

ASC Research

# Consumer Perspectives on Advertising 2016



Advertising Standards Canada  
Les normes canadiennes de la publicité



the gandalf group

## About this Study

Conducted in early 2016 by The Gandalf Group with a representative sample of 1,564 Canadians, this research continues ASC's probing into consumer perceptions about advertising. This year, in addition to general views on advertising and perceptions of truth and accuracy of advertising across media types, we looked at Canadians' perspectives on certain advertising themes with a spotlight on perceptions around sexism in advertising.



# Table of Contents

Overview	2
Highlights	4
<b>1</b> Canadians View Advertising Positively	6
<b>2</b> Trustworthiness of Advertising Varies Across Media Types	7
<b>3</b> Acceptability of Advertising Themes	8
<b>4</b> Portrayals of Women and Men in Advertising	10
A. Is advertising fair to men and to women?	10
B. Sexism in advertising	11
C. What does a sexist ad look like?	14
<b>5</b> Rules, Regulations and Consequences	18
<b>6</b> Awareness of ASC and the <i>Code</i>	19

# Highlights

## General Perceptions of Advertising



- Consistent with previous research findings, Canadians continue to have a favourable impression of advertising and a majority find it helpful. As in previous studies, comfort levels with truth and accuracy continue to be higher in ads in traditional versus digital media.



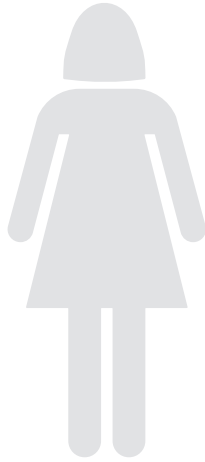
- Canadians find certain advertising content to be almost universally unacceptable, including demeaning portrayals of persons with disabilities, animal abuse, racism, and depictions of bullying – even when intended as humour. A large majority also find ageism, sexism, and violence unacceptable in advertisements.
- There are consequences for unacceptable advertisements. 88% of Canadians say they would be ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ likely to stop buying from a particular company because of unacceptable advertising. In fact, 56% say they have previously done so.



## Special Focus Portrayals of Women and Men in Advertising



- By a large margin, Canadians believe women are treated more unfairly than men in advertising. 47% believe that women are treated ‘somewhat’ or ‘very unfairly’ in Canadian advertising, while only 31% believe the same about men.
- 56% of women versus 38% men feel that women are treated unfairly in advertising. On the other hand, virtually the same percentage of women and men (32% women vs. 31% men) perceive that men are treated unfairly in advertising.
- Top cited examples of unfair treatment of men in advertising involve men being depicted as dumb or stupid, while the top cited examples of unfair treatment of women involve depictions of unrealistic body images.
- Canadians believe that sexism toward women is more prevalent in advertising than sexism toward men. 63% believe that at least some Canadian advertising is sexist toward women, while only 40% believe that at least some is sexist toward men. And 70% of Canadian women say that at least some advertisements are sexist toward women.



- Many Canadians believe that advertising is becoming less sexist. 44% of Canadians believe that advertising is less sexist than it was 10 years ago, while 25% perceive advertising as more sexist than it was 10 years ago.
- When Canadians see a sexist ad, they report feeling annoyed (46%), resigned (15%) or angry (9%). More women (53%) report feeling annoyed than do men (39%).
- While Canadians hold the company placing the ad most at blame for sexist ads (31%), they also apportion some blame to society at large (26%) and to advertising agencies (25%).
- There are economic consequences to sexist advertising. Most respondents (67%) report they are less likely to buy a product from the company running a sexist ad.
- To many Canadians, objectifying women or men to advertise a product is seen as sexist, as are portrayals of women in less powerful roles than men. Scenarios where women are omitted from traditional male domains, such as a business meetings, are seen as sexist by many, as are portrayals of women in traditional roles, including doing laundry. Role 'reversals', including depicting men doing laundry, are not seen as sexist.
- Canadians report seeing certain 'sexist' scenarios more frequently than others. They report regularly seeing ads with women in traditional or less powerful roles, but they report rarely or never seeing ads with both men and women in non-traditional roles.



## ASC and Advertising Self-Regulation

- Canadians agree that it is important to have rules and regulations for advertisers, and seven-in-ten believe that such rules and regulations already exist.
- Almost 50% of Canadians are aware of both the *Canadian Code of Advertising Standards* and ASC.
- ASC membership strongly correlates to an increase in trust for an advertisement. 76% respondents say that they would be more likely to trust an advertisement if they knew the advertiser was a member of ASC.



# 1 Canadians View Advertising Positively



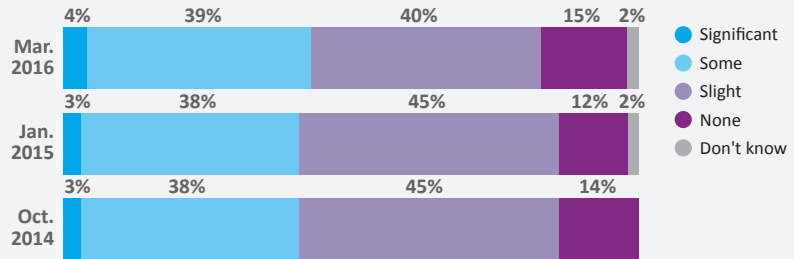
Canadians continue to have a favourable impression of advertising

Canadians continue to have a favourable impression of advertising; a majority find it helpful and most feel they receive at least some value from it. Few find no value at all. Less than half of consumers report having been recently exposed to advertising they find unacceptable.

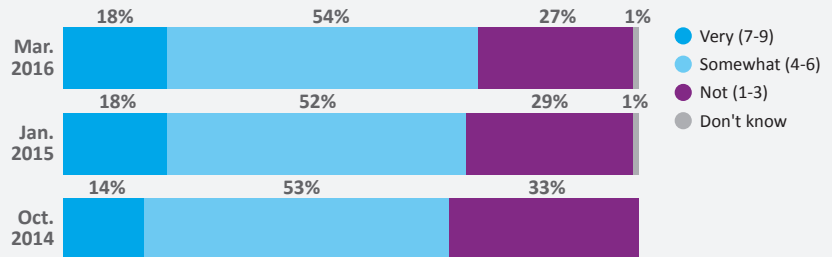
- Generally speaking, and consistent with previous studies, Canadians continue to have a favourable impression of advertising they see, hear or read.
- Most derive at least slight value from advertising and very few report that advertising provides no value at all.
- A majority continue to find advertising helpful with consumer decision-making.



