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Media Release

ASAS to work closer with authorities

The Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS) was established in 1976 with the adoption of the Singapore Code of Advertising Practice (Code). ASAS comes under the umbrella of the Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE). The Code was revised in 2003 and 2008. ASAS is a self-regulatory industry body, with its Council members representative of the industry stakeholders, including advertising agencies, governmental agencies, media agencies and other supporting organisations. It has 24 Council members, at the present moment, that consider and deliberate on its guidelines and decisions.

The Code seeks to promote a high standard of ethics in advertising by self-regulation against the backdrop of applicable National laws and International Code or laws. This self-regulatory regime has been adopted as the compliance system in the advertising industry in many other countries, including United Kingdom and Australia.

ASAS relies principally on a system of guidance and voluntary compliance, rather than punitive measures, to facilitate observance of the Code. It facilitates a level playing field amongst advertisers and sets a high standard of advertising practice for the good of consumers. Accordingly, it is a pro-business and pro-consumer organisation.

The recent interests relating to an advertisement in Orchard Road highlights the trend of more vibrant and eye-catching advertisements in non-traditional mediums, which include bus-stop shelters, lamp posts, bus facades, building billboards and façade. This segment of advertisement may, from time to time, pose a challenge to the industry norms and probably requires consideration of whether it is within the perimeters of the basic principles contemplated in the Code.

ASAS works and will work with all governmental agencies, such as the Media Development Authority (MDA) to ensure a high standard of ethics in advertising in various media platforms. Moving forward, it will work even more closely with various agencies, such as the Land Transport Authority (LTA) and Building Construction Authority (BCA) to ensure the same high standard of advertisement in this non-traditional mediums of advertisement as in any other mediums. ASAS is set and committed to work even closer with these agencies to facilitate compliance with the Code.

Where there is adverse feedback about advertisement content at bus stop shelters or on lampposts, LTA will seek ASAS' view to ensure that advertisements keep to the ethical standards and good practices upheld by ASAS. LTA and BCA are supportive of ASAS's

effort to promote self-regulation by the advertising industry although BCA primarily deals with the structural safety and integrity of the physical structures and billboards on buildings.

The four basic tenets of the Code are that all advertisements must be legal, decent, honest and truthful. Each advertisement must comply with applicable legislation. If it is found to be objectionable under any legislation, it will have to be dealt with by the relevant authorities responsible for the relevant legislation. Still, the use of the law is a last resort. In the extreme case of a recalcitrant offender, ASAS can ride on existing government legislation, such as the Consumer Protection (Fair Trading) Act, the Broadcasting Act and the Medicines Act (if applicable). The corresponding authorities may act where relevant and necessary.

ASAS will continue to enhance its working relationship with all agencies and to entrench the responsibility of all advertisers to observe and comply with the Code. Inherent in any self-regulatory system is that the administration of compliance is very much market-based. The industry stakeholders are the gate-keepers and in a sense their own regulators. An advertisement or promotional campaign can be disrupted or banned if it is deemed objectionable under the Code. This process of review and check and balance, may be more effective than any penalties or enforcement. ASAS has found this self-regulation effective in reigning in most, if not any objectionable advertisement.

ASAS believes in the benefits of self-regulation, in which there is flexibility to resolve concerns expeditiously while striking a balance between advertising creativity and any public sensitivity. There is no reason for any socially responsible organisation not to work with ASAS where, through a process of consultation and deliberation, an amiable outcome in compliance with the Code may be arrived at.

Dr Tan Sze Wee
ASAS Chairperson