

**Summary Research Report:
Serious Offence in
Non-Broadcast Advertising**

July 2002

Advertising Standards Authority

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Executive Summary

- The ASA commissioned a quantitative study which examined the views of the UK population as a whole on the nature and causes of ‘serious offence’.
- A representative sample of 2,082 adults aged 15+ in the United Kingdom were interviewed using a random location sampling technique. All interviews were conducted using Computer Aided Personal Interviewing (CAPI).
- The majority of the population are quite positive towards advertising, but some feel that sometimes ads just go too far. However, a similar proportion felt that some people are just too sensitive about the things they see in advertising.
- Just under a fifth of adults said that they had been personally offended by advertising they had seen in the past 12 months, and ‘push’ media such as posters and direct mail were most likely to cause personal offence. Internet advertising was the medium most likely to cause personal and serious offence among those who had seen it.
- Women, older people and those from non-white ethnic minorities, as well as those from higher social grades were more likely to have been personally offended in the past 12 months. Men were more likely to have been offended on behalf of others, as were young people.
- Issues related to children and advertising were seen as having the greatest potential to cause offence. Almost all respondents thought that the portrayal of children in a sexual way had the potential to cause serious offence, and similarly high proportions thought that showing images or words unsuitable for children to see or hear was also potentially offensive. As well as being concerned about the content of advertising aimed at children, the majority of the public were also concerned about children when thinking about the location and context of the advertising. There was very strong feeling that advertisers should take special care if children may see the ad or if the ad is shown in places where children go.
- The nature of serious offence differs between younger and older people, and young people tended to be less sensitive around ‘traditionally’ offensive areas such as sexual images, violence and bad language. Young people tended to be more

sensitive than their older counterparts when thinking about the way in which people are portrayed, and they tend to be more concerned about the portrayal of vulnerable groups.

- The public acknowledged that niche targeting is possible when advertising in magazines, and felt that you should know what you are letting yourself in for when buying a particular publication. However, it was felt that there are certain publications which could be bought for general consumption and one should be confident that these would not contain shocking advertising.
- The majority of the public thought that advertising could be more shocking if it is 'in a good cause', but there was less support for commercial advertising to deliver shocking messages.
- The majority of UK adults agreed that advertising which caused widespread and serious offence should be banned, and this feeling was strongly and widely held. There was less support for banning advertising where offence was not serious or widespread. Those who had themselves been offended by advertising in the past were more likely to feel that offensive advertising should be banned.

1.1 Conclusions

The nature of offence

- The reaction of offence can be broken down into 'emotional' offence and 'rational' offence:
 - We have suggested that 'emotional' offence can be equated with 'serious' offence.
- Individuals are far more likely to have been offended 'by proxy' (on behalf of somebody else) than to have been offended personally:
 - However, where the offence is 'by proxy' rather than 'personal' the reaction generally tends to be rational rather than emotional.

Issues causing offence

- There appeared to be a difference in the issues that provoked serious offence among younger and older people:
 - Younger people tended to be less sensitive in relation to ‘traditionally’ offensive areas, such as sexual images, violence and bad language;
 - But they tended to be more sensitive than older people when thinking about how groups and individuals were portrayed, and were more concerned about the negative portrayal of vulnerable groups.
- Minority groups did seem to be far more sensitive than did the general population:
 - And there seemed to be differences in their views of the images that caused offence;
 - Issues that were very emotive and sensitive for minority ethnic and religious groups (such as religious symbols, perceived racism, sex and violence) tended to be viewed by the majority as being less important, in the context of other issues.
- However, there was consensus between the minority and majority groups that the images that were most sensitive were:
 - The portrayal of children, and particularly any sexualisation of children;
 - Images felt to degrade, demean or humiliate vulnerable groups.

Factors affecting offence

- It was clear that the reactions of both the overall population and minority groups were greatly affected by the context in which the advert appeared:
 - The location and type of media were crucial;

- They influenced who would see the advert, with particular concern expressed as to whether children would see it and whether groups likely to be offended (such as religious groups) would see it;
 - As well as determining how much choice individuals felt that they had as to whether they viewed an advert or not;
 - And whether individuals were likely to see the advert in company with others.
- Additionally, the likelihood of an advert causing offence was affected by the presence of humour in the advert and by the origin of the advert:
 - Adverts produced by charities or Government were felt to be able to use shocking or distressing images to a far greater extent without offending than were commercial organisations.

Quantitative research objectives and method

The quantitative research aimed to assess the following:

- What proportion of the public have recently been offended by non-broadcast advertising they have seen, and how serious was this offence
- What is the influence of context in terms of serious offence. This could include the timing of the ad, the medium in which the ad appears and the nature of the advertiser
- General attitudes towards non-broadcast advertising in the UK.

1.2 Quantitative research method

Given the objectives described above, a face to face in-home interview was judged to be the most appropriate method. For reasons of cost efficiency, questions were placed on BMRB's face to face omnibus, and the first phase of fieldwork was conducted between 13th and 19th December 2001.

Interviews were conducted among a representative sample of 2,082 adults 15+ in the United Kingdom using a random location sampling technique. All interviews were conducted using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI).

After the end of the first tranche of fieldwork, it was decided that one issue required clarification which was attitudes to government and charity vs commercial advertising. A small second tranche of fieldwork was completed between 28th February and 6th March 2002. At this stage 989 adults in Great Britain were interviewed, again face to face in-home. Because this questionnaire was very small, it was not appropriate to run a separate survey in Northern Ireland, so results for these questions are among adults in Great Britain only.

2 Who was interviewed?

In order to put the study results into context, the next chapter gives details of the sample interviewed.

The study interviewed a representative sample of adults aged 15+ in the United Kingdom. Data were weighted in terms of age, gender, working status, social grade and region. Establishment data for weighting was taken from the NRS, a large-scale, robust random probability study. All results shown in this report are based on weighted data.

2.1 Demographic profile of respondents

Table 11a shows the demographic breakdown of the adults interviewed.

Table 11a: Demographic profile		
<i>Base: Adults 15+ (2082)</i>		
		Total (2082) %
Gender:	Male	49
	Female	51
Age:	15-24	15
	25-34	19
	35-44	18
	45-54	16
	55-74	25
	75+	7
Social Grade Of Chief Income Earner in household	AB	21
	C1	27
	C2	22
	DE	29
Presence of children in household	Mother	18
	Father	14
	No children	68
Terminal education age	Under 16	30
	16-17	34
	18-20	11
	21+	16
Region	South of England	39
	Midlands	20
	North of England	25
	Wales	5
	Scotland	9
	Northern Ireland	3

2.2 Ethnic origin

Respondents were also asked a number of other questions to enable us to further classify their answers. All respondents were shown a card and asked which category

best described their ethnic origin – the card showed the main categories for ethnic origin, as specified in the 1991 census. Because the numbers in each of the individual ethnic categories is too small for sub-analysis, these were combined into one ‘non-white’ ethnic category.