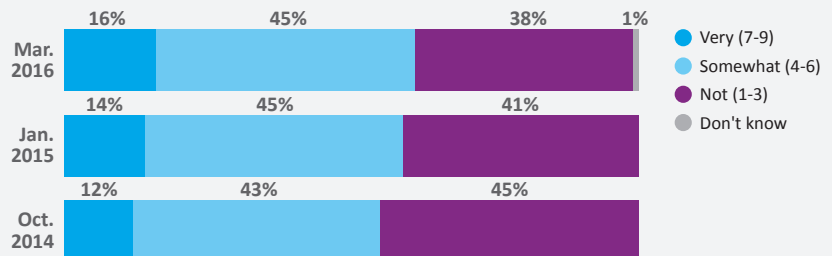
Generally speaking, how much value does the advertising that you see, hear or read offer you?



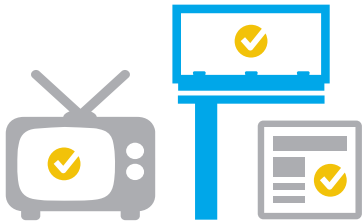
Generally speaking, how favourable is your impression of the advertising you see, hear or read?



How helpful is the advertising you see, hear or read to your decision-making as a consumer?



# 2 Trustworthiness of Advertising Varies Across Media Types

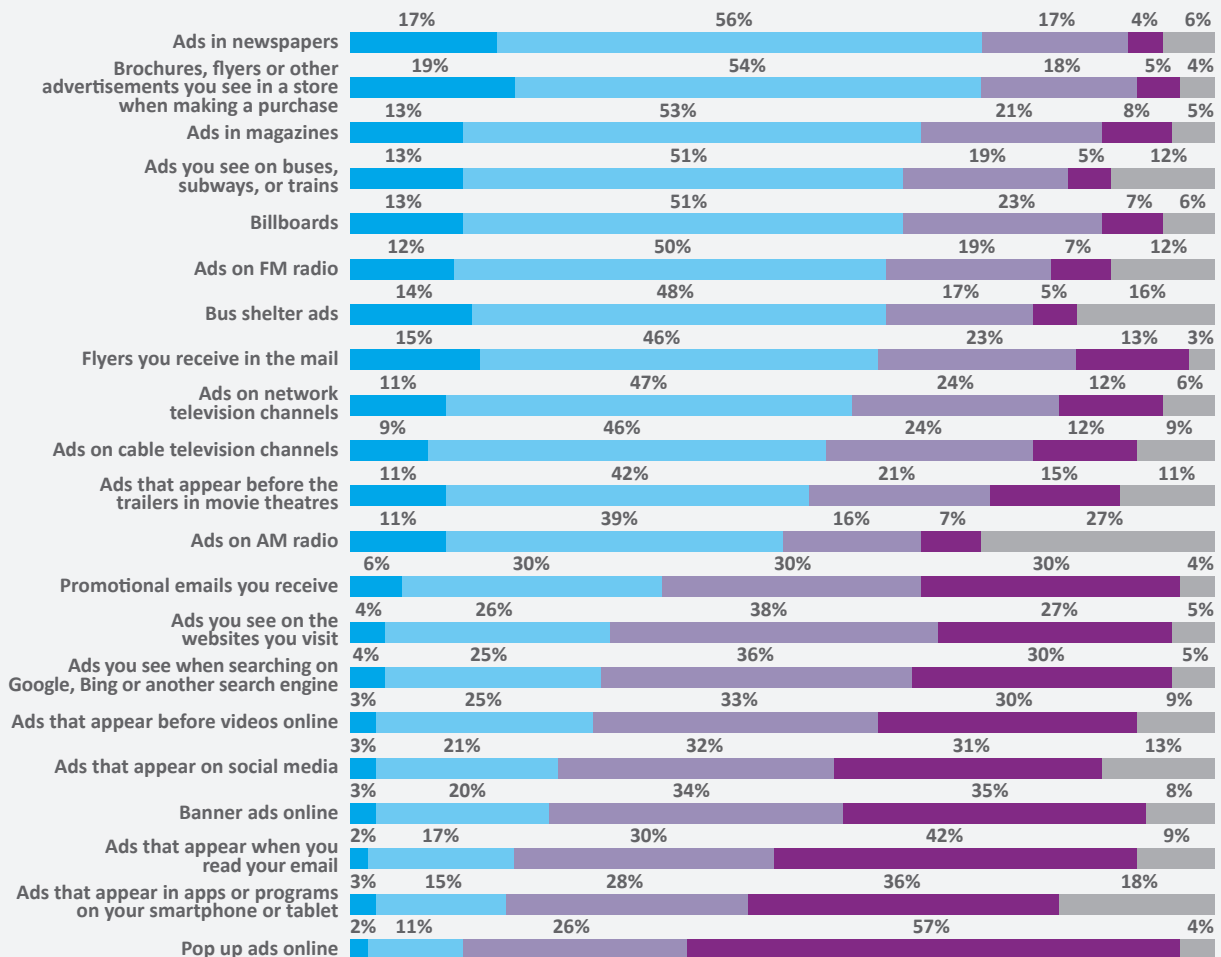


- As in previous studies, consumers continue to be more comfortable with levels of truth and accuracy in traditional media versus digital media.
- More Canadians report higher levels of comfort with ads in newspapers, followed by ads in brochures and in-store flyers.
- Canadians continue to report lower levels of comfort with truth and accuracy in ads in digital media.



How comfortable are you with the levels of truth and accuracy in the advertising you see, hear or read for each of the following:

- Very comfortable
- Somewhat comfortable
- Somewhat uncomfortable
- Very uncomfortable
- Don't know



