

Adblock Bristol complaint to the Advertising Standards Authority



Re: misleading Chevron advert

Date: 27th March 2021

To whom it may concern,

We are writing to lodge a formal complaint about a current social media marketing campaign by Chevron Corp which targets consumers including UK audiences.

The central message of Chevron's marketing campaign is that the firm is lowering its environmental impact and protecting the planet, epitomised in its [core marketing video](#) which is the subject of this complaint. This video is shared across Chevron's social media platforms and currently has high visibility on the firm's Twitter account, [@Chevron](#), whose >375,000 followers include many UK residents.

The video transcript reads:

"We know it's going to take many forms of energy to meet the world's needs while creating a cleaner future for all. At Chevron we're lowering the carbon emissions intensity of our operations, investing in low carbon technologies and exploring renewable fuels of the future. We work hard to care for the homes we love, but it's only human to protect the one we share."

In this complaint we set out four **points** detailing the ways in which this advertisement is misleading and in breach of principles 3.1 and 3.3 of the ASA non-broadcast Code:

3.1 Marketing communications must not materially mislead or be likely to do so **(points 1-4)**

3.3 Marketing communications must not mislead the consumer by omitting material information. They must not mislead by hiding material information or presenting it in an unclear, unintelligible, ambiguous or untimely manner **(points 1-4)**



Point 1: Misleading emphasis on reducing carbon emissions when Chevron's total emissions are predicted to rise.

The advertisement strongly emphasises the company's 'green' credentials and actions to reduce their environmental impact, including via its central message: "*we're lowering the carbon emissions intensity of our operations, investing in low carbon technologies and exploring renewable fuels of the future*". This is misleading since it suggests that Chevron are lowering their carbon emissions when in fact, efforts to reduce the firm's carbon footprint remains a minimal proportion of its annual capital expenditures, and their overall contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions is predicted to rise.

In 2021, Chevron's "Climate Change Resilience" report states an intent to invest \$3 billion in carbon-reduction projects, renewables, offsets, and carbon capture technologies by 2028⁽¹⁾. This amounts to just < 3% of the firm's annual capital budget⁽²⁾. In comparison, Chevron plans to spend \$14 - \$16 billion a year on capital projects and exploration in the period 2021-2025⁽³⁾. Chevron aims to increase oil and gas production by 15% to **3.5 million net oil-equivalent Barrels/Day** by 2025^(2,4).

The climate-friendly emphasis in this advertisement is grossly disproportionate, misleading consumers by promoting Chevron's negligible low-carbon operations while concealing material information, *i.e.*, the scale of their ongoing investment into climate-harming fossil fuel

extraction, which comprises >97% of their annual spending plan to 2028 and will lead to an absolute increase in carbon emissions.

Point 2: Misleading imagery of racial inclusion.

The video advertisement strongly portrays racial diversity and inclusion in its visual imagery. This is misleading since Chevron is known to be racist in its activities and political financing.

Chevron's enormous contribution to global heating through greenhouse gas emissions⁽⁵⁾ disproportionately affects black, brown, indigenous and lower-wealth communities across the world⁽⁶⁾, with no substantial commitment to address this currently⁽¹⁻⁴⁾ (see **point 1**).

Chevron is credited with knowingly dumping more than 16 billion gallons of toxic waste into the Ecuadorian Amazon, compromising the health and homes of 30,000 Indigenous and rural Ecuadorians⁽⁷⁾.

In the city of Richmond, California, which hosts Chevron's major oil refinery, the population of Black, Asian and Hispanic and Latino residents is markedly higher (78.1%) than the state (61.4%) according to the 2019 US Census. Children in Richmond are diagnosed with asthma at more than two times the national average rate⁽⁸⁾. Residents suffer long-term exposure to air pollution from the refinery, including from deliberate 'flares' that send clouds of particulate matter into the air. A fire in 2012 caused 15,000 people to seek medical treatment for respiratory distress and other health problems⁽⁹⁾.

In the 2019/20 US election cycle Chevron gave over four times more campaign funding to US politicians who vote against racial justice and civil rights legislation⁽⁸⁾.

Point 3. Misleading use of environmentally responsible terminology: '*cleaner future*', '*protect the [home] we share*'.

This terminology depicts Chevron as a responsible company that is contributing to a low-carbon future and protecting the planet. This is misleading and conceals material information.

Chevron contributed more than 43.4 billion tons of CO₂ equivalent in greenhouse gases from 1965-2017 and is the second biggest contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions in the world⁽⁵⁾. With plans to increase their fossil fuel extraction by 15% from 2021-2025^(2,4) and no current plans to

reduce either their Scope 2 or 3 emissions⁽¹⁾, this is unlikely to change in the short- or medium-term. The company is highly polluting, credited with knowingly dumping more than 16 billion gallons of toxic waste in Ecuador's Amazon region⁽⁷⁾. Just recently, in February 2021, a spill at Chevron Corp's oil refinery in Richmond, California, leaked around 600 gallons of petroleum into the San Francisco Bay, compromising human wellbeing and threatening wildlife⁽¹⁰⁾.

Chevron is evidently not contributing to a '*cleaner future*', nor protecting the planet.

Point 4. Misleading use of jargon.

The jargon used in the video's central message misleads consumers: "*We are lowering the carbon emissions intensity of our operations*". The concept of *carbon emissions intensity* (emission rate of CO₂e per unit of energy produced) is not well known. Consumers are likely to conflate this phrase with the more commonly understood concept of *carbon emissions*. The advertisement does not make a distinction between these terms meaning this statement is unclear and ambiguous.

Lowering carbon emissions intensity means that Chevron will be reducing carbon emissions per barrel of oil extracted. Chevron recently acquired new oil fields in the Permian and offshore Israel through its acquisition of Noble Energy, added 5 billion barrels of 'potentially recoverable' oil-equivalent resources to its portfolio in 2020 and reports exploratory and appraisal drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, Egypt, Canada, Colombia and Cyprus in 2020-2021 totalling approximately 5.67 million net exploration acres⁽¹¹⁾. The firm plans to direct a further \$1.5 billion into exploration alone from 2021-2025⁽¹¹⁾. Even if carbon emissions intensity was 0%, Chevron's contribution to absolute emissions will rise as the firm continues to expand its oil and gas operations.

Overall, we are concerned that this advertisement consistently breaches points 3.1 and 3.3 of the non-broadcast Code. It misleads consumers by placing false emphasis on Chevron's role in environmental protection and the transition to a low-carbon future, as well as presenting a false portrayal of environmental and social responsibility. By misleading consumers in this way, Chevron maintains its social license to continue fossil fuel extraction despite the increasingly urgent requirement to phase out fossil fuels in order to limit global heating to <1.5-2°C compared to pre-industrial levels, as stated in the Paris Agreement which Chevron nominally supports.

Given that this advertisement is currently prominent and seen by millions of people daily, we look forward to receiving a response shortly.

Your sincerely,

Veronica Wignall submitted on behalf of Adblock Bristol

About Adblock Bristol

Formed in 2017, Adblock Bristol is a volunteer group who are concerned about the impacts of corporate advertising on our health, wellbeing, environment, climate, communities and the local economy. We lobby for policy change at a local levels, showcase alternatives, organise locally to stop new advertising sites and produce resources to raise awareness about the impacts of commercial advertising. We are part of the national Adfree Cities network.

References

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