[IE] Advertising Authority decision on sports star appearance in alcohol advertisement

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On 30 November 2016, the Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland (ASAI) issued its decision concerning a television alcohol advertisement featuring a mixed martial arts (MMA) star. The decision sets out the ASAI's approach to determining whether a sports star may be considered to have "hero/heroine of the young status".

The advertisement for Budweiser beer featured MMA champion Conor McGregor, walking through a Dublin housing estate, with a voice over "Dream as big as you dare", and accompanied by the Budweiser logo. The advertisement included the text "Dream Big - Enter at BudDreamBig.ie, ROI Residents 18+, Get the facts. Be Drink Aware, Visit drinkaware.ie".

A complaint was made under the ASAI Code of Standards for Advertising and Marketing Communications in Ireland, in particular Section 9.7, which states that "Marketing communications should not be directed at children or in any way encourage them to start drinking", and 9.7(c) which provides that marketing communications should not use or refer to identifiable heroes or heroines of the young. The complainant argued that it is "inappropriate to link Conor McGregor, who they considered to be a role model/hero for many young children, especially boys, to advertising for an alcohol product alongside the invitation to enter a competition and "Dream Big".

The ASAI's Complaints Committee decided to uphold the complaint. First, the Committee noted that the advertiser (Diageo/Budweiser) provided details of McGregor's profile on Facebook, Twitter and the television viewing figures. The advertiser argued that this data demonstrated a profile with an "overwhelming adult focus". However, the Committee held that "while social media metrics may have relevance, they could only be considered as indicators of a person's popularity and were not a definitive measure in determining hero/heroine of the young status". Second, the Committee considered that the achievement of a highly publicised sporting title (i.e. becoming a world champion) would increase an individual sportsperson's profile to a very significant level, and that "in such circumstances, it was highly likely that the subsequent fame attaching to such a sporting personality would result in him or her becoming a hero of the young". In this regard, the Committee held that "Conor McGregor had become a World Champion and in conjunction with his steadily increasing following from an under-

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18 audience, they concluded that, when the advertising ran, he had become a hero of the young". Thus, the Committee concluded that the advertisement breached section 9.7(c) of the Code of Standards for Advertising and Marketing Communications in Ireland.

Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland, Complaints Bulletin 16/6, Complaint reference 25831, 30 November 2016

http://www.asai.ie/complaint/alcohol-13/

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