# 3 Acceptability of Advertising Themes

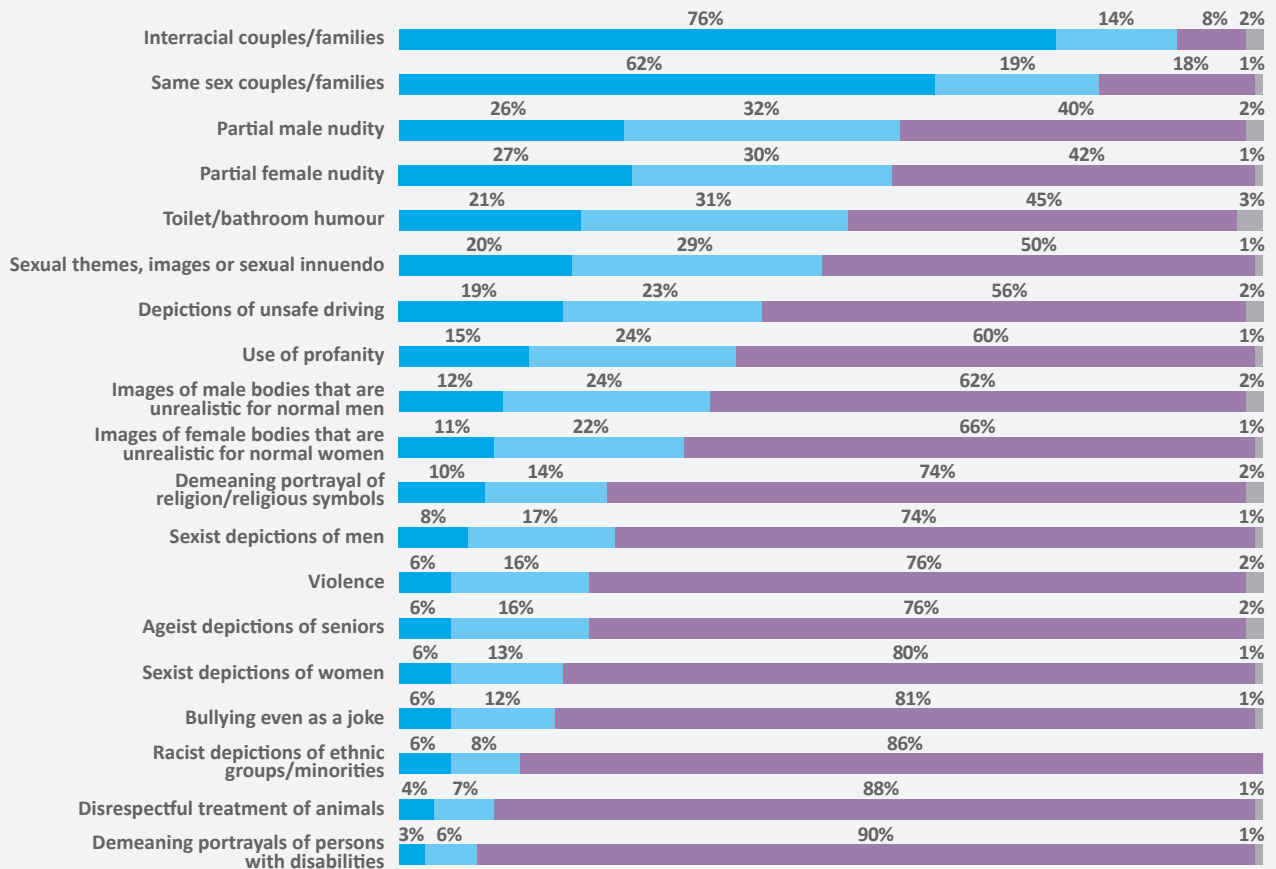
- **Consistent with 2013, almost all Canadians have a high degree of intolerance for ads containing animal abuse, images that demean persons with disabilities, and racist depictions.**
- **A large majority of Canadians are intolerant of ads containing violence and bullying, and sexist depictions of both women and men.**
- **Profanity is a concern for older audiences, two thirds of women and half of men. Younger Canadians are less concerned about this in advertisements.**

Consistent with 2013 results, when asked to rate certain images as being acceptable in ads, Canadians continue to find certain content almost universally unacceptable. Much of this content has a disparaging element to it, and includes themes of violence, ageism, sexism, racism, demeaning portrayals of persons with disabilities, poor treatment of animals, or the depiction of bullying – even when intended as humour. Generally, more women, older Canadians and Quebecers find these themes more unacceptable than do other Canadians, and women tend to have particularly higher concerns than men with nudity, unrealistic body types and sexist depictions.



How acceptable would you personally find each of the following in an advertisement:

- Completely acceptable (7-9)
- Moderately acceptable (4-6)
- Unacceptable (1-3)
- Don't know





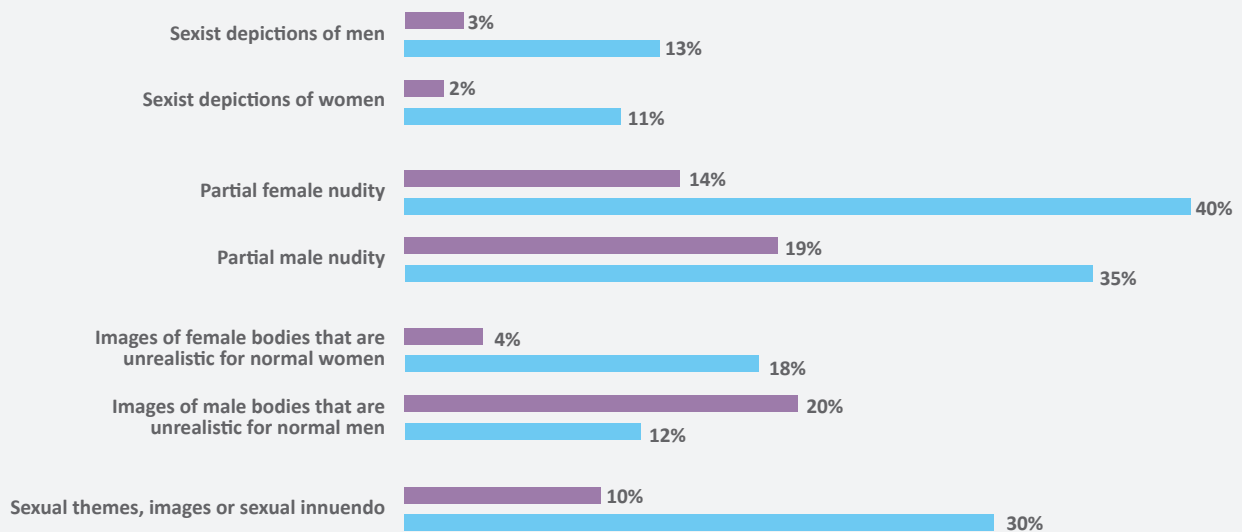


- As a rule, women more than men tend to find certain advertising themes unacceptable.
- There is a wide gender gap, particularly when it comes to nudity in advertisements - partial female nudity tends to be more acceptable to men (40%) than women (14%). Likewise, partial male nudity is more acceptable to men (35%) than to women (19%). Similar findings were found regarding unrealistic body types in advertisements, sexual themes, images or innuendo, and violence – these themes are more acceptable to men than they are to women.
- On the other hand, women report higher acceptance of more universally acceptable themes like same sex couples and families in advertisements, while men tend to be somewhat less accepting.



How acceptable would you personally find each of the following in an advertisement:  
(% Completely acceptable)

● Female  
● Male



# 4 Portrayals of Women and Men in Advertising

- Women are found to be portrayed unfairly in Canadian advertising by 47% of consumers, while men are found to be portrayed unfairly by 31%.
- Older men tend to feel men are portrayed more fairly in Canadian advertising than younger men (Men aged 18-34 57% fairly, Men over 65 77% fairly).
- Older women are more likely to feel women are portrayed fairly in Canadian advertising than younger women (Women 18-34 32% fairly, Women over 65 51% fairly).