Table 11b shows the gender and age breakdown within ethnicity of the adults interviewed.

Table 11b: Ethnic origin profile – age and gender		
<i>Base: Adults 15+ (2082)</i>		
		White (%)
		Non-White (%)
Total:		80
Age:	15-24	13
	25-34	18
	35-44	18
	45-54	17
	55-74	25
	75+	8
Gender:	Male	48
	Female	52
		59
		41

In total, 80% of adults in the sample classified themselves as white, and 5% classified themselves as non-white. However, 15% refused to classify themselves.

The profile of non-white respondents tended to be younger than their white counterparts, with a third of non-white respondents aged under 25 and two thirds aged under 35. This compares with only just over three in ten white respondents aged under 35, and reflects the much younger profile of ethnic minorities in the UK. In addition, men were slightly over-represented in the sample of ethnic minorities (59% non-white, compared with 48% white respondents).

As would be expected, ethnic minorities interviewed tended to be clustered in the South of England – two thirds of ethnic minorities were from the south, compared with only two fifths of white respondents.

However, there were no differences in the sample of ethnic minorities interviewed in terms of social grade, or presence of children.

2.3 Religious Affiliation

Respondents were shown a list of different religions and asked which, if any, they belonged to. Those who said that they were a member of any religious group were asked whether they would describe the strength of their religion as very strong, quite strong or not particularly strong.

Table 11c shows the proportion of the total sample classifying themselves as belonging to each religious group, and the strength of their affiliation.

Table 11c: Religious Affiliation and strength of belief		
<i>Base: Adults 15+ (2082)</i>		
Religion	% of total sample identifying	% of total sample with strong belief
<i>Any</i>	79	13
Christian	71	10
Muslim	2	1
Hindu	1	*
Sikh	1	*
Jewish	1	*
Buddhist	*	*
Other	4	1
No religion	20	n/a
Don't know/refused	1	n/a
<i>Note * represents a proportion which is less than 0.5% but greater than 0</i>		

Eight in ten adults said that they belonged to a religion, and just over one in eight said that they had a strong religious belief. Within these, the most prevalent religion was Christianity. Just over seven in ten adults classified themselves as Christian, although only one in ten said that they had strong Christian beliefs.

Respondents from non-white ethnic minorities were slightly more likely to say that they subscribed to a religious group (82%, compared with 79% white), although they were more likely to say that their strength of affiliation is strong. Over half (55%) of white respondents said that their beliefs were not particularly strong, compared with just a third of ethnic minorities.

2.4 Internet access

Advertising on the Internet comes under the ASA's remit, and the study included a number of questions relating to this medium. In order to interpret responses to questions about Internet advertising, all respondents were asked whether they have access to the internet, and where their access points are.

Just over three in ten (31%) of adults have access to the Internet at home, and two fifths (21%) have access elsewhere. A minority (14%) have access both at home and

elsewhere. However, the majority of our sample (62%) said that they do not have access to the Internet. This is broadly in line with other studies of adults¹.

As could be expected, younger respondents were more likely to have access to the internet at all and to have access at home. Table 11d shows results. These results are again broadly similar to those achieved on the Internet Monitor study.

Table 11d: Internet access				
		Any internet access	Internet access at home	No access
All respondents	%	38	31	62
15-24	%	65	49	35
25-34	%	49	37	51
35-44	%	47	42	53
45-54	%	36	31	64
55-74	%	18	16	82
75+	%	5	5	95
Social Grade				
AB	%	59	51	41
C1	%	53	42	47
C2	%	29	22	71
DE	%	17	14	83

One in eight (12%) of adults were parents who had internet access at home.

¹ BMRB's Internet Monitor uses a similar research method to this study, and estimated in February 2002 that 37% of Adults in Great Britain had access to the internet. However, the question relating to internet access differs slightly, as it prompts respondents to think about access through digital TV, etc, and therefore it is not surprising to find that penetration of internet is higher in the Internet Monitor study.

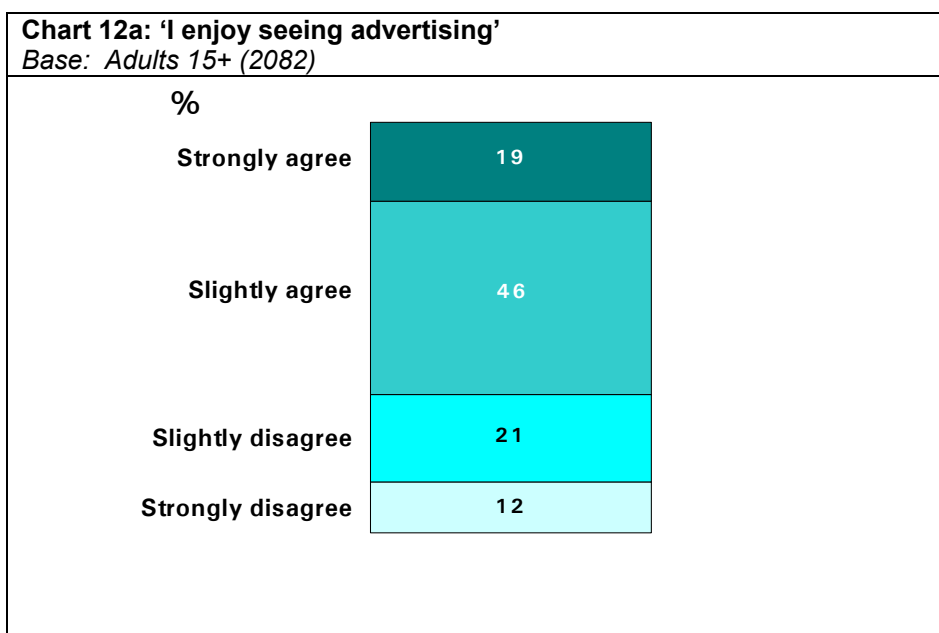
General attitudes towards advertising

Before describing offence in advertising, we will examine general attitudes towards advertising among adults in the United Kingdom. This section of the report describes respondents' attitudes towards advertising in general, and describes the environment in which advertising messages are viewed.

2.5 Enjoyment of advertising

All respondents were presented with a number of statements and asked how much they agreed or disagreed with each. The order of presentation of the statements was rotated to ensure that no order bias was introduced.

