WHAT'S HOT

January 2020

BEYOND STEREOTYPES: FROM REGULATION TO REPRESENTATION

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has this month banned two ads according to gender stereotyping rules introduced last year. The ads have been banned by the ASA following complaints that they perpetuate gender stereotypes.

An outdoor ad for People Per Hour, a freelancer finding service, was criticised for demeaning women with the copy "You do the girl boss thing, we'll do the SEO thing". Meanwhile a TV ad for computer firm PC Specialist featuring solely men was banned for perpetuating stereotypes that only men are interested in technology.

People Per Hour later apologised, swiftly removing the word "girl" from their ad, while PC Specialist countered that their ad was reflecting their 87.5% male customer base, albeit to no avail.

These advertisers join Volkswagen and Philadelphia as those that have fallen foul of the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) code that came into force on 14th June 2019. The code states that ads "must not include gender stereotypes that are likely to cause harm, or serious or widespread offence".

There is no doubt that the copy displayed in these ads feels archaic and lazy, and for examples such as this the rulings are clear cut.

However, the principle of banning ads for how they represent people comes with much debate – some claim regulation has gone too far, while others warn that it fails to account for the humour or nuance that often makes advertising feel so relevant.

The real problem is that regulation comes so late in the creative process; it is too late to ban an advert once live. Instead, agencies and advertisers should be eradicating gender stereotypes and unconscious bias earlier in the process.

Advertisers like Diageo are setting an example to address the challenge throughout the business. In 2019 they introduced a framework to avoid unconscious bias around gender. In the US, the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) introduced a new Gender Equality Measure (GEM) providing a measurement similar to the film industry's "Bechdel test" to identify unconscious bias in creative testing and advertising upfront, with a clear link to effectiveness.

Beyond the immediate implications for creative agencies this debate raises a wider challenge – how do we move beyond stereotypes to represent society for the masses, at the same time acknowledging the individual?

For media agencies, this is increasingly pertinent. In a world where we collect and analyse more signals of audience behaviours than ever before, our ability to understand and group audiences is challenged.

All too often we seek to define our audience by simplified pen portraits. While these are mere snapshots designed to bring data to life in more emotive and compelling ways, they often ignore the nuances that can really help to connect brands to their audience. Instead we should be looking for what unites audiences as well as what divides them.

TAKING THE BISCUIT: ONLINE ADVERTISING IN A WORLD WITHOUT COOKIES

Next month, it has been announced, a Chrome browser update will increase the security of cross-domain cookies.

While this is a huge announcement it itself, it represents just the beginning of the war on third-party cookies, with Google revealing plans to completely block them within the next two years.

The update, expected on 4th February, is changing how cookies are handled in Chrome; as it is the UK's most-used browser, we should expect all others to follow suit in the coming months. Firefox and Edge have already confirmed they are updating.

The changes are specifically being made to same-site cookies, commonly used to keep people logged into individual websites, and remember their preferences, as well as supporting ad tracking, attribution and site analytics.

After the security change, these same-site cookies will require proper labelling in order to avoid disruption to site or ads functionality. For example, certain audience measurement or attribution may not work properly.

Beyond tightening the security of cookies, the ad industry is facing major changes in tracking and targeting capabilities. The industry has already lost about 30-40% of the information concerning marketing performance, user behaviour and targeting visibility following the Safari and Firefox cookie blocking updates.

Google's plans to tighten security on Chrome suggests this could go up to 100%.

In the next two years we can expect to see multiple rounds of testing and enhancements by all major browsers, as well as the emergence of new tactics – and even dedicated firms – focused on cookie-less tracking and targeting.

Google assert that their aim is to make the web more private and secure for users, while also supporting publishers. They are currently testing out a new initiative called Privacy Sandbox to "sustain a healthy, ad-supported web in a way that will render third-party cookies obsolete". They have suggested that "once these approaches have addressed the needs of users, publishers, and advertisers, and have developed the tools to mitigate workarounds, [they] plan to phase out support for third-party cookies in Chrome."

If their trials are successful and the ad industry manages to pull itself together and adapt to the changes, we expect to say goodbye to third-party cookies and hello to a user-choice-friendly privacy-focussed transparent web ad ecosystem.

FROM TRANSPARENCY TO NEUTRALITY

The media agency world, and its relationship with its advertiser clients is in a far better place than it was before the issue of transparency burst upon the scene back in 2015.

But – and it's a very big but – here at the7stars we do not think it is good enough to believe that the transparency question is answered by sticking religiously to a clause in a contract. Within the media world, 'transparent' is a word whose meaning has shrunk.

We believe there is another layer to transparency – not just in the buying process but in everything that leads up to the buy. We believe in the principle of clarity, in providing impartial advice across everything we do in planning, buying and evaluating campaigns on behalf of our clients. We call this 'neutrality'.

This month we released our white paper, "From Transparency to Neutrality: From Single to Double-Glazing. Why Transparency in Media Dealing Isn't Clear". You can read the full version here.

We believe that transparency (as often defined) is over-rated, and that clients deserve more. They have every right to expect agencies to be neutral in everything we do.