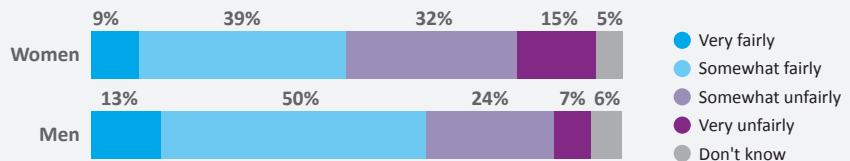
## A. Is advertising fair to men and to women?

47% of Canadians believe that women are treated somewhat or very unfairly in Canadian advertising, while only 31% believe the same when it comes to men. And while there is very little difference of opinion by gender about unfair treatment of men, over half of women, versus only about a third of men, feel that women are treated unfairly.

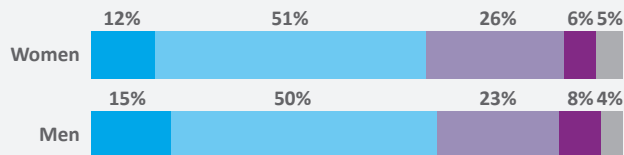
As well, 62% of Canadians found at least some ads to be sexist toward women, while only 41% say at least some ads are sexist toward men. Again, there is very little difference of opinion by gender about the quantity of ads that are sexist toward men, whereas 69% of women versus 56% of men report at least some ads are sexist toward women.



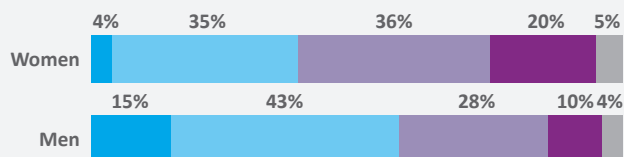
Generally speaking, how fairly do you feel women/men are portrayed in Canadian advertising?



Generally speaking, how fairly do you feel men are portrayed in Canadian advertising?



Generally speaking, how fairly do you feel women are portrayed in Canadian advertising?

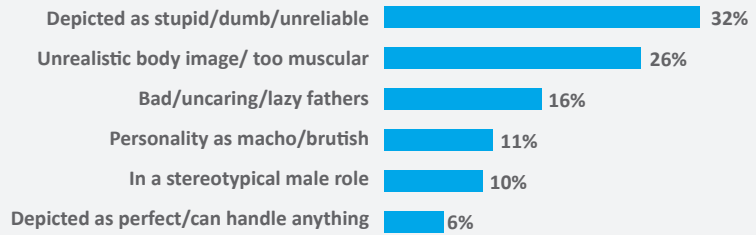


# Spotlight on Fairness

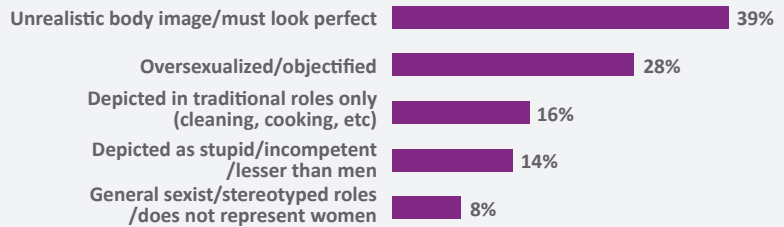
- Consumers feel that both women and men are treated unfairly in advertising. However, the “unfair” reasons reported are strikingly different between the genders. Top-cited examples of unfair treatment of men include depictions of men who: are stupid, dumb, or unreliable; have bodies that are too muscular or are unrealistic; or are bad or lazy dads.
- Top-cited examples of unfair treatment of women include depictions of women who: are too perfect or have unrealistic body types; are oversexualized or objectified; or are depicted only in traditional roles.



Please tell us in what ways (or examples of how) men are being unfairly treated in advertising.



Please tell us in what ways (or examples of how) women are being unfairly treated in advertising.

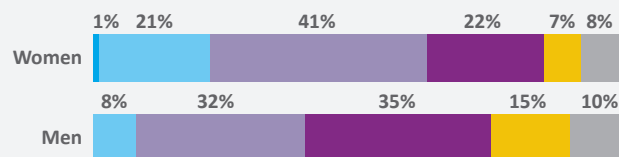


## B. Sexism in advertising

- 63% of Canadians feel that at least some of the advertisements that they see, hear or read are sexist toward women, while only 40% feel that at least some of the ads that they see, hear or read are sexist toward men.

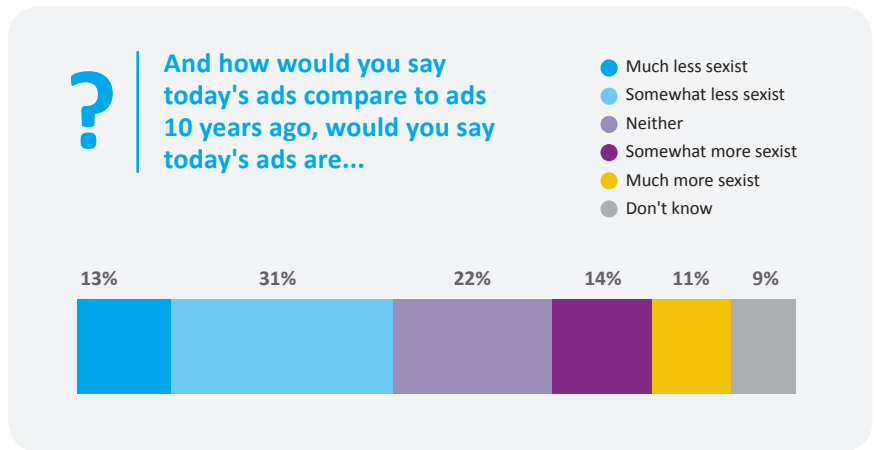


How many of the advertisements that you see, hear or read are sexist toward women/men?



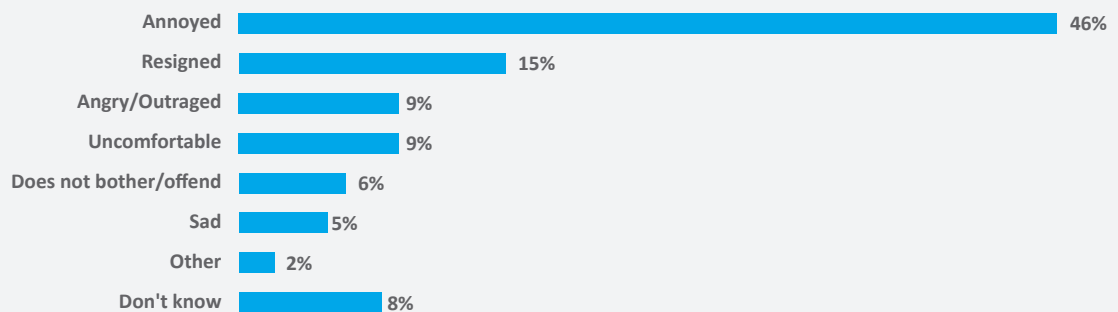


- Compared to ads 10 years ago, more consumers consider today's ads less sexist (44%), than those who see them as more sexist (20%), or who don't see a change (22%).