Chart 12a shows the proportions agreeing with the statement 'I enjoy seeing advertising'.



Two thirds of adults agreed that they enjoy seeing advertising, with just under a fifth (19%) strongly agreeing. However, one in eight indicated that they really do not enjoy advertising by strongly disagreeing.

There were clear generational differences in enjoyment of advertising, with younger people much more likely to agree than their older counterparts. Three quarters (74%) 15-24s agreed with the statement, with over a quarter (26%) agreeing strongly. This compares with a half (53%) those aged 55 and older agreeing, and only one in eight (12%) agreeing strongly.

These generational differences were very clear when looking at the responses of women in our survey. Although there were no overall differences between men and women, younger women were the group most likely to strongly agree that they enjoy seeing advertising – just under three in ten (27%) women aged under 35 agreed strongly with the statement. In contrast, women aged 55 or older were least likely to strongly agree that they really enjoy advertising (10%). Table 12a shows these results.

% agreeing with statement	Men	Women
15-34	24	27
35-54	18	18
55+	14	10

There were also clear differences in attitude between people of different backgrounds. Respondents who left school at the end of their compulsory education were least positive, with only 13% agreeing strongly that they enjoy seeing advertising. By contrast, 23% of those who completed their education aged 21 or older (indicating degree level or equivalent education), strongly agreed.

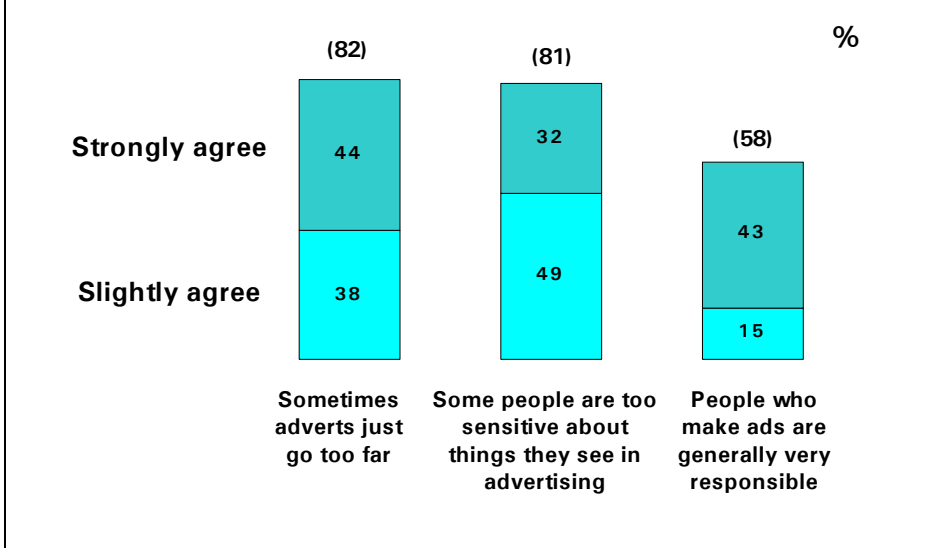
Finally, attitudes were more positive among members of non-white ethnic minorities. Over a third (35%) non-white respondents strongly agreed that they enjoy seeing advertising, compared with only 17% white respondents. This is linked to the younger age profile of non-white respondents in the population, but given that attitudes are more positive among non-whites than among young people in the population, this indicates that attitudes are indeed more positive among ethnic minorities.

2.6 Other general views of advertising

Other general statements about advertising were included in the attitude battery, and respondents were asked to state the extent to which they agree or disagree with each one. Chart 12b shows the proportion agreeing with each statement. The number in parentheses on top of each column shows the proportion agreeing with each statement in total.

Chart 12b: General attitudes towards advertising

Base: Adults 15+ (2082)



Although the majority of the population said they enjoy seeing advertising, there was a strong feeling that sometimes ads just go too far. Just over four fifths (82%) of adults agreed that this is the case, and over two fifths (44%) strongly agreed.

Once again, there were clear generational differences in response, with younger people less likely to agree with the statement. However, levels of response among young people were fairly high, and over three quarters (76%) of under 25s agreed with 38% strongly agreeing. This compares with 87% over 55s agreeing, and 52% strongly agreeing.

There were strong differences between men and women, with women much more likely to think adverts sometimes go too far. Older women were particularly likely to think this, and just under three fifths (58%) of women aged 55 and over strongly agreed. This compares with just 47% of men of the same age group.

There were no differences in agreement between respondents of different levels of education, social grades or ethnic origins.

Despite feeling that sometimes adverts just go too far, there was also a strong feeling that some people are too sensitive about things they see in advertising. Over four fifths (81%) agreed, and just under a third (32%) agreed strongly. Younger people were more likely to feel this was the case, although the generational differences were stronger for women than for men. Responses are shown in table 12b.

% agreeing with statement	Men	Women
15-34	86	86
35-54	82	78
55+	81	75

There was little variation in attitudes between men of different ages, but there were large differences between women of different ages. This continues the theme that older women are the most sensitive group.

There were no differences in response by other demographic group.

Turning to the final statement in the chart – ‘people who make advertisements are generally very responsible’. Over half (58%) of adults agreed, although very few (5%) strongly agreed. Few respondents expressed a strong opinion, with the vast majority giving an answer towards the middle of the scale – 43% agreed slightly and 26% disagreed slightly.

Younger people tended to be more positive towards people in the advertising industry, although differences in response between age groups was not as strong as observed on the other two statements. Younger men tended to be the most positive, with 63% agreeing with the statement, and older women were the least positive, with 55% agreeing. However, there was no difference in the proportion of respondents in each age group strongly agreeing.

2.7 Views of internet advertising

Internet users were asked about their views of this medium. They were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement ‘Pop up ads on the internet can be irritating’.

Over nine in ten internet (91%) users agreed that pop up ads can be irritating, and this view is strongly held as over three quarters (77%) strongly agreed. Internet users of all ages and genders were equally likely to feel that this is the case.

2.8 Summary – general attitudes towards advertising

The majority of the population are quite positive towards advertising, and two thirds agree that they enjoy seeing advertising. Despite this, there is some feeling that sometimes ads just go too far, and over four fifths of adults agreed that this is the case. However, a similar proportion think that some people are too sensitive about the things they see in advertising.

In general, women, and especially older women tend to be more sensitive about advertising. The majority of internet users strongly feel that pop up ads can be irritating.

Offence in advertising

At the start of this section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked if they had been offended by advertising they had seen in the past 12 months. These questions were placed before any specific topics or issues were introduced, as we did not wish to prompt respondents at this point.

