

COMPLAINT NUMBER	22/032
ADVERTISER	Shincheonji NZ
ADVERTISEMENT	Shincheonji NZ, Billboard
DATE OF MEETING	31 January 2022
OUTCOME	No Grounds to Proceed

Advertisement: The Shincheonji NZ billboard advertisement shows an open book with the words, "REVELATION FULFILLING NOW!" above. Text beside this states, "BIBLE COURSE", and shows the URL "mountzion.co.nz" and Shincheonji name and logo below.

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

Complaint:

The Complainant was concerned that the Advertiser was a religious group which had a questionable history and could prey on a vulnerable audience who could mistake the organisation for a more main-stream religion.

The relevant provisions were Advertising Standards Code - Principle 1, Principle 2, Rule 2(b), Rule 2(e);

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

Principle 2: Truthful Presentation: Advertisements must be truthful, balanced and not misleading.

Rule 2(b) Truthful Presentation: Advertisements must not mislead or be likely to mislead, deceive or confuse consumers, abuse their trust or exploit their lack of knowledge. This includes by implication, inaccuracy, ambiguity, exaggeration, unrealistic claim, omission, false representation or otherwise. Obvious hyperbole identifiable as such is not considered to be misleading.

Rule 2(e) Advocacy advertising: Advocacy advertising must clearly state the identity and position of the advertiser. Opinion in support of the advertiser's position must be clearly distinguishable from factual information. Factual information must be able to be substantiated.

About Advocacy Advertising

Complaints about advocacy advertising are considered differently to complaints about advertising for products and services.

In assessing whether an advocacy advertisement complies with the Advertising Standards Code, the freedom of expression provisions under the Bill of Rights Act 1990 must also be considered.

Section 14 of the Act says: “Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and opinions of any kind in any form.” This freedom of expression supports robust debate on current issues in a democracy.

Under Rule 2(e) Advocacy advertising of the Advertising Standards Code:

- The identity of the advertiser must be clear
- Opinion must be clearly distinguishable from factual information, and
- Factual information must be able to be substantiated.

If the identity and position of the Advertiser is clear, a more liberal interpretation of the Advertising Standards Code is allowed including robust expression of opinion.

About this complaint

The Chair acknowledged the Complainant’s concern about the nature of the advertiser.

The Chair confirmed the ASA Codes of Practice, and the complaints process, applies to the content and placement of advertisements, and the Complaints Board does not adjudicate on the beliefs or behaviour of advertisers per se.

The Chair said the Advertiser’s identity was clearly visible with the Shincheonji name, logo and a website address, mountzion.co.nz. The Chair said the advertisement complied with the identity requirements of Rule 2(e) of the Advertising Standards Code. She noted the advertisement comments about the “revelation being fulfilled” and offers a free bible course.

The Chair said the belief statements in the advertisement were not in breach of the Advertising Standards Code. The Chair noted consumers have a range of options to seek further information on groups they may wish to follow or join, prior to making that decision.

The Chair said in the context of advocacy advertising, the advertisement did not meet the threshold to breach Principle 1, Principle 2, or Rules 2(b) and 2(e) 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 with notification of the intent to appeal lodged within 14 calendar days of receipt of the written decision. The substantive appeal application must be lodged with the ASA within 21 calendar days of receipt of the written decision.