- 46% of Canadians feel annoyed when seeing a sexist ad, followed by feelings of resignation (15%), anger (9%), or discomfort (9%). Women are much more likely to be annoyed (53%), than men (39%), while men tend to feel resigned (20%) more often than women (11%).

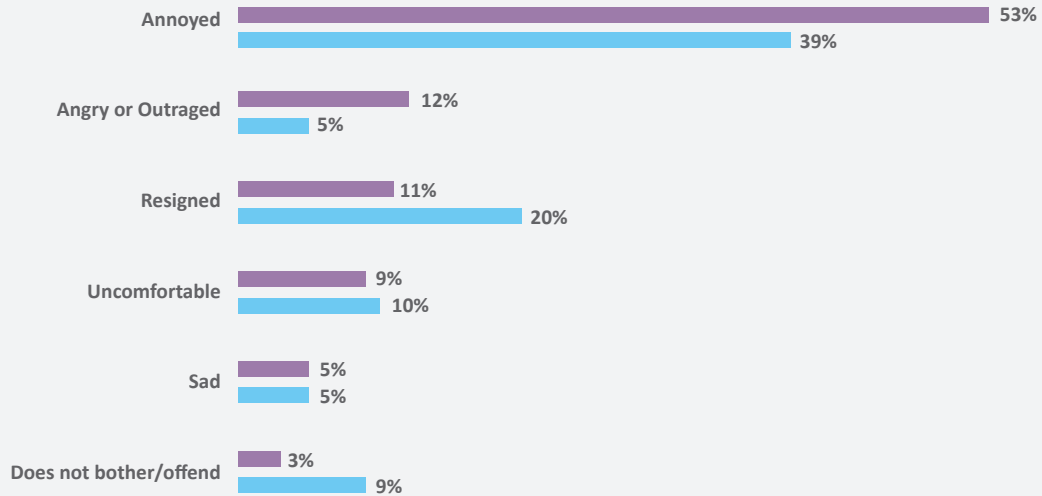
When you see a sexist ad, which one of the following are you most likely to feel?





When you see a sexist ad, which one of the following are you most likely to feel?

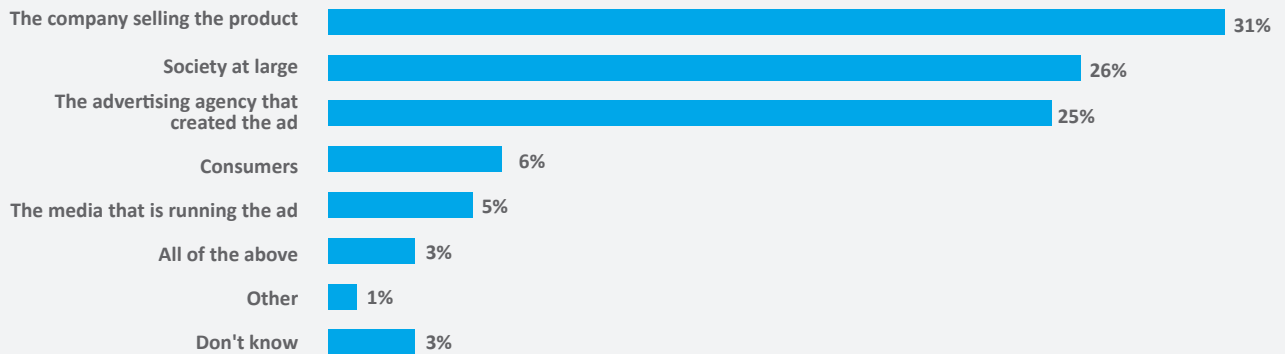
● Female  
● Male

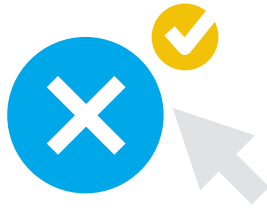


- While consumers place most blame for sexist ads on companies selling the product (31%) and their ad agencies (24%), society at large also shoulders some of the blame (26%). Women are somewhat more likely than men to blame the company (34% versus 28%).



When you see a sexist ad, who do you think is most to blame?



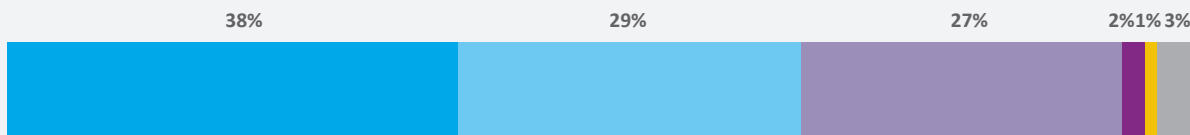


- As a consequence of sexist ads, consumers are less likely to buy a product from the advertiser (67%), with only 27% saying there is no impact on their purchase likelihood. This is largely driven by women, 77% of whom are less likely to buy a product as a result of seeing a sexist ad, and particularly by senior women, 82% of whom are less likely to buy a product as a result.



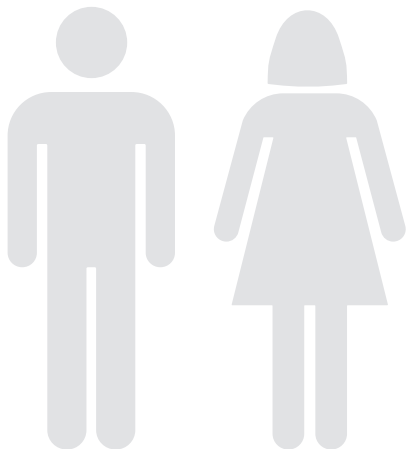
And when you see a sexist ad, are you more or less likely to buy a product from that company?

- Much less likely
- Somewhat less likely
- No impact
- Somewhat more likely
- Much more likely
- Don't know



### C. What does a sexist ad look like?

Canadian consumers were asked to rate a variety of advertising scenarios on a 'sexist' scale. In addition to revealing top of mind considerations on what they find unfair, this provides an interesting insight into what Canadians mean when they report sexism in advertising. To Canadians, objectifying women or men to advertise a product is generally sexist. Portrayals that depict traditional gender roles in society and women appearing to be treated badly are often seen as sexist toward women, while similar scenarios are not as often seen as sexist toward men.



