GUIDELINES ON HARMFUL GENDER STEREOTYPES

Preamble:

The guidelines on harmful stereotyping follow the release of ASCI's study GenderNext, conducted along with Futurebrands in October 2021. The study examined the depiction of women in advertising and identified several stereotypes and tropes. While the report encourages advertisers and creators to demonstrate more progressive roles based on the insights revealed, it also identified some stereotypical depictions that could negatively reinforce how people think they should look and behave, and how others think they should look and behave, based on their gender. This can have negative consequences for individuals and for society as a whole, and over a period of time. As society progresses and evolves, norms on what is acceptable to consumers and other stakeholders also evolve. While harmful stereotypes are not only present in advertising, and advertising is not the only factor that reinforces these stereotypes, it is important for advertising to play its rightful role and not contribute to the perpetuation of such stereotypes.

As the gender landscape is a complex issue, the following guidelines provide a specific interpretation of ASCI Chapter III (against harmful situations) as it relates to harmful gender stereotyping. While the guidelines lay down the boundaries of what is unacceptable, advertisers and creators are encouraged to be inspired by the spirit of the GenderNext report and deploy the SEA framework and the 3S checklist to create more progressive gender depictions when it comes to the depiction of women. (https://ascionline.in/gendernextreport/index.html)

Guidelines

Note:

1. ASCI will consider an ad's likely impact when taken as a whole, and in context

2. ASCI will consider stereotypes from the perspective of the group of individuals being stereotyped.

3. The use of humour or banter is not likely to overcome the underlying issue of such harmful stereotypes.

4. The guidelines do not intend to prevent ads from featuring:

    a. glamorous, attractive, successful, aspirational or healthy people or lifestyles;

    b. one gender only, including in advertisements for products developed for and aimed at a particular gender;

    c. gender stereotypes as a means to challenge their harmful effects.

Advertisements must not include gender stereotypes that are likely to cause harm or serious or widespread offence.

1. While advertisements may feature people undertaking gender-stereotypical roles e.g., a woman cleaning the house or a man going to an office, or displaying gender-stereotypical characteristics e.g., a man being assertive or a woman being sensitive to others' needs, they must not suggest that stereotypical roles or characteristics are:

    - always uniquely associated with a particular gender

    - the only options available to a particular gender

    - never carried out, or displayed by, another gender(s).

    1.1 Advertisements that are aimed at or depict children may target and feature a specific gender, but should not convey that a particular children's product, pursuit, behaviour, or activity, including choice of play or career, is inappropriate for one or another gender(s). For example, ads suggesting that a boy's stereotypical personality should be "daring" or that a girl's stereotypical personality should be "caring", or someone chiding a boy playing with dolls or girls from jumping around, because it is not the typical activity associated with the gender, are likely to be problematic.

2. While advertisements may feature glamorous and attractive people, they must not suggest that an individual's happiness or emotional wellbeing depends on conforming to these idealised gender-stereotypical body shapes or physical features.

3. Advertisements should not mock people for not conforming to gender stereotypes, their sexual orientation or gender identity, including in a context that is intended to be humorous, hyperbolic or exaggerated. For example, an ad may not belittle a man for carrying out stereotypically female roles or tasks or make fun of a same-sex relationship.

4. Advertisements should not reinforce unrealistic and undesirable gender ideals or expectations. For example, an advertisement must not depict a man with his feet up and family members creating a mess around a home, while a woman is solely responsible for cleaning up the mess, or a woman overly grateful for the man helping her in everyday chores. Similarly, a woman returning from work may not be shown as solely responsible for doing household duties, while others around her are at leisure.

5. An advertisement may not suggest that a person fails to achieve a task specifically because of their gender e.g., a man's inability to change nappies; or a woman's inability to park a car. In categories that usually target a particular gender, care must be taken to not depict condescension towards any other gender, or show them as incapable of understanding the product or unable to make decisions. This does not prevent the advertisement from showing these stereotypes as a means to challenge them.

6. Where an advertisement features a person with a physique or physical characteristics that do not match an ideal stereotype associated with their gender, the advertisement should not imply that their physique or physical characteristics are a significant reason for them not being successful, for example, in their romantic, social or professional lives. For example, an ad may not suggest that a man who is short, a woman who is dark, or any individual who is overweight has difficulty finding a job or a partner due to this aspect of their physique.

7. Advertisements should not indulge in the sexual objectification of characters of any gender or depict people in a sexualised and objectified way for the purposes of titillating viewers. This would include the use of language or visual treatments in contexts wholly irrelevant to the product. For example, an online takeaway service featuring an image of a woman wearing lingerie lying back in a provocative pose behind various fast-food items would be considered problematic. Even though the image may not be sexually explicit, by using a suggestive image of a woman that bears no relevance to the advertised product, the ad would be considered objectifying women by presenting them as sexual objects, and therefore is a gender stereotype that is likely to cause harm.

8. No gender should be encouraged to exert domination or authority over the other(s) by means of overt or implied threats, actual force, or through the use of demeaning language or tone. Advertisements cannot provoke or trivialise violence (physical or emotional), unlawful or anti-social behaviour based on gender. Additionally, advertisements should not encourage or normalise voyeurism, eve-teasing, stalking, emotional or physical harassment or any similar offences. This does not prevent the advertisement from showing these depictions as a means to challenge them.

Chairman
Board of Governors, ASCI
June 8th, 2022