The art of planning should come from a neutral perspective with no preconceived rules as to which media channel will do the best job or how best to use it, and channel selection based on what will deliver the brief in the most effective way.

Neutrality equally runs through the decision-making process when it comes to partnering with specialist services such as research, data analytics, technology and tools. Our first question when approached by any vendor is 'what will this do for my clients?'.

We use tools and techniques that meet our requirements of true objectivity and usability. Maintaining a neutral position throughout the process is the only way to ensure true transparency and deliver the best results.

Finally, we apply this thinking to how we evaluate results. Working with PwC we will be launching a new auditing framework built around evidencing effective neutral planning, to be released in March 2020.

Neutrality is true, double-glazed transparency. Every client has every right to expect it from their appointed media agency.

The topic of transparency and neutrality will no doubt continue to evolve as advertisers become attune to its importance, especially when it comes to effectiveness of their media campaigns, and overall business success. At the7stars we will continue to talk about its benefits and the important role it plays in our industry's future long-term success.

IS TIKTOK THE NEXT INSTAGRAM?

TikTok was arguably the break out success of 2019. Following its acquisition of musical.ly in August 2018, its user figures rose rapidly over the following 12 months. It has quickly become a social media sensation – with recent highlights ranging from Courtney Cox dancing with her daughter, to Australian firefighters posting clips to 'raise spirits'.

What started as a relatively obscure app now harnesses the attention of a huge audience, having exceeded 1.5 billion downloaded by February 2019 – and it's largely made up of those under the age of 30. Many argue that brands wanting to attract this audience cannot afford to ignore the huge potential of the platform.

In recent years conversations around influencer content have predominantly focused on Instagram. And it keeps growing – last year, the Facebook-owned platform accounted for roughly 32% of the group's advertising revenue.

Many of us turn to Instagram to discover new products and with Instagram Shopping, launched last year, brands are now able to sell products directly through posts and stories.

But with TikTok's rise, the sphere of influence could be about to change. For Gen Z – a generation which has grown up around screens – the immediacy of TikTok is particularly appealing.

Precisely because TikTok does not demand the same kind of polish that is now expected on Instagram – MarketWatch recently called it the "anti-Instagram" – content, challenges, and memes shared via the app often spread quickly.

TikTok is also arguably more democratised than Instagram; rather than promoting content based on follower figures, videos are boosted according to audience engagement. Where many brands and advertisers have fallen into the trap of selecting Instagram influencers based on follower numbers, TikTok is set up in such a way that the very best content will become viral, no matter its origin.

A best-in-class examples is Nike's recent, hugely popular, TikTok campaign. They paired three Milan-based content creators – who had a combined audience of 11 million followers – with an elite athlete, then recorded a dance and set their followers a challenge to re-create it. This simple idea saw huge success; challenge content gained 100m+ views and 540k+ likes, while #basketbeat recorded 20m views in the first 36 hours.

Any brand would jump at the opportunity to emulate Nike's success – but with such rapid growth, there are concerns that problematic content will slip under the radar.

TikTok has recently partnered with the not-for-profit organisation Internet Matters to stress its commitment to internet safety. It is ultimately up to brands to decide whether they want to hold back on TikTok advertising – and potentially miss out on great advertising opportunities – or whether they dive straight in and risk appearing against dangerous content.

It is too soon to tell whether TikTok will become such a feature in our online lives to overtake Instagram's success, but advertisers should pay close attention to its growth (or, with the recent launch of close competitor Byte, maybe its eventual fall).

TRENDS BEYOND THE SPOTS & DOTS

Every year the content, partnerships and talent team at the7stars dust down their crystal ball, and look for big trends to expect in the year ahead. Last year they forecast step changes in transparency in influencer campaign measurement, the rise of self-care content and brand-ownership of the experiential space; all brand marketing trends that have seen a rise in coverage throughout 2019.

Here are the team's forecast for the coming year:

1: Content with Nostalgia: In times of change, nostalgia often rears its rose-tinted head. For content this means a resurgence of TV programming from our childhoods, the return of familiar faces, and even repeat airings of much-loved ads of the past. 2019 saw the return of Supermarket Sweep, sponsored by Tesco, and there are rumours of the return of further classic UK TV titles, such as GamesMaster. It's clearly time to unleash Ainsley Harriott and revive The Big Breakfast.

2: Share of Experience: Defined by Chief Experience Officer Fiona Blades as "the percentage of total brand experiences that a brand has in relation to the total market", SOE could be the solution to integrated measurement across even the most non-traditional channels. Encouraging a greater mix of POEM channels, SOE is capable of measuring the whole media plan, including experiential and AFP.

3: Talking to the Few: We've reached content saturation, and audiences increasingly expect content to be tailored to them. While it might feel counterproductive to conventional business principles to target fewer people, niche content will be pivotal in paving the way to building loyal customer bases for many companies. Brands should take the lead of Nike's relationship with talent Colin Kaepernick and Lego's opening a bricks-n-mortar school in Denmark.