Firstly, respondents were shown a list of different media within the ASA's remit and asked to say how they feel about the advertising they have seen in those media in the past 12 months. The following answer categories were offered:

- I have been personally offended by advertising
- I have seen advertising that other people may have been offended by
- I have not seen any advertising that could offend me or anyone else
- I have not seen any ads in that format

If respondents said that they had been personally offended, they were asked the extent to which they had been offended. If they had seen more than one ad in the media that had personally offended them, they were asked to answer thinking about the ad they were most offended by.

2.9 Personal offence

Overall, just under a fifth (19%) of all adults interviewed said that they had been personally offended by some advertising they had seen.

Women and more upmarket respondents were more likely to say that they had been offended, although it was perhaps somewhat surprising that no one age group was more likely to say that they had been personally offended. Full results are shown in table 13a.

	% of group personally offended
All adults 15+	19
Gender: Male	16
Female	22

Social Grade:	AB	28
	C1	20
	C2	18
	DE	14
Age:	15-24	19
	25-34	17
	35-44	21
	45-54	20
	55-74	20
	75+	15
Ethnic Group:	White	18
	Non-white	30
Religious affiliation:	No religion	15
	Any religion, no strong belief	18
	Any religion – strong belief	32

In addition, those from non-white ethnic groups and those with strong religious beliefs were more likely to say that they had been personally offended by some advertising in the past 12 months.

Table 13b shows the proportions who have been personally offended by an advertisement in the past 12 months in each advertising medium in the ASA's remit. It should be remembered that not all respondents would have seen advertising in each medium (e.g. 55% of all those interviewed had not seen any advertising on the internet).

To account for this, the column on the right of the table shows the proportion of those respondents who have seen some advertising in each medium in the past 12 months who have been personally offended by advertising there. So, for example, thinking about the internet, the column on the right shows the proportion of those who have seen internet advertising in the past 12 months who were personally offended by it.

Medium	% of all adults personally offended by ad	% of those seen medium in past 12 months personally offended
Posters or billboards	7	9
Direct mail	6	7
Newspapers	5	6
Magazines	5	6
Internet	5	12
Sales promotion	4	4
Cinema	2	3

Seven percent of adults had been personally offended by a poster or billboard in the past 12 months, and a similar proportion had been personally offended by direct mail they had seen. These are both 'push' media, and the consumer has no choice as to whether or not to see these ads. One in twenty had been personally offended by ads in newspapers, magazines, both traditional 'pull' media.

Although posters or billboards were most likely to cause personal offence, this medium was the most widespread in terms of consumption. Only one in eight respondents had not seen any poster advertising, and even among respondents from the oldest age group, more than three quarters had seen posters or billboards (76% those aged 75 or older). Among those who had seen poster advertising, just under one in ten (9%) had been personally offended by something they had seen in the past 12 months. The proportion of those who had seen posters and had been personally offended varied between 7% of those aged under 35 and 11% of those aged 55 or older.

The medium which had the least coverage was the internet. Over half of adults said that they had not seen any advertising on the internet in the past 12 months, and older respondents were more likely to say this (only 29% of under 25s had not seen any internet ads, compared with 81% those aged 55+). Even among those with internet access, one in seven (14%) said that they had not seen any ads on the internet, indicating that either these users are seldom using the internet, or that they do not classify the commercial messages they see as advertising.

Internet advertising was most likely to cause personal offence among those who had seen it. One in eight (12%) of those who had seen advertising on the internet in the past 12 months said that they had been personally offended by it. There were very few differences in offence among internet users of different genders or ages. However, more upmarket internet users were more likely to have been personally offended by internet advertising than other users, with 15% AB internet users personally offended compared with 9% DE internet users.

Similarly, young people were more likely to have seen advertising on screen at the cinema, but there were no differences in the proportions of cinema goers of different ages who have been personally offended by on screen ads.

2.10 How serious was that offence?

All those who said they had been personally offended by advertising they had seen were asked whether they had been seriously offended, slightly offended or not offended at all. Table 13c shows the results – the left hand column shows the proportion of all adults who had been seriously offended by advertising in each medium. The column on the right shows the proportion of those who had been offended by advertising in that medium who were seriously offended.

Medium	% of all adults seriously offended by ad	% of those offended by ad in that medium seriously offended
Posters or billboards	2	26
Direct mail	2	37
Newspapers	1	16
Magazines	1	18
Internet	2	47
Sales promotion	1	23
Cinema	*	16

*Note * represents a proportion which is less than 0.5% but greater than 0*

Two percent of all adults had been seriously offended by advertising they had seen on posters or billboards in the past 12 months, and a similar proportion had been seriously offended by advertising in direct mail or on the internet.

Although internet advertising caused serious offence to only 2% of all adults, almost half of those who had been personally offended by internet advertising in the past 12 months said that their offence had been serious. This equates to 6% of all internet users being seriously offended by some advertising they had seen in that medium in the past 12 months.

Similarly, just under two fifths (37%) of those who had been personally offended by direct mail in the past 12 months said that they had been seriously offended, although this equates to only 2% of those who had received direct mail over the past 12 months.

It appears that a small minority of adults tended to be seriously offended by advertising they saw in a number of media. For example, of those who had been seriously offended by posters or billboards in the past 12 months (41 adults), 17%

were also seriously offended by magazine advertising and a similar proportion had been seriously offended by direct mail.

2.11 Proxy offence

As well as answering in the context of personal offence, respondents were asked if they had seen any advertising that other people may have been offended by. They answered thinking about media within the ASA's remit.

Just under a third (32%) adults said that they had seen advertising that they felt other people may have been offended by, more than said they had been personally offended (19%).

Just under three in ten (29%) of those who had been personally offended by some advertising in the past 12 months had also seen some advertising that other people may have been offended by. It is therefore not surprising that many of the same groups of people who had been personally offended also said that they had seen advertising that others may have been offended by. Results are shown in table 13d.

Table 13d: Whether have seen advertising that other people may have been offended by in the past 12 months		
		% of group seen advertising others may have been offended by
All adults 15+		32
Gender:	Male	35
	Female	30
Social Grade:	AB	43
	C1	38
	C2	31
	DE	21
Age:	15-24	48
	25-34	36
	35-44	33
	45-54	31
	55-74	25
	75+	17
Ethnic Group:	White	31
	Non-white	50
Religious affiliation:	No religion	35
	Any religion, no strong belief	31
	Any religion – strong belief	35

In many cases, the same groups who were more likely to be personally offended were also more likely to have seen advertising that they felt others have been identified by.

