Gender portrayal and stereotyping

Background

Gender portrayal in advertising is a recurring issue on the European political agenda. Together with other media, advertising has the capacity to shape social norms and people's values, attitudes and perceptions. Because of its potential societal effects, the significance of gender portrayal and stereotyping in advertising should not be underestimated. In the absence of direct legislation at the EU level, the advertising industry has the responsibility to ensure a balanced depiction of women and men.

EACA position

Self-regulation

EACA believes that the advertising industry has a crucial role in portraying both women and men positively and responsibly. EACA regards the self-regulatory approach in addressing gender portrayal and stereotyping in advertising as the best way to achieve this aim. Different codes of advertising practice, addressing and tackling irresponsible gender mainstreaming in media and advertising, are already in place across the countries of all of our European members.

Building on the national codes, the EACA members have released a statement on gender portrayal. It makes clear our members' commitment to strive to uphold the highest ethical standards in the commercial communications developed on behalf of their clients.

In addition, EACA is committed to further training and educating our members to the sensitivities of gender portrayal. As an example of our work, in 2017, EACA's education body organised the annual 'Ad Venture' competition with gender equality as its main theme. The participating student groups had the task of preparing advertising campaigns for the European Women's Lobby. The campaigns were designed to support the client's long-term goal of achieving gender equality and realising women's human rights by informing people and mobilising them to engage with women's organisations.

European Advertising Standards Alliance

EACA is also part of EASA – the European Advertising Standards Alliance – which is a network of 41 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). Similarly to EACA, the portrayal of gender forms of one EASA's priorities, which it works on at the national level through:

- Robust self-regulatory codes that address discrimination in all its forms;
- Impartial self-regulatory organisations that handle complaints from citizens;
- Media literacy programmes created by the ad industry;

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According to EASA's annual report of the complaints received from citizens in 2016, the European advertising self-regulatory organisations received altogether 5,775 complaints related to gender stereotyping. This is down from 7,850 in 2012.

Remaining challenges

However, as the European Parliament's study on 'Gender Equality in the Media Sector' published in January 2018 shows, there is still work to be done. Some of the findings of the study are:

- Women were four times more likely than men not to have a speaking role in advertisements
- In an analysis of English-speaking advertisements 2006-2016, women had consistently made up only around one-third of all characters featured
- Men had around four times as much screen time as women and around seven times as much speaking time

For these reasons, EACA continues to work towards improving the situation of gender equality in advertising across Europe. EACA seeks to ensure that a solid standard is applied throughout our member countries in line with EU-level resolutions, recommendations of the Council of Europe and international declarations.

About EACA

The European Association of Communications Agencies (EACA) represents more than 2 500 communications agencies and agency associations from nearly 30 European countries that directly employ more than 120 000 people. EACA members include advertising, media, digital, branding and PR agencies. They create and place adverts and develop brand-building campaigns.

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