[IE] Advertising Standards Authority upholds complaints against Sprite advert as being “exploitative of sexuality” and “causing grave offence”

IRIS 2017-1:1/21

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The Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland (ASAI) has upheld a number of complaints regarding an advertisement that was part of (Coca Cola) Sprite’s “#BrutallyRefreshing” campaign. The advert appeared on two Irish websites, Joe.ie, a men’s lifestyle website, and WaterfordWhispers, a popular Irish satirical news website.

The ASAI received ten complaints in relation to the campaign. The advert featured bottles of Sprite Zero and regular Sprite alongside the following captions; “she’s seen more ceilings… than Michelangelo” “you’re not popular…you’re easy” “a 2 at 10 is a 10 at 2”. All of the complainants considered the advertising to be “sexist, degrading to women, offensive and insulting” with several of the complainants deeming the advertisement “misogynistic.” In response to the complaint, Coca Cola stated that they strived to “deliver the highest standards of advertising” and acknowledged that “on this occasion the content had not met with their or their consumers’ expectations.” The advertiser asserted that when they became aware that their advertising was “causing concern, they immediately had it removed and issued a public apology for any offence caused.”

The ASAI Complaints Committee considered the details of the complaints and Coca Cola’s response, including their withdrawal of the advert and issuing of a public apology. The Complaints Committee observed that Rule 3.16 of the ASAI Code acknowledged that “humour is acceptable in advertising”. However, that rule also states that “the portrayal of people should not be likely to cause grave or widespread offence or to cause hostility, contempt, abuse or ridicule”. The Committee further noted the obligation in Rule 3.20 of the Code for advertisers to “avoid the exploitation of sexuality and the use of coarseness and undesirable innuendo” and that “offensive or provocative copy or images should not be used merely to attract attention.” In finding that the advertising had “caused grave offence, had been exploitative of sexuality and had used coarse and undesirable innuendo”, and had also “used offence and provocative copy”, the Complaints Committee considered the advertising to be in breach of the Code.

The ASAI however found that as the advertisement had been withdrawn, no further action was required in this case.

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Advertising Authority of Ireland, Complaints Bulletin 16/6, Reference 26575, 3 November 2016

http://www.asai.ie/complaint/beverages-4/

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