Those from higher social grades, and those from non-white ethnic minorities all gave responses which followed this pattern.

However, there were some differences observed. While younger respondents were no more likely to have been personally offended, they were more likely to say that they had seen advertising that other people may have been offended by. It appears that young people acknowledge that their personal boundaries may not be the same for all. Although the ethnic minorities in our sample did tend towards the younger age groups, this does not wholly explain the difference – ethnic minorities were also more likely to report personal offence in the past 12 months, and this age differential was not evident in that case.

In addition, while women were more likely to have been personally offended in the past 12 months, men were more likely to have seen material that others may have been offended by.

Those who had some strong religious belief were significantly more likely than other groups to say that they had been personally offended in the past 12 months. However, they were no more likely than average to say that they had seen advertising that others may have been offended by in the past 12 months.

It should be noted that the claimed “proxy” offence may comprise two elements, namely a “genuine” element on behalf of other people and a projective element on behalf of themselves (resulting from some respondents making a social response that attributed concern to others rather than themselves). It is difficult or impossible to de-construct the two elements from the total response.

2.12 Summary – offence in advertising

Just under a fifth (19%) of adults said that they had been personally offended by advertising they had seen in the past 12 months. The media most likely to cause personal offence were ‘push’ media, such as posters and direct mail, where the respondent has no choice of whether or not to see them, and 7% had been personally offended by a poster in the past 12 months.

Although the coverage of internet advertising is less wide, 12% of those who had seen some internet advertising in the past 12 months had been personally offended by advertising they had seen. In addition, just under half of those who had been offended

by internet advertising said that they had been seriously offended by it. This is the highest proportion for any medium.

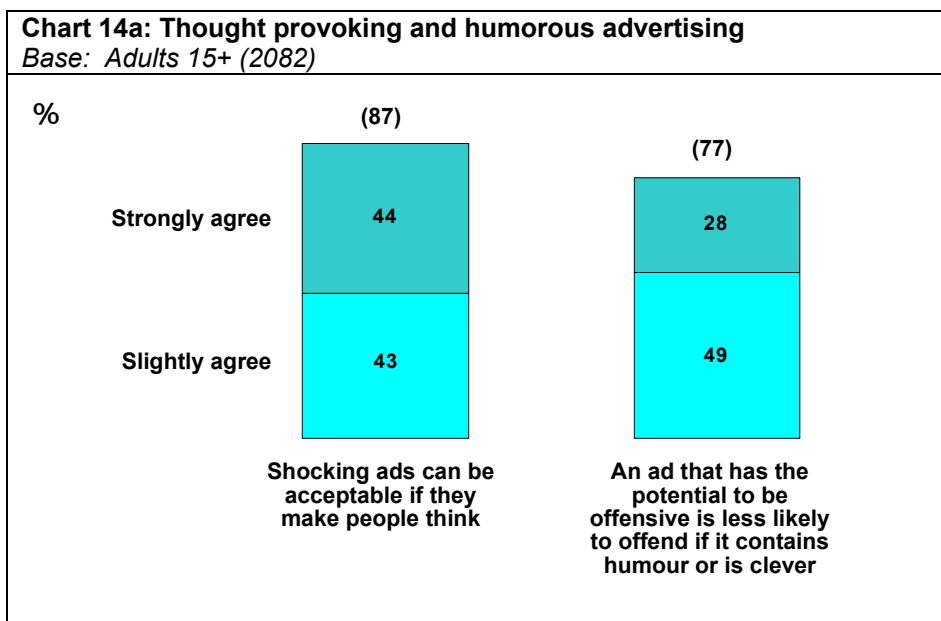
Women, older people and those from non-white ethnic minorities, as well as those from the higher social grades were more likely to have been personally offended in the past 12 months. Men were more likely to have been offended on behalf of others, and young people appear to acknowledge that their own personal boundaries might not be the same for other people.

3 Attitudes towards advertising content

This chapter of the report describes feelings towards the content of advertising, including rating of sensitivity of different subjects by the public. Chapter 4 describes the influence of the location and context of advertising on reactions towards it.

3.1 Humorous and thought provoking advertising

Chart 14a shows the proportions of UK adults agreeing with statements about thought provoking or humorous advertising.



Almost all (87%) respondents agreed that shocking ads can be acceptable if they make people think. Agreement was relatively strong, with over two fifths (44%) agreeing strongly. It therefore appears that the public responds more positively to ads which are thought provoking than they do to ads which shock ‘for the sake of shocking’.

This view was fairly universally held. Respondents of all ages were equally likely to think this, and men and women held similar views.

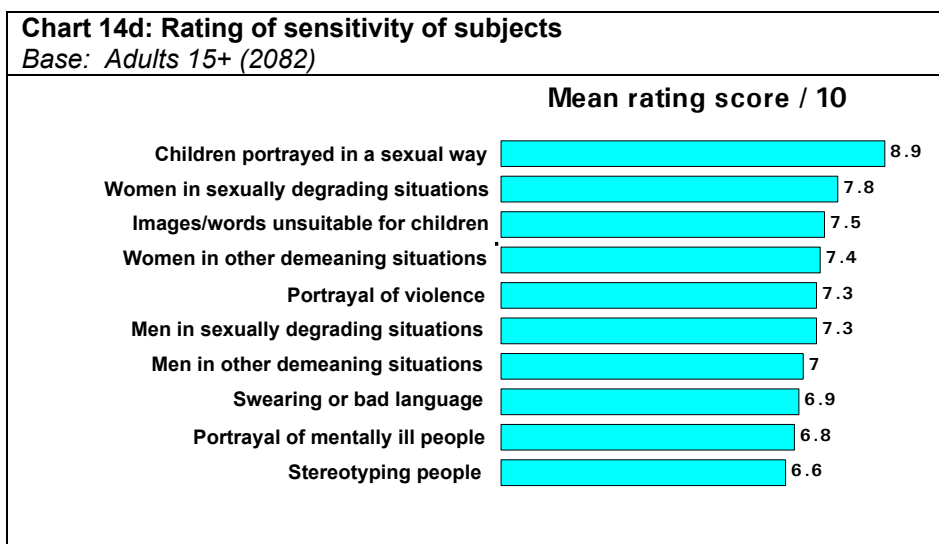
The use of humour was also accepted as an advertising tool, and over three quarters (77%) of respondents agreed that an ad that has the potential to be offensive is less likely to offend if it contains humour or is clever. Respondents felt less strongly about this, with only a quarter (28%) strongly agreeing.

Younger people were more likely to acknowledge the role of humour, with a third strongly (33%) agreeing with the statement, and young men were especially likely to say this (37%).

