Diversity and Inclusion in Advertising

Introduction

The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the world business organization, has a long history of setting standards for business and promoting responsible marketing and advertising. In this regard, the Global ICC Marketing and Advertising Commission establishes global best practices through its ICC Advertising and Marketing Communications Code (ICC Code), which is used as a foundation for locally applied self-regulation.

Effective self-regulation builds trust with consumers by ensuring advertising that is honest, legal, decent and truthful, and providing quick and easy redress when transgressions occur. Responsible marketers and advertisers take care in developing their advertising and marketing messages to reinforce consumer trust and confidence in their brands and products. For this reason, they have upheld through the ICC code that marketing communications should respect human dignity and should not incite nor condone any form of discrimination, including that based upon ethnic or national origin, religion, gender, age, disability or sexual orientation. This sense of responsibility extends in the current context particularly to the importance of diversity[1] and inclusion[2] in marketing and advertising communications – which should reflect the diversity of consumers (across the marketing ecosystem and value chain), recognising that they are at the heart of marketing.

This document provides an overview of generally related current ICC provisions and self-regulatory rules as well as recommended industry best practices and initiatives that would apply to diversity and inclusion matters in marketing communications and advertising. It is intended to

---

[1] **Diversity** refers to the practice or quality of including or involving people from a range of different social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations, etc. (Oxford).

[2] **Inclusion** refers to the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those who have physical or mental disabilities and members of other minority groups (Oxford).

raise greater awareness and responsibility of this issue as well as an indication of the related best practices that will be considered in the forthcoming review of the ICC code.

In view of the relevance of diversity and inclusion across all spectrums of society and business operations, it is important that marketers take due consideration to ensure that their marketing and advertising communications do not incite or condone any form of discrimination. Marketers can benefit from industry best practice and guidance in this area to ensure that broader social responsibility considerations are taken into account in their advertising and marketing communications.

In marketing communications, this relates to the representation and messaging used in relation to diversity and inclusion, with the onus of ensuring that discrimination and stereotyping are avoided in such areas as already set out in the ICC code such as ethnic or national origins, religion, gender, age, disability or sexual orientation as well as social background, which would impair social responsibility in this area. As indicated below, many national SR codes have expanded the non-discrimination in this area to also include beliefs, marital status, stereotyping and objectification. Below are some of the key reference points for industry best practice, guidance and initiatives addressing this area.

ICC Code guidance

The ICC Code addresses social responsibility and the general concept of non-discrimination with over-arching guidance as indicated below:

"Article 2"
Marketing communications should respect human dignity and should not incite or condone any form of discrimination, including that based upon ethnic or national origin, religion, gender, age, disability or sexual orientation."

Self-regulation

ICC's general principle of non-discrimination is integrated into national advertising self-regulatory codes across the world. Advertising Self-Regulatory Organisations (SROs) that are part of the European Advertising Standards Alliance (EASA) or the International Council for Advertising Self-Regulation (ICAS) have either specific self-regulatory rules or standards related to gender depiction integrated in their general codes, or these issues are addressed in a separate code. In addition to the general principle of non-discrimination, a large majority of SROs around the globe have specific standards in place to address particular forms of discrimination related to race/ethnicity, nationality, age, religion and beliefs, disability, sexual orientation, marital status, stereotyping and objectification.[3] Beyond enforcement of the rules, SROs provide training and advice to help ensure compliance.

---

[3] See also: ICAS Report on Advertising Standards and Practices on Non-Discrimination

Consumer complaints handled by SROs relate to issues around discrimination (whether gender-related or not), general offensive content (dependent on local sensitivities), sexualisation, objectification, portrayal of the human body, violent content, and stereotyping. In Europe, in 2021, complaints on social responsibility and taste and decency issues reflect that 19% are gender-related, with another 21% relating to non-gender related discrimination[4].

Industry Initiatives

There are a number of existing industry initiatives that address diversity and inclusion, a few of which are highlighted below:

World Federation of Advertisers (WFA)

- **Guide to progressive gender portrayals in Advertising**

This guide aims to illustrate how the advertising industry needs to move with the times in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, ability, sexuality, gender identify and age portrayals in advertising. It details how brands can combat harmful gender stereotypes in their creative.

- **A Marketer's approach to diversity and inclusion**

This guide builds on the work of the 'Guide to progressive gender portrayals in advertising' and encourages thinking beyond gender to encapsulate all forms of diversity. It showcases some outstanding examples of work, as well as offering practical advice on how diversity can be channelled both across the creative ambit and within companies.

- **Guide to potential areas for bias in the creative process (Diversity and Representation)**

This framework highlights 12 key areas where bias can occur, aiming to provide brands and their agencies with practical guidance that helps them avoid such pitfalls and ensure that content is as representative and inclusive as possible.

- **WFA DEI Census**

In 2021, WFA launched the first census looking at DEI in the marketing industry, building on insights from 10,000 in-depth interviews with advertising and marketing professionals in 27 markets. It provides detailed insight into how the global industry is performing on a wide range of metrics and covers all protected characteristics – race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, gender identity or expression, family status or disability – as well as positions, salary and lived experiences in the workplace. WFA will conduct a new DEI census in 2023.

United Nations (UN)

- **UNSTEREOTYPE Alliance**

---

[4] 2021 European Trends in Advertising Complaints, Copy Advice and Pre-clearance

Recognising the power of partnerships to accelerate progress, this industry-led initiative convened by UN Women unites advertising industry leaders, decision-makers, and creatives to end harmful stereotypes in advertising.

- **UNICEF playbook on Promoting diversity and inclusion in advertising (October 2021)**

The Playbook was developed in collaboration with LEGO Group and provides tools for businesses to create guidelines and strategies, along with a multitude of examples of companies that demonstrate diversity and inclusion in their creative content and products for children.

Marketers need to be aware of existing rules and new concepts to enhance their responsibility commitments and demonstrate best practice. This will equally enhance consumer trust in marketing communications **and demonstrate the ability of the industry to be proactively responsible.** This note thus sets out to provide current guidance and industry best practice aspirations. In the next revision of the ICC Code, this issue will be carefully considered, and where appropriate, provide specific guidance.