- The use of scantily clad men or women to market to the opposite sex is seen as sexist. However, the use of scantily clad women to sell products to women is seen as sexist by fewer Canadians.
- Ads that portray women as less powerful than men are also seen as sexist by many Canadians – examples include a woman walking a step behind a man, or a woman cooking dinner while a man sits nearby.

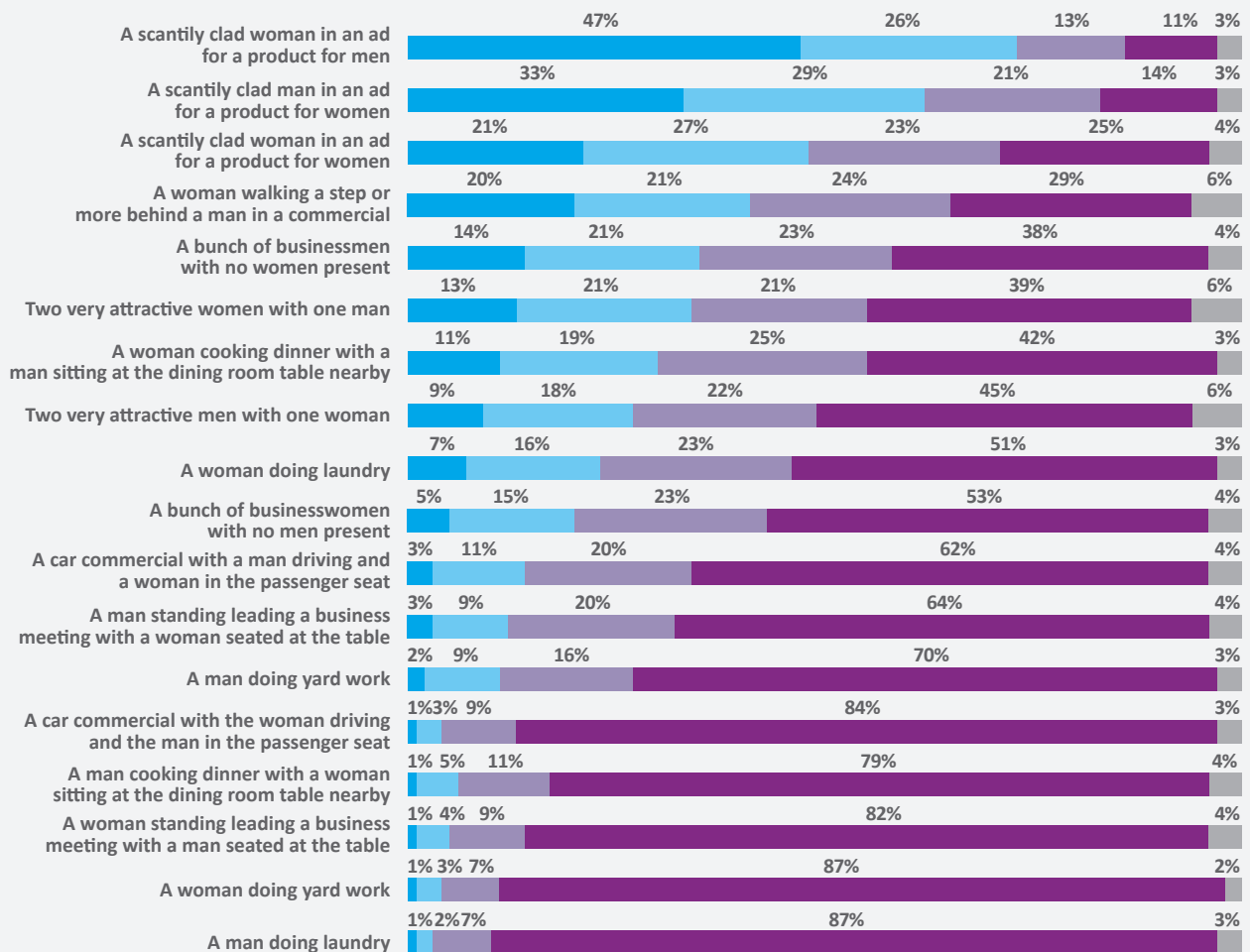


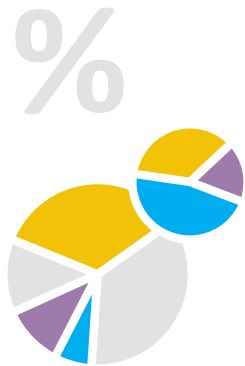
- Exclusion from traditionally male roles (such as in business) can also be seen as sexist by some. And half of Canadians view women in traditional roles (such as doing laundry) as at least slightly sexist.
- Importantly, when traditionally male roles are presented, the scenarios are often not seen as sexist. For instance, half of Canadians find a woman doing laundry at least slightly sexist, but just 27% feel that a man doing yard work is at least slightly sexist.



And for each of the following, please tell me if you find the ad very sexist, somewhat sexist, slightly sexist or not at all sexist:

- Very sexist
- Somewhat sexist
- Slightly sexist
- Not at all sexist
- Don't know