3.2 Ranking of sensitivity of different subjects

All respondents were presented with a number of issues and asked to give them a rating from 1 to 10, where 1 means it is not sensitive at all, and 10 means it has the potential to cause serious offence.

A mean score out of 10 was calculated for each subject, and results for the 10 subjects rated as most sensitive are shown in chart 14d.



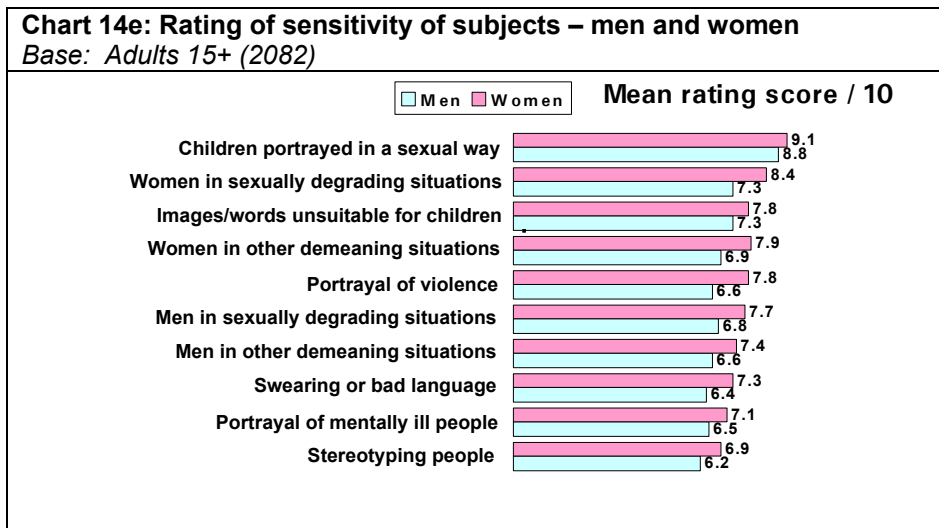
The subject that was rated as most sensitive was the portrayal of children in a sensitive way. Two thirds of respondents (64%) gave this a score of 10 (i.e. it has the potential to cause serious offence), and overall it achieved a mean score of 8.9/10. This was clearly the most sensitive issue, and all groups of respondents gave it a high mean score. Women gave a score of 9.1, compared to men giving a score of 8.8. Parents in particular were more likely to find it a sensitive issue, and mothers gave a mean score of 9.2, fathers giving a score of 9.1.

High scores were also given in regard to another issue related to children – showing words or images unsuitable for children to see or hear. Clearly, members of the

public identify the need for children to be protected from harmful advertising messages. Once again, women and parents were more likely to give a high score.

The portrayal of women in demeaning situations was also rated as very sensitive, and women being shown in sexually degrading situations was seen as especially sensitive. It is interesting to note that although the portrayal of men in demeaning situations was rated as fairly sensitive (given score of 7 and 7.3), this was felt to be less sensitive than the portrayal of women in this way.

There were clear gender differences in responses given. Chart 14e shows the responses of men and women separately for the 10 issues. All differences in the opinions of men and women are statistically significant.



Women were more likely than men to find all the subjects listed more sensitive. The greatest differences observed related to the portrayal of women in sexually degrading situations, the portrayal of women in other demeaning situations, the portrayal of violence and swearing or bad language. These are all issues that are traditionally included in films/programmes aimed at men, and therefore it is not surprising that men were less likely to find them sensitive.

3.3 Summary – Attitudes towards advertising content

Adults in the UK acknowledge the role of thought provoking and humorous advertising, but over three quarters felt that it is wrong to use sex to sell unconnected products. Similarly, the majority agreed that violence should never be portrayed in advertising.

It was clear that issues relating to children and advertising were seen as having the highest potential to cause offence. Almost all thought that the portrayal of children in a sexual way had the potential to cause serious offence, and similar proportions thought that showing images or words unsuitable for children was also potentially offensive.

The portrayal of women in demeaning situations was seen as sensitive by the majority, although the portrayal of men in such situations was seen to be less sensitive.

The greatest differences in the opinions of men and women occur for subjects which are traditionally 'aimed' at men – men were significantly less likely than women to find sex and sexual situations, violence and bad language potentially offensive.

The nature of serious offence differs between younger and older people, and young people also tended to be less sensitive around these 'traditionally' offensive areas, including sexual images, violence and bad language. Young people tended to be more sensitive than their older counterparts when thinking about the way in which people are portrayed, and they are more concerned about the negative portrayal of vulnerable groups.

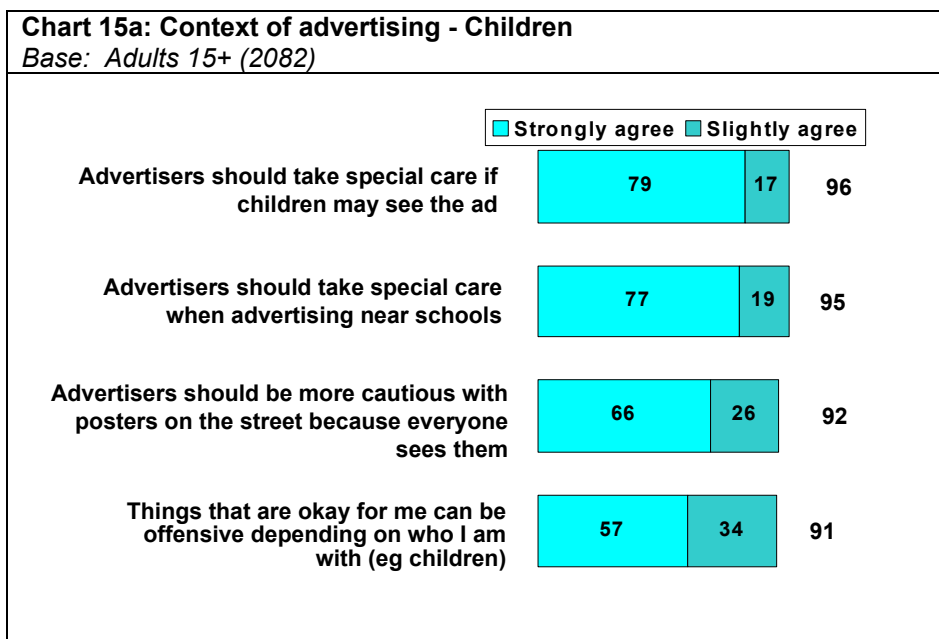
4 Context of advertising

As well as thinking about the images and messages portrayed in ads, advertisers also need to think about the context and location of the ads, as this can have a significant effect on how the message is received.

