

Ensuring sensitivity and honesty: ASCI introduces guidelines for advertisements for charitable causes

- ~ *Ads for charitable causes must avoid using images or themes that cause unjustified distress to consumers*
- ~ *Ads should not disrespect the dignity of those on whose behalf the appeal is being made*
- ~ *Crowdsourcing platforms must disclose fees charged by them for collecting donor funds*

Mumbai, July 20, 2023: The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) has introduced guidelines for advertisements for charitable causes.

In recent years, charities have been active advertisers, particularly on digital media, and especially for the purpose of seeking funds and crowdfunding on behalf of their beneficiaries who may not have an active social network to reach and tap donors. Charities, including crowdfunding platforms, provide this reach through sponsored ads and organic posts, which tap potential donors.

However, there have been some concerns about ads that create donor distress through the use of images that may be too graphic. While the intent of such posts is undoubtedly to nudge donors to contribute, such posts may cause undue distress to ordinary consumers who may be surfing through their news feeds. In addition, with crowdsourcing platforms, consumers may not know what amount, from their donation, goes to the beneficiary and what may be kept by the platforms for their administrative fees or charges.

The new guidelines reinforce the ASCI code; Chapter 1 requires ads to be honest and truthful and Chapter 2 requires them not to cause grave or widespread harm or offence. To be compliant, ads related to charitable causes must adhere to the following guidelines:

1. An advertisement for a charitable organisation or crowdsourcing platform for charity shall not overtly or pointedly suggest that anyone who doesn't support the charity fails in their responsibility or should feel ashamed.
2. Advertisements must not disrespect the dignity of those on whose behalf an appeal is being made, by any means, including showing graphic images of victims in distress, particularly children and minors. An advertiser must be able to produce evidence of express consent for the use of images of beneficiaries if asked to do so.
3. In digital advertising, any image that could cause unjustified distress to an ordinary consumer must be blurred and made visible only to those interested in knowing more.

4. When an appeal is made for a specific case or beneficiary, the ad must disclose if the funds could potentially be used for other purposes or other beneficiaries. Ads must not mislead consumers about where or to whom their donations are going.
5. If a crowdsourcing platform collects a percentage or fee for managing or raising donor funds, it must be made clear what such amounts are in the advertisement itself.

Talking about the new guidelines, **Manisha Kapoor, CEO and Secretary General, ASCI**, said: ASCI recognises that charities can have a challenging job explaining the nature of the important, and often sensitive work they do, and raise funds for beneficiaries in need. However, they must take care not to overstep the mark by misleading consumers or causing unjustified distress to those who may be merely surfing online. The guidelines strike a balance between allowing charities to do their important work, and at the same time, be fair to consumers who are viewers of such advertisements”.

For the complete guidelines, please visit the link: <https://www.ascionline.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Guidelines-for-Advertisements-for-Charitable-Causes.pdf>

About the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI)

The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), established in 1985, is committed to the cause of self-regulation in advertising, ensuring the protection of consumer interests. ASCI seeks to ensure that advertisements conform to its Code for Self-Regulation, which requires advertisements to be legal, decent, honest, and truthful and not hazardous or harmful while observing fairness in competition. ASCI looks into complaints across ALL MEDIA such as Print, TV, Radio, hoardings, SMS, Emailers, Internet/website, product packaging, brochures, promotional material and point of sale material etc. In January 2017, the Supreme Court of India in its judgement affirmed and recognised the self-regulatory mechanism as an effective pre-emptive step to statutory provisions in the sphere of advertising content regulation for television and radio in India. ASCI’s role has been acclaimed by various Government bodies including The Department of Consumer Affairs (DoCA), the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), the Ministry of AYUSH as well as the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB). MIB issued an advisory for a scroller providing ASCI’s WhatsApp for Business number 77100 12345, to be carried by all TV broadcasters for consumers to register their grievances against objectionable advertisements. On the international front, in 2023, ASCI CEO and Secretary General, Ms. Manisha Kapoor was re-elected as one of the four Vice-Presidents on the Executive Committee of the International Council on Ad Self-Regulation (ICAS). Among several awards bestowed by the European Advertising Standards Alliance (EASA), ASCI bagged a Gold Global Best Practice Award for the Mobile App “ASCI online” (2016), special recognition for its “Guidelines for Celebrities in Advertising”; at the first-ever ‘Global Awards for Effective Advertising Self-Regulation’ hosted by the ICAS (2019). In 2021, ASCI also won two ICAS awards, one for the ASCI scroll telecast across television in the ‘Best Awareness Raising Initiative’ and for its extensive digital suo-moto monitoring through the NAMS

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initiative, in the 'Special Category'. It also got a special mention in the 'Best Sectoral Initiative' category for its efforts and regulatory recognition of its Gaming Guidelines. ASCI received the ICAS Global "Inspiration Award" in April 2023 for successfully promoting ASCI as a thought leader and developing impactful engagement with various stakeholders.

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