

COMPLAINT NUMBER	21/086
ADVERTISER	LBC Studios
ADVERTISEMENT	LBC Studio Facebook
DATE OF MEETING	1 March 2021
OUTCOME	No Grounds to Proceed

Advertisement: The LBC Studio's Facebook Advertisement for the game Hempire gives players the opportunity to grow their own virtual marijuana. The advertisement shows two jars, one with 'Grim Reefer' and one with 'Happy Daze'. The text says "Become the world's greatest weed whisperer and undisputed Hemperor!"

The Chair ruled there were no grounds for the complaint to proceed.

Complaint: An ad on Facebook advertising was presented to me today: 'Hempire' a game where the objective is to grow the best weed. This is glorifying an illegal activity - growing weed. It is also shown that they are specifically targeting people in New Zealand

The relevant provisions were Advertising Standards Code - Principle 1, Rule 1(c), Rule 1(f);

Principle 1: Social Responsibility: Advertisements must be prepared and placed with a due sense of social responsibility to consumers and to society.

Rule 1 (c) Decency and Offensiveness: Advertisements must not contain anything that is indecent, or exploitative, or degrading, or likely to cause harm, or serious or widespread offence, or give rise to hostility, contempt, abuse or ridicule.

Rule 1 (f) Violence and anti-social behaviour: Advertisements must not, unless justifiable on educational or social grounds, contain anything that condones, or is likely to show, violent or anti-social behaviour or damage to property.

The Chair noted the Complainant's concern the advertisement was glorifying an illegal activity.

Rules 1(c) and 1(f) of the Advertising Standards Code required the Chair to consider whether the promotion of the game Hempire, in this context, was likely to cause serious or widespread harm or condone anti-social behaviour, in light of generally prevailing community standards.

The Chair confirmed the ASA's jurisdiction is confined to the content and placement of the advertisement and it is not able to adjudicate on the product or service being promoted, in this case a game about virtual marijuana.

Turning to consider the content and placement of the advertisement, the Chair said that despite the Complainant's objection to the advertisement, it did not reach the threshold to cause serious or widespread offence or condone anti-social behaviour for most consumers.

This is because while the objective of the game does relate to an activity which is illegal in New Zealand, cultivating marijuana for sale, this activity is portrayed in the context of a game. The Chair said at times the advertising for games, movies and other forms of entertainment, can include the depiction of what might be regarded as illegal activities. Examples of such activities include fighting, using weapons and damaging property.

The Chair said the advertisement had been prepared with the due sense of social responsibility required and it was not in breach of Principle 1, Rule 1(c) or Rule 1(f) of the Advertising Standards Code.

The Chair ruled there were no grounds for the complaint to proceed.

Chair's Ruling: Complaint No Grounds to Proceed

APPEAL INFORMATION

According to the procedures of the Advertising Standards Complaints Board, all decisions are able to be appealed by any party to the complaint. Information on our Appeal process is on our website www.asa.co.nz. Appeals must be made in writing via email or letter within 14 calendar days of receipt of this decision.