Gender portrayal and stereotyping

Background

Gender portrayal in advertising is a recurring issue on the European political agenda. Although we have been dealing with this subject for decades, recent concerns regarding an increased use of so-called gender stereotyping and sexualising imagery in commercial communications has opened an unprecedented appetite for legislative measures across Europe.

In 2014, independent self-regulatory organisations (SROs) across the EU registered a significant increase in the number of advertising complaints related to gender portrayal. ''Taste and decency" represented the second largest area of complaints across Europe (27.5%), after misleadingness (36.6%). Within "taste and decency", 63% of complaints were about the "portrayal of gender". Most complaints (around 98%) refer to the portrayal of women and only a rough 2% of complaints have been filed because of the negative portrayal of men.

The European Commission's 2006-2010 Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men fosters the elimination of gender stereotypes in the media, while its post 2015 strategy is currently being developed and there are early indications that advertising will be included as an area for action.

Furthermore, the Council of the European Union adopted in 2008 its Conclusions on Eliminating Gender Stereotypes in Society, where it highlights the responsibility of media in reproducing culturally transmitted stereotypes. According to the Council, gender stereotyping, perpetuated, amongst others, by advertising, is the most persistent cause of inequality between men and women.

EACA position

We are committed to training and education of our members to the sensitivities of gender portrayal. Effective self-regulation, addressing and tackling irresponsible gender mainstreaming in media and advertising, is in place across all EU Member States.

EACA is part of EASA – the European Advertising Standards Alliance. EASA is network of 54 organisations committed to effective advertising standards in Europe and beyond. EASA's membership is made up of national ad standards organisations as well as representatives from across the advertising ecosystem (advertisers, agencies and the media).

The self-regulatory network acknowledges the role that the ad industry has to play in ensuring that women and men are portrayed responsibly in advertising. At national level this is achieved through:
- o Robust self-regulatory codes that address discrimination in all its forms;
- o Impartial self-regulatory organisations that handle complaints from citizens;
- o Media literacy programmes created by the ad industry;

EACA position
EACA has also developed a statement on gender which contains principles to responsible advertising with regards to gender portrayal and to which EACA members have subscribed.

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