

Q & As on Commercial Communications

1. Advertising and consumer behaviour

1.1 Are advertising restrictions really effective in tackling the excessive/harmful consumption of alcohol, particularly by children and adolescents?

- There is no reliable research which demonstrates a causal link between advertising and consumption. Without such demonstration, it is impossible to conclude legitimately that advertising induces specific behaviours.
- Existing bans on advertising in a number of countries have not proved to be effective. Bans did not result in a decrease of alcohol consumption.
- It is not advertising, but other factors which influence adolescent drinking patterns. In particular relations with parents and peers impact drinking by adolescents.

1.2 Can advertising restrictions really contribute to a healthier diet/lifestyle?

- As in the case of alcohol, scientific evidence shows that advertising of foods and beverages is not the determining explanation for the societal problem of overweight.
- Existing restrictions on food and beverage advertising have not contributed to the reduction of obesity rates among children.
- It is not advertising, but in particular socio-economic factors (level of education, social status, descent) together with a lack of physical activity, unhealthy dietary behaviour, genetic predisposition and psycho-social aspects which play a role in the development of overweight.

1.3 Is “green” qualitative product categorisation really suitable to promote environmentally-friendly choices to consumers?

- Every consumer must be provided with the information that enables him to make an environmentally-friendly purchase decision. This information must be given in the needed explanatory complexity and at the right place, i.e. where the consumer is able to estimate and to comprehend the given product details: in brochures and information boards at the point of sale or on producers`/vendors` websites.
- Obligatory information in media advertising (print and internet ads, TV-, radio or internet spots) for example any form of eye-catching symbols or written compulsory text messages, cannot be an option as they would endanger advertising revenues and therefore the ability of the media to provide high quality editorial content on topics like climate change and energy saving.

2. Advertising and media

2.1 What are the consequences for media of greater advertising restrictions?

- The existence of media plurality and independence relies on advertising revenues. Further advertising restrictions, particularly in the light of the economic crisis, will endanger the existence of independent media.
- Media are playing an important role in society, by informing consumers on all major health issues and society's problems.

3. Advertising and self-regulation

3.1 What are the advantages of self-regulation over statutory regulation?

- The advertising self-regulatory system provides a fast, free and independent complaint resolution service for consumers, freeing up time and resources for courts, without the use of taxpayer money.
- Self-regulatory rules are flexible, provide timely information about community concerns and do not require complex law changes when responding to current issues
- Self-regulation is easier to update to integrate technological advances and its implementation is far quicker.

3.2 Do systems for advertising self-regulation exist across Europe?

- Self-regulatory bodies for ensuring high advertising standards operate in 22 out of the 27 European Union Member States and cover 97% of the EU population.
- These are funded by the advertising industry and on the basis of codes applying to all forms of media provide pre-launch advice, ensure a one-stop shop to handle consumer/competitive complaints on advertising, have juries which independently deliberate on compliance and will request that ads in breach are modified or withdrawn.
- Coherence in the provision of effective self-regulation is provided via the application of best practice principles enshrined in EASA's Self-Regulation Charter which was the basis for the model of effective self-regulation identified in the EU Advertising Roundtable.