

## Decision of the ADVERTISING REGULATORY BOARD

Complainant	Aadila Agjee
Advertiser	Heineken South Africa (Pty) Ltd
Consumer/Competitor	Consumer
File reference	Windhoek Lager – Aadila Agjee
Outcome	Upheld
Date	20 January 2021

The Directorate of the Advertising Regulatory Board has been called upon to consider a complaint by Aadila Agjee against a television commercial for Windhoek Lager.

### Description of the advertising

The commercial features two men having a video call, with the following words:

Man 1: Hey, where you?

Man 2: Just grabbing a beer, man.

Man 1: Better be a real one. Remember when you asked for this? Man 1 indicates with his thumb and forefinger, showing a space of about 5cm. The commercial then shows a memory of when the two men were in a bar and Man 2 is brought a beer. He asks, “Can I have a lime with this?” with the same finger movement. The actor Gerard Butler is sitting at the bar. He turns around and says: “Hey, that’s a Windhoek. That’s 100% pure beer. He

does the same hand signal and says, “You don’t need any... lime.” Man 2 takes a sip of the beer and clearly enjoys it. Gerard Butler says: “Keep it Real, Joe.”

The commercial goes back to the video call between the two friends, shows Man 2 enjoying a Windhoek Lager, with the voiceover “Keep it real with 100% pure beer.”

## Complaint

Aadila Agjee submitted a complaint to the ARB, on the basis that the commercial is offensive. The complaint states as follows:

“The advertisement featuring Gérard Butler is offensive. It belittles a man for requesting a lime slice with his beer. While this may seem funny to many, an equal or larger number of people enjoy citrus with their beer or cider - popularly linked with women having a lime or lemon slice with their cider. I understand the message that Windhoek beer is complete on its own, however, shaming or belittling people for their personal preferences is not ok. Rather try attract all customers instead of being stupidly restrictive and offending a whole range of potential customers. At least no-one gets a celebrity to insult my Heineken or Savannah with lemon or lime slice....”

## Response

Heineken South Africa responded by stating that the commercial emphasises the fact that Windhoek Lager is a pure beer and does not need any flavouring. The Advertiser submitted that the man who requests the lime was doing so out of habit, and when he tasted the Windhoek Lager without the lime, his response was one of appreciation. He does not react with offense or shame. The Advertiser went on to state that the call out by Gerard Butler on the usage of lime was not, and is not, meant to discriminate against women. The intention is to profile Windhoek’s uncompromising commitment to its *Reinheitsgebot* brewing process, which the brand is well-known for, delivering a beer that is 100% pure and does not need any flavouring. The Advertiser concluded that it respects every consumer and works hard to ensure that it does not offend or discriminate any consumers.

## Application of the Code of Advertising Practice

The following clauses were considered in this matter:

- Clause 1 of Section II (Offensive advertising);
- Clause 3.4 of Section II (Unacceptable advertising – Discrimination);
- Clause 3.5 of Section II (Unacceptable advertising – Gender).

## Decision

The Directorate conducted some informal background research in order to reach its decision.

Windhoek Lager is brewed according to *Reinheitsgebot*, a German purity law dating back to 1516. What this essentially means is that Windhoek lager is produced using only three ingredients, namely malted barley, hops and water. This is why it is referred to as “100% pure beer”. This is, presumably, the unique selling point that the Advertiser seeks to highlight.

Turning then to the use of lime or lemon slices in beer (and cider), there appear to be various theories as to why people add lemon or lime slices to their beer or cider drinks. One theory is that a slice of lime would clean a dirty bottle, another is that a slice of lime or lemon kills germs. Further theories include that the citrus shoos away flies, improves the taste of bad quality beer, and even that people put in a slice of citrus simply to follow a trend. In the Directorate’s informal online research, no links were made to women doing this more often than men.

That being said, the Directorate understands the basis of the Complainant’s discomfort. While it is never spelt out, there is an undertone of “real men drink real beer” in this commercial. This is created by the masculine interactions and the all-male cast – it is almost impossible to imagine a woman teasing her friend for ordering a lime slice with her beer, or insisting that her friend order “real beer”. This typical male interaction creates an unspoken dialogue: real men drink real beer, and men don’t have lemon or lime slices in their beer. This unspoken dialogue is, in turn, further emphasised by the use of Gerard Butler, an actor associated with macho movie roles; and by the use of the words “Keep it real, Joe.” The Directorate also noted that the casting in this commercial was cleverly done – the character who gets teased by the Gerard Butler character is a gentle looking, red-headed man – two characteristics that might typically make him a target for teasing in a

toxic environment. In contrast, and telling him what to do, there is Gerard Butler, a macho looking movie star.

The Directorate also noted that this type of interaction might be acceptable if it is “tongue-in-cheek”; if there is some humour that highlights that the depicted interaction is not “normal” or “acceptable”. However, in this commercial there is no such humorous relief. It is a completely serious communication, the unavoidable out-take of which is that “real men drink real beer”. The Directorate is also disturbed by the “fit in” culture communicated by this commercial; not only is the character publicly shamed and belittled about his request for a lemon or lime in his beer, he is still being teased about it after the fact.

If the spoken dialogue of the commercial was “Real Men drink Real Beer” or “Don’t be like a woman, drink a real beer”, then the Directorate would have no hesitation in pulling the commercial on the basis that entrenches gender stereotypes and is offensive. However, the question now arises as to whether the unspoken message of the commercial is strong enough to warrant the same reaction.

The reality is that it is exactly the unspoken nature of the communication that makes it particularly dangerous – the gender stereotype portrayed as so normal that it does not even require explanation.

Clause 3.5 of Section II deals with Gender and states: “Gender stereotyping or negative gender portrayal must not be permitted in advertising, unless in the opinion of the ARB, such stereotyping or portrayal is reasonable and justifiable in an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom.”

In terms of Clause 4.19 of Section I, “Negative Gender Portrayal” means advertising that portrays a person or persons of a certain gender in a manner that restricts and entrenches the role of persons of such gender in society or sections of society.

It is the entrenchment of the role of men as having to behave in a certain way with which the Directorate takes issue. It is also the entrenchment of male behaviour that is bullying, and what has come to be labelled as “toxic masculinity”. The advertisement, rather than drawing attention to the purity of the taste of their product, paints a clear picture of an aspect of the target market; and that market is a stereotyped macho man who buckles to the pressure of his peers in order to fit in. This breaches the provisions of Clause 3.5 of Section II as read with the definitions.

**The commercial is therefore in breach of Clause 3.5 of Section II.**

### Sanctions

The Advertiser is instructed to withdraw or amend the commercial within the deadlines set out in Clause 15.3 of the Procedural Guide. In the case of television commercials, this is immediately as deadlines permit.