A number of statements were read to respondents, and they were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each one. Those relating to the context of the advertising have been divided into three groups – those relating to messages to children, relating to magazines and to religious issues.

4.1 Context of advertising – children

Chart 15a shows responses to statements relating to the context of advertising and children. The bars show the proportion agreeing slightly or strongly with each statement, and the number at the end of the bars indicates the total proportion agreeing with that statement.



In general, the public strongly felt that special care should be taken around issues relating to children and advertising.

Almost all (96%) agreed that advertisers should take special care if children may see the ad, and four fifths (79%) strongly agreed. This view was especially strongly held by mothers (83% strongly agreed).

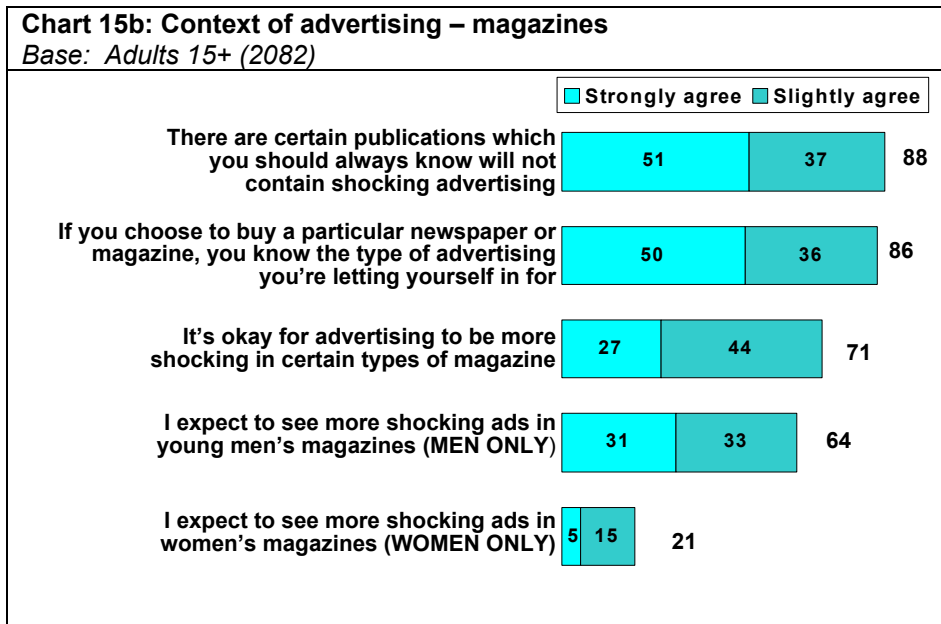
Similarly, over nine in ten (95%) agreed that advertisers should take special care when advertising near schools and other places where children go, and over three quarters (77%) agreed. Again, mothers were more likely to strongly agree with the statement, and 82% mothers strongly agreed. Although men who did not have children were significantly less likely to agree, seven in ten (70%) still strongly agreed.

The statement ‘Advertisers should be more cautious with posters on the street because everyone sees them’ was included in this category because children may also be exposed to them. Over nine in ten (92%) agreed that advertisers should be more cautious with posters on the street, and two thirds (66%) strongly agreed. Women were more likely to strongly agree than men (71% women, 62% men), but mothers were no more likely than other women to feel this.

4.2 Context of advertising – Magazines

There is particular variation in the types of magazine available in the UK, and these all occupy different niches in the market.

A number of statements were devised around these issues, and respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with them. The proportions agreeing with each statement are shown in chart 15b.



The majority (86%) of the UK public agree that if you choose to buy a particular newspaper or magazine, you know the type of advertising you're letting yourself in for. This feeling is also quite strongly held, and half strongly agreed.

Working alongside this, a majority (88%) also agreed that there are certain publications which you should always know will not contain shocking advertising, and again over half strongly agreed.

Similarly, seven in ten (71%) agreed that it is okay for advertising to be shocking in certain types of magazine.

It was hypothesised that certain types of magazines could be expected to contain more shocking advertising. Men were asked if they expect to see more shocking ads in young men's magazines, and women were asked this about women's magazines.

The majority of men (64%) agreed that they expect to see more shocking ads in young men's magazines, and three in ten (31%) strongly agreed. Although young men are more likely to be consumers of such magazines, they were no more likely to agree – older men who are not in the magazines' target audiences may be over-estimating the extent to which shocking advertising is included in these magazines. In addition, young men tend to be harder to shock, and may therefore not find these images shocking.

Women were much less likely to agree that they expect to see more shocking ads in women's magazines – only a fifth agreed, and only 5% strongly agreed. There is a wide range of magazines available to women, and all have different target audiences, so it is difficult for women to answer when thinking about an 'average' women's magazine. Younger women were slightly more likely to agree with the statement – 25% of under 35s agreed, compared with 18% of those aged 35 and older. These younger respondents may have been answering while thinking solely about magazines which are aimed at them.

4.3 Context of advertising – specific media

Early in the interview, respondents were presented with a list of different issues and asked to rate how sensitive each one is. Those who rated a subject as sensitive (7 or higher) were shown a list of media and asked which they thought would be inappropriate to use to show these subjects. Respondents could choose as many or as few media as they wished.

In general, for all sensitive subjects, ‘push’ media were thought to be the most inappropriate. Among those who found each subject sensitive, eight in ten or more felt that posters were inappropriate. Three fifths or more felt this about newspapers, direct mail and sales promotion.

Other media were felt to be more ‘pull’, and as such in the control of the consumer – these included magazines, internet and cinema advertising. The proportions feeling that these media were inappropriate were smaller, but still significant for some issues. Between a half and six in ten felt that magazines, internet and cinema advertising were inappropriate media for sensitive images or messages.