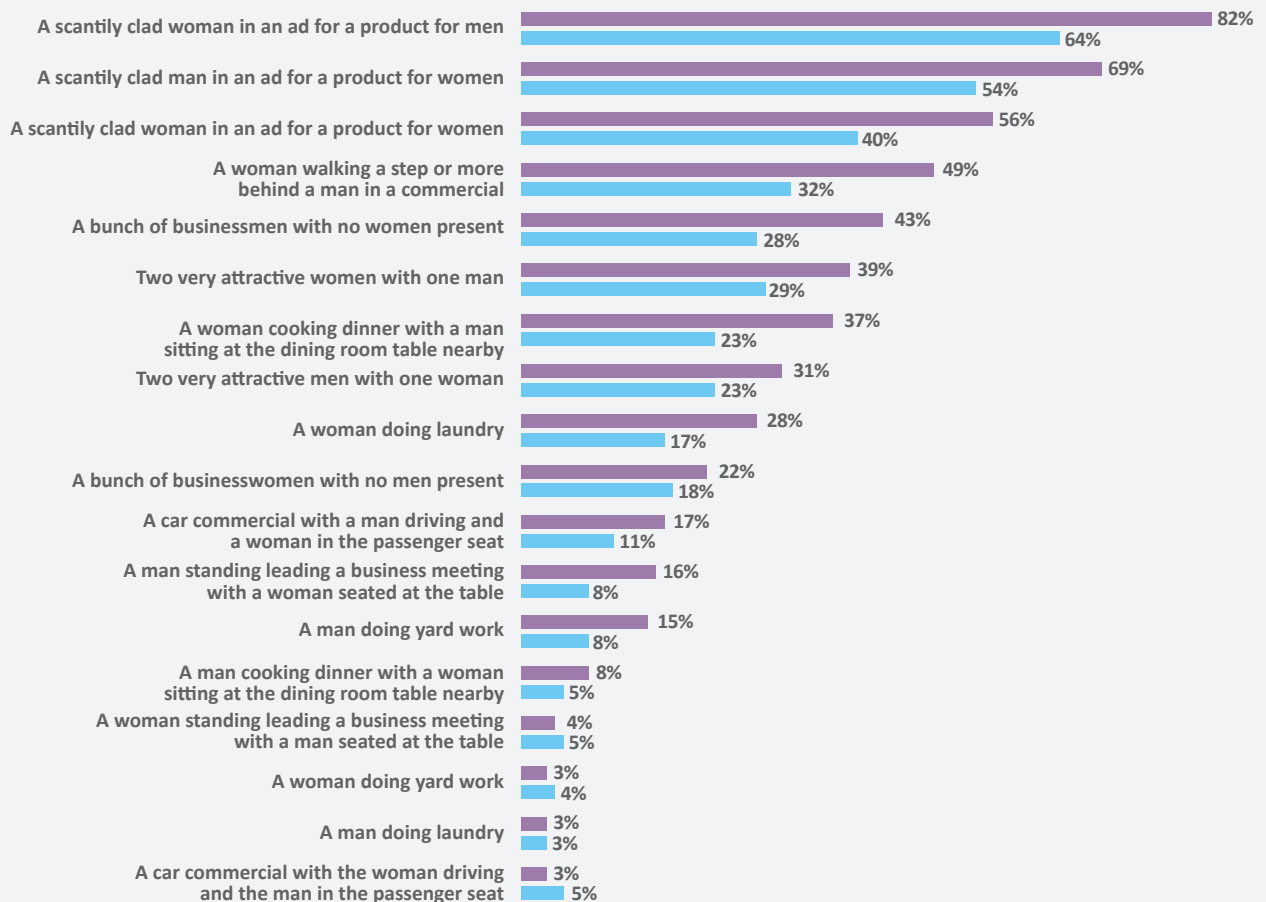
Men not only see far fewer sexist scenarios in advertising than women do, but fewer men than women consider many of the scenarios tested as sexist to begin with, including:

- scantily clad woman in an ad for a product for men or women
- women doing laundry / men doing yardwork
- man driving with a woman as the passenger
- woman walking a step or more behind a man
- man leading a business meeting
- woman cooking dinner for a man
- business meeting, with no women present



And for each of the following, please tell me if you find the ad very sexist, somewhat sexist, slightly sexist or not at all sexist:  
(% Very or somewhat sexist)

Female  
Male





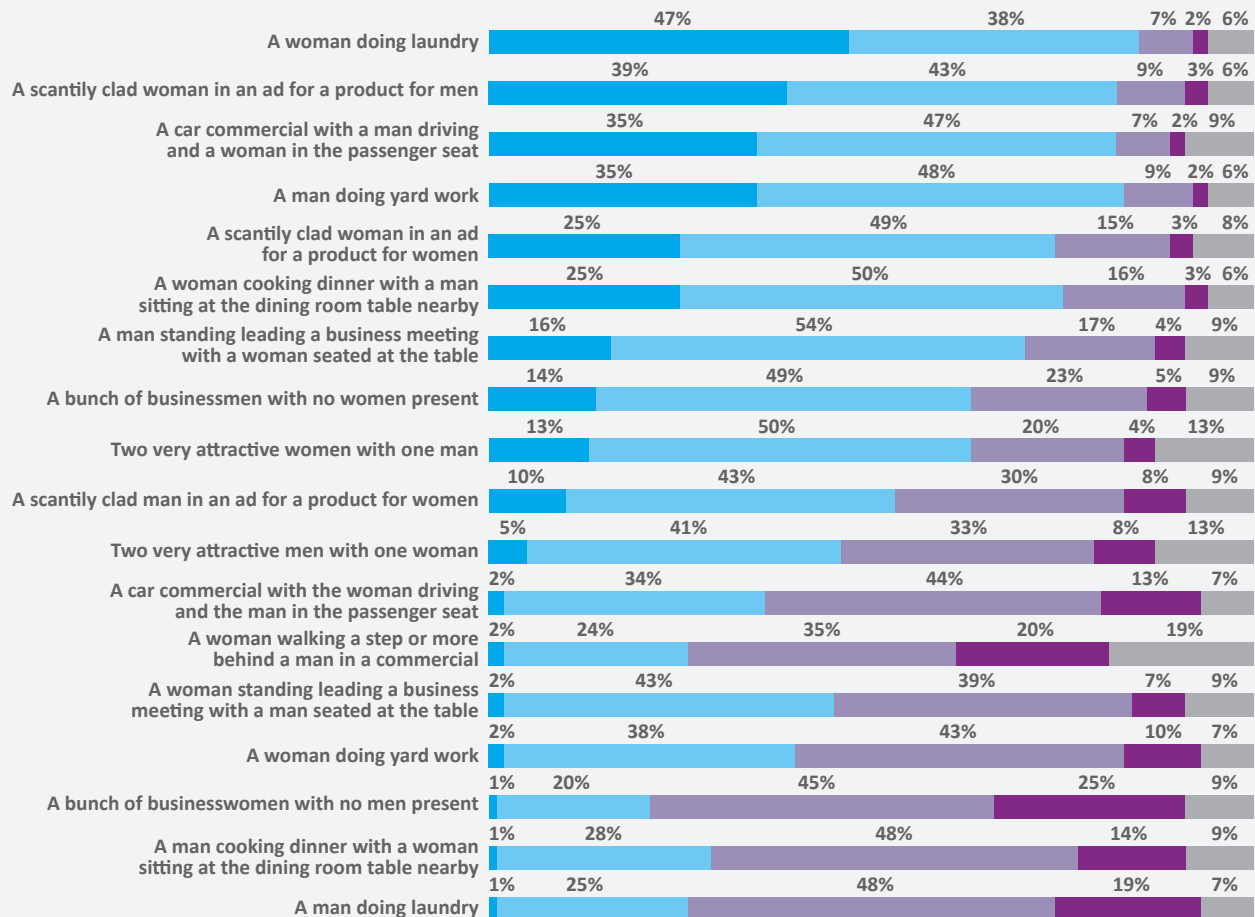


When asked how often they observe ‘sexist’ scenarios in advertisements, consumers report most often seeing men and women depicted in traditional gender roles, followed by objectification of women. They report seldom seeing portrayals of men being excluded, men performing tasks traditionally viewed as female tasks, or women portrayed in traditional male roles.



