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Australians want advertising on social media to show safe, healthy behaviour

New national research conducted by Roy Morgan for Ad Standards reveals Australians have strong expectations that advertising should not show unsafe or unhealthy behaviours, with social media identified as the platform where people are most concerned.

The latest wave of Ad Standards' national Community Sentiment Research, conducted by Roy Morgan, found that 87% of Australians believe it is important that advertising shows safe and healthy behaviours, highlighting the community's expectation that advertisers act responsibly and consider the potential impact of their content.

Social media is the platform of greatest concern, with 71% of Australians worried about unsafe or unhealthy behaviour in advertising on these platforms. That figure rises to 78% among people who use social media several times a day.

Australians are particularly concerned about advertising that portrays unsafe or unhealthy behaviours as fun, cool or desirable (63%). Other key concerns include social media influencers showing unsafe behaviours (61%), children's exposure to advertising that depicts unsafe behaviours (60%), and advertising promoting unrealistic or unhealthy body image standards (56%).

Ad Standards Executive Director Greg Wallace said that advertising plays an important role in shaping perceptions of what is normal, desirable and acceptable.

"Our research shows that Australians expect advertisers to think carefully about how they portray behaviour that could put people's health or safety at risk, particularly where children and young people may be exposed.

"Responsible advertising means considering not just what is shown, but the broader message an ad communicates and how audiences might interpret it."

Community expectations extend across a range of health and safety issues. Smoking, vaping, not wearing a seatbelt, excessive alcohol consumption and riding bikes or scooters without safety equipment were among the behaviours Australians were most likely to say should never be shown in advertising.

The findings also underline the importance of context. Australians distinguish between depictions that may be acceptable in particular circumstances, such as where they are clearly exaggerated, humorous or educational, and behaviours they believe should never be shown in advertising. The results suggest that community expectations are shaped not only by what is shown, but also by how it is presented.

"The key message for industry is that context matters. Advertisers should think carefully about the setting, audience and overall impression their advertising creates. That's particularly important on social media, where content can be seen and shared well beyond its intended audience. Responsible advertising protects the community and helps build trust and confidence in the industry."

Roy Morgan CEO Michele Levine commented: *"This research highlights the high expectations Australians have of advertisers, particularly when it comes to portraying behaviours that can influence health and safety outcomes. Australians increasingly expect advertising, especially on social media, to reflect responsible and healthy behaviours. These findings demonstrate that community standards remain an important benchmark for advertisers seeking to build trust and maintain confidence in their brands."*

These expectations are backed by Australia's advertising rules, which require advertising to meet community standards on health and safety on all platforms, including advertising on social media.

Health and safety is also a significant issue in the more than 5,000 complaints to Ad Standards this year. So far in 2026, more than 90 cases considered by the Ad Standards Community Panel have raised health and safety issues under this provision, with more than 60% of these ads being seen on social media.

While Australians maintain a largely neutral view of advertising, net sentiment has declined in the last 12 months

The research also found that general attitudes towards advertising have declined over the last 12 months, with net sentiment towards advertising (% total positive minus % total negative) at 20%, down from -12% in Wave 1. More than half of Australians (52%) hold a neutral view of advertising, while negative sentiment (34%) continues to outweigh positive sentiment (14%).

Trust in advertising is stable, with 15% of Australians saying they trust advertising compared with 39% who distrust it.

Gambling advertising remains Australians' single biggest advertising concern (66%), while concern about AI-generated advertising increased from 50% to 55% since the previous wave.

"While many Australians remain neutral, the gap between those who trust advertising and those who distrust it shows there is work to do. Advertisers have an opportunity to build trust by being transparent, responsible and responsive to community expectations, particularly as new technologies such as AI create new questions for consumers," Greg Wallace said.

The Ad Standards-Roy Morgan Community Sentiment Tracker Survey was conducted online with a cross-section of 1,032 Australians aged 18+ between 17 August and 2 September 2026.

Media enquiries:

media@adstandards.com.au

(02) 6173 1503

About Roy Morgan

Roy Morgan is Australia's largest independent Australian research company, with offices in each state, as well as in the U.S. and U.K. A full-service research organisation, Roy Morgan has over 80 years' experience collecting objective, independent information on consumers.

About Ad Standards:

Ad Standards is Australia's advertising regulator. They give a voice to community concerns and promote responsible advertising. Ad Standards manages the independent complaints handling process for advertising in Australia, ensuring that advertising and marketing communications comply with the AANA Codes and the FCAI Code.