4.4 Context of advertising – who is advertising

Statements relating to this construct were included on a separate week’s omnibus questionnaire, asked of a representative sample of 989 adults in Great Britain (not Northern Ireland was not included at this stage) in February/March 2002. The three statements included were as follows:

‘It’s okay for government advertising to be shocking, in order to make a point’

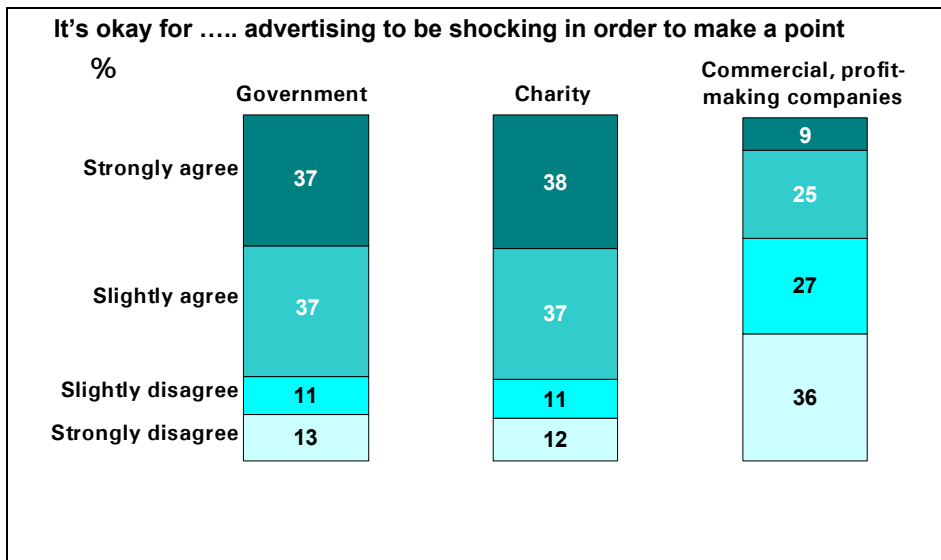
‘It’s okay for charity advertising to be shocking, in order to make a point’

‘It’s okay for advertising for commercial, profit-making companies to be shocking, in order to make a point’.

Responses are shown in chart 15d.

Around three quarters of adults supported the use of shocking executions by these advertisers, and around two fifths strongly agreed that it was okay for government and charities to use shocking advertising. Only a third (34%) supported the use of shocking advertising by commercial advertisers, and only 9% strongly agreed that this was the case.

Chart 15d: Agreement with statements ‘It’s okay for ... advertising to be shocking to make a point’
<i>Base: Adults 15+ (989)</i>



As could be expected, older respondents and women were less likely to support the use of shocking advertising in any circumstances.

Just under a quarter (24%) of those aged 65 and older strongly disagreed that it is okay for government to use shocking advertising, and a similar proportion (21%) said this about charity advertising. This compares with only 6% of under 25s strongly disagreeing that it's okay for government advertising to be shocking, and 4% about charity advertising.

Similar differences were observed when thinking about commercial advertising. One in ten (11%) disagreed strongly that it's okay for advertising for commercial companies to be shocking, compared with over a half (54%) those aged 65 and older.

Similar differences were observed when looking at responses from men and women, for example 33% of men strongly disagreed that commercial advertising could be more shocking, compared with 40% women.

4.5 Summary - context of advertising

As well as being concerned about the content of advertising aimed at children, the majority of the public are also concerned about children when thinking about the context of advertising. There was very strong feeling that advertisers should take special care if children may see the ad, and, linked to this, that special care should be taken when advertising near places where children go. This relates strongly to the use of 'push' media, and the majority feel that advertisers should be cautious when using posters, because there is little control over who sees them.

Respondents acknowledged that niche targeting is possible when advertising in magazines, and the majority felt that you should know what you are letting yourself in for when you buy a particular magazine or newspaper. However, it was also felt that there are certain publications which could be bought for general consumption, and one should be able to be confident that these will not contain shocking advertising.

The public also felt that advertisers should be sensitive when advertising around places of worship, or at the time of religious festivals.

In general, 'push' media, such as posters, direct mail and sales promotion were thought to be inappropriate for conveying sensitive message.

The majority also thought that advertising could be more shocking if it is 'in a good cause', and there was support for more shocking advertising messages from the government or charities. However, there was much less support for commercial advertising to deliver more shocking messages.

5 Regulation of offensive advertising

The ASA aims to ban advertising where there is serious and widespread offence. The study aimed to establish the extent to which members of the public concurred with that view.

To this end, three statements were devised and were presented to respondents who were asked to agree or disagree with each one. They were always presented in a fixed order, to enable respondents to think through the relevant issues in the same order.

Chart 16a shows results. The first column shows the proportion of all respondents strongly agreeing with the statement, and the right hand column shows the proportion slightly agreeing.

	% agree at all	% agree strongly	% agree slightly
If most people are seriously offended by a particular ad, it should be banned	79	49	30
If most people are slightly offended by a particular ad, it should be banned	51	19	32
Even if only one or two people are seriously offended by a particular ad, it should be banned	30	8	22

Just under eight in ten (79%) agreed with the concept that if an ad causes serious and widespread offence it should be banned, and there was considerable strength of feeling, with just under half (49%) agreeing strongly.

The next statement looked at support for banning advertising where there was widespread but slight offence. Fewer supported banning in this case, with only a half (51%) agreeing, and 19% strongly agreeing.

Similarly, there was less support for banning advertising where offence was serious but not widespread. In this case, only three in ten agreed that the ad should be banned, and only 8% strongly agreed.

This indicates that there is broad support for the ASA's approach of banning advertising in the event of widespread and serious offence.

In general, groups who were more likely to have been personally offended in the past were more likely to feel that offensive advertising should be banned. Three fifths (61%) of those who had been personally offended in the past 12 months strongly agreed that ads should be banned where there is serious and widespread offence, compared with 47% of those who had not been offended in the past 12 months. They were also more likely to think that advertising should be banned if offence is slight and widespread, or serious but not widespread. However, even among those who had been personally offended, there was less support for banning advertising where offence is not serious and widespread.

Table 16b shows the proportion strongly agreeing with each of the statements among key groups – older respondents, women, those with strong religious beliefs, and those who had been personally offended in the past 12 months.

Table 16b: Agreement with statements relating to regulation of advertising – views of groups who had been personally offended in the past 12 months.

% strongly agreeing that advertising should be banned if ...			Most people <i>seriously</i> offended	Most people <i>slightly</i> offended	Only 1 or 2 people <i>seriously</i> offended
Age	15-24	%	38	15	4
	25-34	%	38	13	4
	35-44	%	50	19	7
	45-54	%	56	21	7
	55-74	%	56	24	11
	75+	%	62	26	19
Gender	Male	%	45	18	7
	Female	%	54	21	9
Religious belief	No belief	%	44	16	6
	No strong belief	%	50	20	8
	Any strong belief	%	57	25	13
Personal offence	Any in past 12 mths	%	61	26	11
	None in past 12 mths	%	47	18	7
Ethnic group	White	%	51	19	7
	Non-White	%	50	21	10

5.1 Summary – regulation of offensive advertising

The majority of UK adults agreed that advertising which caused widespread and serious offence should be banned, and this feeling was strongly and widely held. There was less support for banning advertising where offence was not serious or widespread.

Those who had themselves been offended by advertising in the past were more likely to feel that offensive advertising should be banned.