

Advertising Constraints

Marmite advert

Learning Point: Audiences can respond to texts in different ways. They do not always take the intended meaning but can respond in an oppositional. Responses can depend on people's age, experiences, gender, beliefs and values.

- Uniformed inspectors are seen raiding homes and shaming families
- The owners have neglected their jars of Marmite which are then rescued by the pseudo RSPCA inspectors and re-homed
- Animal welfare campaigners hit back against the advert which they say is bad taste

By Daily Mail reporter

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The documentary-style spoof which featured a welfare crew rescuing abandoned jars of Marmite was first screened earlier this month. It drew 504 complaints from viewers who said it trivialised the work of child and animal welfare agencies.



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The manufacturer trades on the marketing slogan *'Love It. Hate It.'*

The complaints led to Marmite's owner Unilever donating £18,000 to the RSPCA. But the **Advertising Standards Authority** said: 'Most [viewers] would recognise the ads were a spoof.

'They... did not trivialise issues of abuse or denigrate the work of child and animal protection services.'

One man is apparently left crying on his doorstep, while the faces of some children are pixilated to protect their identity – as happens with genuine documentaries. The premise is that these owners have neglected their Marmite which are then rescued by the pseudo RSPCA inspectors before the jars are re-homed.

The manufacturer, which trades on the marketing slogan *'Love It. Hate It. Just Don't Forget It.'*, appears to have misjudged the response of viewers.

After the commercial was seen during a break in *Coronation Street* on ITV on Monday night, the brand's Facebook and YouTube page were hit with a critical backlash. Among the many Facebook complaints, one read: *'Your new advert is very bad taste. Animal abuse is no laughing matter and I think it's very wrong to jokingly use such a subject as a marketing scheme to increase your sales.'*

'People would be more inclined to buy Marmite if you donated a tiny percentage of each jars sale to the RSPCA to show that you meant no disrespect to the hard work that it does.'

Another wrote: *'What on earth were you thinking?! Poor taste, at best.'*

While a third added: *'Disgraceful advert! The implications are dreadful and shame on Michael Buerk for taking part! Hope you take this off air straight away!!!!'*

However, the critics were matched by a deluge of positive comments from fans who enjoyed the humour and defended what they insisted was a funny message.

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Marmite apologised to those shoppers who were offended on its website, saying: *'Sorry you feel that way.'*

The manufacturer trades on the marketing slogan *'Love It. Hate It.'* It added: *'The plot focuses on a fictitious world where teams of people are dedicated to salvaging unused jars and giving them to people who actually eat Marmite with the only animal that appears being a much-loved family pet.'*

'We worked really hard to create an ad that we hoped people would watch in the light-hearted way it was intended.'

The **RSPCA** said it understood the concerns of some viewers.

A spokesman said: *'We understand that animal lovers are concerned on our behalf - people either love the advert or hate it. We plan to talk to the makers of Marmite about how we can work together on animal welfare.'*

A spokesman for Unilever, which makes the spread, said: *'It is never our intention to cause offence. This is the first time Marmite has been on television for two years and we have made every effort to ensure that this commercial entertains anyone who watches it. It ranked highly throughout our rigorous testing process and with clear branding from the outset, as well as the comedic tone, we believe we have created an unmistakably Marmite ad – people will either love it or hate it and they certainly won't forget it. We hope that everyone will watch and enjoy this commercial in the light-hearted way it was intended'*

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Read the information in the downloadable sheet about the Marmite documentary spoof advert.

Role play a debate about the advert.

Roles:

- Animal rights campaigner
- Advert creator
- RSPCA representative
- Spokesperson from Unilever
- Fans of the marmite brand
- ASA adjudicator

What is your viewpoint? Is the advert offensive and irresponsible? Or is it obviously light hearted?

Write your own personal response.