And how often do you see a commercial that is similar to the following:

- Almost always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- Don't know



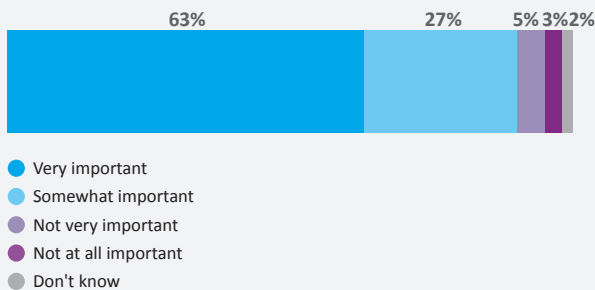
# 5 Rules, Regulations and Consequences

Canadians continue to believe that rules and regulations for advertising are important, and most believe they are in place.

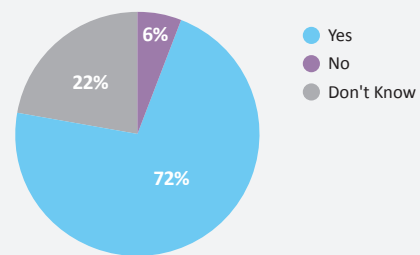


Thinking about all forms of advertising, both online and offline... In your opinion, how important is it to have rules and regulations that advertisers must follow? / To the best of your knowledge, are there rules and regulations about advertising that advertisers must follow?

Importance of rules and regulations



Are there rules and regulations?

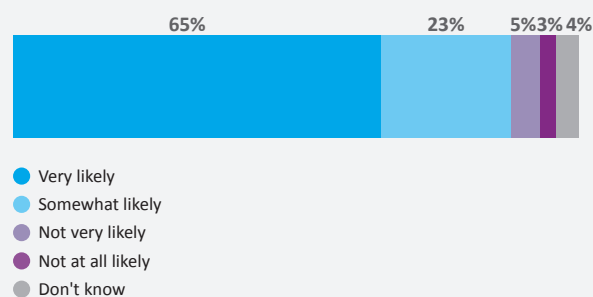


Canadian consumers are more than willing to vote with their wallets if they find advertising unacceptable.

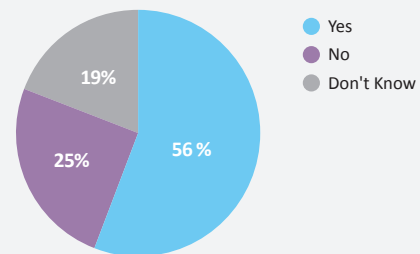


How likely would you be to stop purchasing a product or service if the company offering it ran advertising that you considered unacceptable because it was not truthful, was not accurate, or had offended you? / Have you ever stopped purchasing a company's product or service because the company's ads were unacceptable to you?

Likelihood of stopping purchases over ads



Stopped purchases over ads

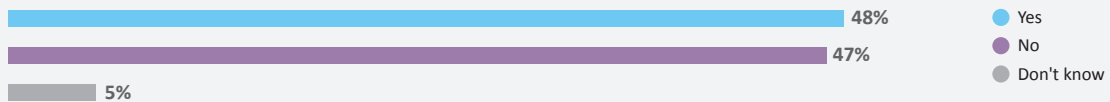


# 6 Awareness of ASC and the Code

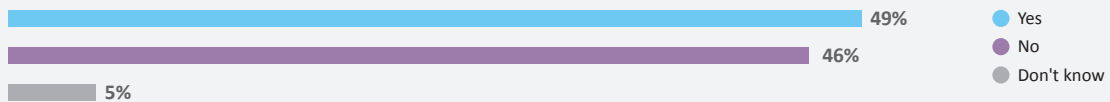
Almost half of Canadians are aware of both the *Canadian Code of Advertising Standards* and Advertising Standards Canada



Before participating in this survey, had you heard of Advertising Standards Canada?



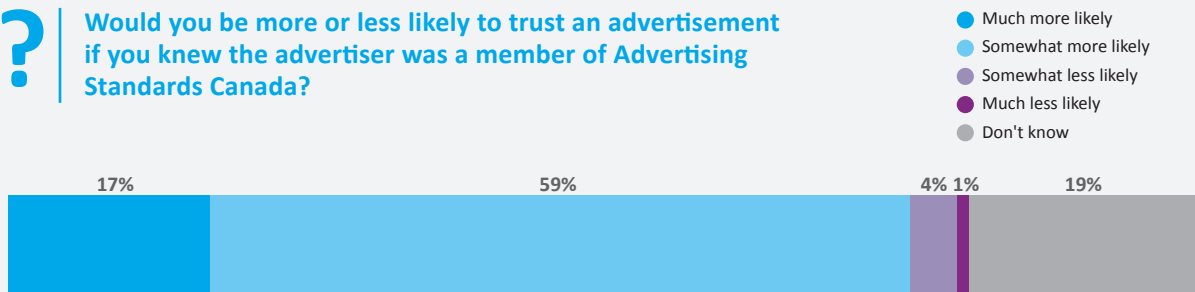
Before participating in this survey, were you aware of the *Canadian Code of Advertising Standards*?



Most Canadians would be likely to trust an advertisement more if the advertiser was a member of ASC.



Would you be more or less likely to trust an advertisement if you knew the advertiser was a member of Advertising Standards Canada?



## About ASC

Advertising Standards Canada (ASC) is the national independent advertising industry self-regulatory body committed to creating and maintaining community confidence in advertising. ASC members – leading advertisers, advertising agencies, media and suppliers to the advertising industry – are committed to supporting responsible and effective advertising self-regulation. A not-for-profit organization, ASC administers the Canadian Code of Advertising Standards, the principal instrument of advertising self-regulation in Canada, and a national mechanism for accepting and responding to consumers' complaints about advertising.

## About The Gandalf Group

The Gandalf Group is a Toronto-based consulting firm that provides expertise in public opinion research, strategic communications and issues management.

## Advertising Standards Canada

### Toronto Office

175 Bloor Street East  
South Tower, Suite 1801  
Toronto, ON M4W 3R8  
Phone: (416) 961-6311  
Fax: (416) 961-7904  
adstandards.com

### Montreal Office

2015 Peel Street  
Suite 915  
Montreal, Quebec H3A 1T8  
Phone: (514) 931-8060  
Fax: (877) 956-8646  
adstandards.com



Advertising Standards Canada  
Les normes canadiennes de la publicité



the gandalf group

© 2016 Advertising Standards Canada

This Report is the property of Advertising Standards Canada and may not be reproduced, in whole, or in part, without prior permission from Advertising Standards Canada.