



Are you sick of lazy stereotypes?



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We know why adverts use such a swathe of stereotypes, they have a short amount of time to get their message across and by using outdated tropes they are able to quickly get across a scenario but, its increasingly apparent that these stereotypes are helping to maintain outdated and in some cases offensive ideas about who we are.

I am the mum of twin girls, both my girls have short hair, play a lot of sport and would happily kick around in football strips all day if they could. As such people have regularly mistaken them for boys due to the desperately outdated gender stereotypes we have all had ingrained in us from an early age. As you can imagine the subject of gender stereotyping is something I feel quite passionate about and so I have found the recent rulings by the ASA and the swell of opinion around this really interesting. I have been reading up to find out what these rules are, why they are in place and what does it mean for the industry.

The new rule that came in to force in June this year states that 'marketing communication must not include gender stereotypes that are likely to cause harm or serious or widespread offence'. It's arguable that all stereotypes could be harmful. I am sure that everyone will have a different opinion on what they would picture this to be but for me, the traditional roles of men and women are completely outdated and I find it offensive that brands would assume that this is still the right way to communicate with consumers.

2 ads have been banned so far, one from VW and one from Philadelphia. The Philadelphia ad showed 2 men who were so amazed by the taste of the cream cheese that they momentarily forgot that they were supposed to be looking after their kids. The ASA ruled that this enforced the idea that men are ineffective caregivers. Mondelez said that they decided to use men in the ad rather than women to avoid depicting the stereotypical image of women looking after kids. The VW ad showed men engaging in adventurous activities and then a woman with a pram. The ASA ruled that 'the ad presented gender stereotypes in a way that was likely to cause harm'. VW responded by saying that the ad focused on learning to adapt and caring for a newborn was a life-changing experience regardless of the parent depicted – so why chose to depict a mum rather than a dad and who not balance this out a bit by looking at the other characters in the ad? It's great that brands are starting to think about these things but just doing the basics of using a man rather than a woman does mean that you have addressed all elements of the issue.

I have been reading a lot of opinion pieces on this and I loved a question in one by Ellen Hammett in Marketing Week asking if advertising should reflect culture or try to lead it. Great question but surely if we as an industry can do something to contribute towards a more inclusive and understanding society then we should, rather than going along with behaviour that keeps peoples stereotypical assumptions of others in the dark ages. Some advertisers have already embraced this with consideration and positivity.

What does this mean for brands – it just means they have to think about the depictions of all parties in their ads and the impact of those depictions on not only the people viewing them but also the impact on their own brand. Strive for change and inclusivity and surely this will help future-proof your brand. It seems to me that this could encourage creativity rather than capping it by having the option to stick to stereotypical imagery.

CULTURE EDINBURGH OPINION