4: From Influencer to Brand: It's not just Kylie Jenner who's realised that leveraging her social media following to build her own brand, rather than promote others, can be much more profitable in the long-term. This year expect to see fewer sponsored posts and publishing deals in favour of more influencer-owned start-ups.

5: Tackling TikTok: The social media landscape is continuously evolving, as are the trends and tastes of its users. As Gen Z start moving away from the mainstream influencer channels, we'll see more young influencers developing their presence on the platform, and existing influencers branching out. Now that the platform has launched its self-serve ad platform, we think a wider content opportunities on the platform will surface later in 2020.

6: 5G-Ready Content: 2020 is the year that the telcos push 5G to the masses, without without Huawei. This means faster, more reliable internet to mobile devices, with a massive boost to the internet of things (IoT), eventually making the smartphone the least interesting toy in our media armoury for content distribution. For partnerships, this means those big ideas will be boosted by a new ear of AR, gaming, wearables and autonomous tech. Look for a surge in voice in activated content and the ability to try on that ASOS bargain in the context of a mobile game.

7: From Another Dimension: It's not new, but advancements in the technoverse hail a whole new era of 3D. No longer the sole remit of big budget movies, media companies are building studio facilities to create in 3D. With 3D ads reportedly seeing a "300% increase in CTR, 46% increase in VCR", 3D-driven content won't be far behind.

IS 5G THE PLACE TO BE?

5G networks are the next generation of mobile internet, offering far faster speeds than available at present. It will also provide instant connection at 1 millisecond latency – forty times faster than 4G users currently experience.

Heading into the next decade, 5G hype has hit an all-time high. Barclays Corporate Banking estimates that the technology could add £15.7 billion per year to the UK's economy by 2025 and almost all sectors are predicting its potentially transformative impact.

Outside benefits to mobile users – which will in particular improve the load speed and user experience of high-quality video streams and VR tech – 5G is set to revolutionise the backend technology behind driverless cars, workplace IT, and many have even predicted that 5G will 'save the high street'. Indeed, according to Altus Group's annual Commercial Real Estate Innovation Report, 66% of retailers in Britain say they hope 5G technology will help them to get rid of cashiers.

5G certainly is big business. In 2018, the UK's biggest mobile operators spent almost £1.4 billion to secure spectrum, and this week saw the debate around Huawei's role in the UK's 5G infrastructure continue to cross borders with intense lobbying from both US and Chinese governments.

For advertisers, 5G's instant opportunities are clear: quicker delivery of more interactive and complex content to consumers. Expect discussions around Augmented, Virtual and Mixed Reality, especially in combination with out of home formats, to resurface at creative workshops in the next 12 months, with a far clearer route to execution powered by 5G technology.

Now for the reality check – 2020 will not be the year 5G crosses into the mainstream. Issues with limited coverage aside, the 5G launch may take place amid a global downturn in smartphone sales. Last year was the worst ever for smartphone sales, and the UK saw a 14% YoY decline in Q4, according to IDC data. Optimistic estimates by Deloitte put 2020 5G smartphone sales at 2-3 million – meaning that less than 5% of the UK population are likely to own a 5G handset by the end of the year.

Clearly first-mover opportunities for advertisers will surface this year. However, with or without Huawei's involvement, expect 5G's influence on advertising at scale to really kick in as we move into 2021 and beyond.

5G is one of our '7 Trends for 2020'. To read more about 5G and the other six download the full report at https://www.the7stars.co.uk/the-7-trends-in-2020

HOTLINE

THE STORIES THAT LIT UP OUR MEDIA WORLD THIS MONTH

The Telegraph Media Group will no longer follow the ABC circulation audit system. This move comes as their focus moves to digital, but many ad executives have met the announcement with concern. Paul Bainsfair, director of the Institute for Practitioners in Advertising said: "The IPA is extremely concerned by the news that The Telegraph is to pull out of ABC" considering that the system provides "trusted, independent and transparent data" for buyers.

A YouGov survey run in partnership with Adobe Analytics has shown that advertising on premium sites has higher engagement. The survey looked at sites including The New York Times and CNN and asked Americans aged 18-64 their thoughts on these sites in comparison to those built from user-generated content. Video ads received the highest rating across all the KPIs the survey examined, with news sites and magazines rated the lowest of the premium channels.

2.9 million tuned in to watch the first episode of the latest series of Love Island; a share of 13.3% of the total audience watching TV at that time. These numbers fall short of the 3.7 million viewers who tuned in for the 2019 launch show, seeing some suggest its success is fading.

The Stylist Group made a pre-tax loss of £8.8 million in the year ending 31st March 2019, it has been announced. This follows the closure of ShortList magazine in November 2018. ShortList remains online and focuses on product recommendations but The Stylist Group are focused on growing Stylist, their print magazine that launched in 2009 and has a circulation of 404,000. Stylist have also expanded into health and wellbeing, with the launch of fitness brand Stylist Strong.

BREXIT

BAFTA'S ECO DRESS CODE

MEGXIT

LOVE ISLAND

THIRD-PARTY COOKIES

CORONAVIRUS