

## Comment: New CAP regulation on gender stereotypes in advertising and its effect on the creative industries

On Friday, 14 December 2018, several UK news outlets proclaimed a ban on gender stereotypes in UK advertising. The media echo was sparked by the release of the national industry watchdog's newest regulation.

The regulation has been long awaited and is, in my opinion, a welcomed move on the part of The Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) and The Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP). This is only the latest step in a development that has been ongoing for the better half of a decade. Unlike what is stated in the new *Regulatory Statement: Gender stereotypes in advertising*, this discussion predates the Advertising Standards Authority's (ASA) report on *Depictions, Perceptions and Harm* from 2017, dating back to 2012 (and even further than that), when the ASA conducted research into harm and offence in UK advertising and identified gender stereotyping as one of the main issues of concern.

The regulation should be welcomed, as research has shown repeatedly that the media, and with them advertising in its omnipresence within modern societies, are one of the most influential socialisation agents in a person's life. This is something that CAP and BCAP have reaffirmed and responded to with their newest regulatory statement. For this alone, the statement should be commended.

Looking at the new regulation, however, it might fall short of what would be ideal from a sociopsychological point of view in respect of audience welfare and what has been stipulated by the ASA's 2017 report itself – that is, the need for a tougher stance regarding gender stereotypes in advertising. Whilst I agree that advertisers cannot and should not be forced to solely rely upon positive, progressive gender depictions within their creative communications, the now published statement indirectly admits that the regulation does not go as far as might be necessary and desirable, but instead is a compromise between the audiences' welfare and industry interests.

Consequently, the new regulation itself features what appears to be a rather high threshold for advertising to be governed, requiring gender stereotypes to '*likely (...) cause harm, or serious or widespread offence*'. It will have to be seen, how the ASA is going to interpret and apply this high impact terminology; something, CAP and BCAP somewhat acknowledge, by installing a review process of the new regulation within 12 months after it has taken effect in June 2019.

Until then, the impact on the industry will unlikely be as big as the news media make it seem. Looking at the current advertising landscape within the UK, the kind of depictions infringing upon the new regulation are not the norm – which is a positive. However, gender depictions that fall into the realm of negativity but are not clear cut negative – and those can be found in UK advertising –, might still not be stopped even after the new regulation takes effect. It is likely, that the regulation does not go far enough to truly disrupt gender stereotyping. It will have to be seen how the new regulations are enforced and whether additional aspects of inequality in advertising depictions will also be followed up by CAP and BCAP, such as ageism, to truly shake up the advertising landscape with regard to harmful stereotypes.

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