[GB] ASA Adjudication on Channel Four Television Corporation's Posters Advertising a Documentary

IRIS 2012-10:1/15

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On 3 October 2012, the UK's Advertising Standard Authority (ASA) ruled against Channel Four Television for its posters advertising its documentary based on the film My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding.

The posters featured the words "Bigger. Fatter. Gypsier" over an image of a young boy looking directly at the camera and others of two teenagers wearing low-cut bra tops and three young girls dressed for their first Holy Communion standing in front of a caravan.

The ASA, on advice from the Equality and Human Rights Commission reviewed the matter in light of the provisions of the UK Code of Non-broadcast Advertising, Sales Promotion and Direct Marketing (CAP Co Edition 12), specifically Clauses 1.3 (Marketing communications must be prepared with a sense of responsibility to consumers and to society); 4.1 (Marketing communications must not contain anything that is likely to cause serious or widespread offence. Particular care must be taken to avoid causing offence on the grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability or age. Compliance will be judged on the context, medium, audience, product and prevailing standards. Marketing communications may be distasteful without necessarily breaching this rule. Marketers are urged to consider public sensitivities before using potentially offensive material. The fact that a product is offensive to some people is not grounds for finding a marketing communication in breach of the Code.); 5.1 (Marketing communications addressed to, targeted directly at or featuring children must contain nothing that is likely to result in their physical, mental or moral harm) and 6.1 (Marketers must not unfairly portray or refer to anyone in an adverse or offensive way unless that person has given the marketer written permission to allow it.)

ASA decided that:

- the advertisements featuring the young boy and the low-cut top-wearing teenagers could enforce prejudicial views against the gypsy and traveller community

- the ads were likely to cause serious offence to some members

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- Channel 4 acted irresponsibly by depicting a child - one of the two young teenagers pictured in low-cut tops - in a sexualised way

- two other adverts showing a man leading a horse across a field with caravans in the background and the three young girls dressed for Holy Communion did not breach the advertising code.

The decision was to take no further action in relation to the ad showing a man leading a horse across a field with caravans visible in the background and the ad showing three young girls dressed for their first Holy Communion standing in front of a caravan.

However two ads were ordered not to be shown again: one, featuring a close-up of a young boy looking directly at the camera and the other showing two young women wearing low-cut bra tops.

There are two rather unusual aspects of this adjudication by the Advertising Standards Authority. First, it does not concern programme content as such, but four poster advertisements for the (documentary) programme. Second, the ASA Executive assessed the ads in February 2012 and recommended to the Council (which agreed with the Executive) that the complaints did not warrant investigation. However, the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain and eight co-complainants sought an Independent Review of Council's decision. The case was re-opened and investigated.

ASA Adjudication, A12-197451, 3 October 2012

http://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2012/10/Channel-Four-Television-Corporation/SHP_ADJ_197451.aspx

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