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### CSW 68 – Side-event “Catalysts for change: breaking down gender stereotypes in media and advertising”

Thank you for the invitation.

I want to start by taking you back 30 years. Ann Nicole Smith and Cindy Crawford, models many of you might not even know who are, did commercials for H&M, and it was a huge debate about gender-discriminatory advertising in Norway. The boards were actually so big, intrusive and visible, that cars crash because the board caught the car driver’s attention.

You may think I’m a bit out of date, talking about what happened 30 years ago. But Norway was one of the first countries in the world to introduce legislation, banning gender-discriminatory advertising. And from 2000 to 2010, I was the Consumer Ombud in Norway, and one of our tasks was to monitor the marketing regulation in Norway. As part of the story was that the companies, an H&M in particular, knew exactly how to stretch the limit. Even though the commercials exposed the female body, only very few were found to be in breach of the act. And the last ten years, only very few cases have been handled by the Consumer Authority, using this regulation as a legal basis.

Today, the trend in terms of stereotypes, prejudice towards one sex and pressure to have the perfect body, comes from influencers, and from social media. For instance, 75% of those between 15 and 18 has been exposed for commercials promoting weight loss products.

However, regulation still has an important role to play. I will also remind you that the women convention art 5, put an obligation of the parties *to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.*

So, in 2022 a new legislation was introduced, to tackle manipulation and retouching in commercials. It put an obligation on the advertiser and the person designing the advertisement to ensure that the advertisement in which the shape, size or skin of a body has been changed by retouching or other manipulation must be marked. The mark, or the label, must cover 7% of the size of the commercial. The idea is quite simple: Even though a commercial in its nature visualize a glorified world or person, the regulation will make consumers, especially children and young people, aware that the advertising does not show people as they look in reality. The aim is to reduce the use of idealized bodies that are retouched in advertising.

As far as I know, only very few countries have such a regulation. The Consumer authority has investigated several cases, but all of them has ended up in an amicable agreement.

In addition to this, we have marketing regulating of beauty products and beauty treatments. It covers different treatments, from fillers, teeth bleaching and botox, to cosmetic surgery, like implants and nose corrections. It falls under the law that it is illegal to promote unhealthy beauty ideas or undermine bad conscious. Furthermore, it is forbidden to use before and after pictures, and if an ad for beauty treatment, can not be combined with consumer credit. The equality ombud is not monitoring this law,

but I'm still certain that several of the billboards I saw on the way from Newark to Manhattan, would be illegal in Norway.

Finally, there is legislation aiming to protect children. A part of the legal assessment of the advertisement, it should be considered whether the advertisement uses means that affect social insecurity or contribute to physical pressure.

Finally, we have a self-regulatory body set up by the Advertisers Union and the Media Association. Influencers are the target group. They can't impose sanction, but the decisions are to a large extent accepted. They can also issue prior approval for a campaign. Some examples of products or treatments is nutrition products, makeup, and cosmetic treatment.

I'll stop there, but with a reminder. We are at the very start of the "wonderful" world of AI. What we see today in terms of manipulation and stereotypes, will be nothing compared to the harmful potential of AI. We must act now, we must regulate, but this is maybe a topic for the discussion.