HALF-YEARLY COMPLAINTS REPORT

April - September 2025

ABOUT THE ADVERTISING STANDARDS COUNCIL OF INDIA

Established in 1985, The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) is the self-regulatory body of the Indian advertising industry. ASCI resolves issues around

- Dishonest or misleading ads
- Indecent or offensive ads
- Harmful ads
- Ads that are unfair in competition.

ASCI looks at advertisements across all media types and formats such as TV, print, digital, outdoor, radio, point of sale, claims made on packaging and so on.

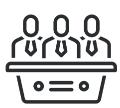
ASCI works closely with different stakeholders in the matter of consumer protection. ASCI's code is part of The Advertising Code enshrined within the Cable TV Networks (Regulation) Act, 1994, providing it with a legal backstop.

Complaints management

ASCI’s speedy, independent and low-cost complaint management approach ensures that both consumers and industry have the opportunity for a fair resolution.

All stakeholders can register their complaints at no cost via www.ascionline.in

ASCI's independent jury (The Consumer Complaints Council or CCC) comprises 40 eminent professionals, both from the industry as well as from civil society, who review complaints on a weekly basis and provide their recommendations



Three retired high court judges hear appeals from complainants or advertisers who may wish to contest a CCC recommendation

Eminent technical experts from over 20 fields support the CCC and the Review Panel

ASCI Academy

To support the industry get it right, the ASCI Academy builds the capacity of all stakeholders in creating responsible and progressive advertising. The Academy offers an array of services to raise standards of advertising through training, education, outreach, and thought leadership on the preventive aspects of advertising self-regulation.

- **E-learning Certification:** Get certified with our snappy e-learning courses that helps the industry stay abreast of the changing regulatory/self-regulatory landscape.
  - The ASCI Guide to Responsible Advertising is designed for the brand, marketing, regulatory compliance and creative teams
  - The ASCI Responsible Influencing Playbook is specifically tailored for influencers
- **ASCI Masterclass**, an on-campus or hybrid immersive workshop with in-depth case studies, group working sessions, role plays, quizzes and much more.
- **ASCI Advisory Service** Get your storyboards/ scripts assessed by an expert panel so you get your ad right rather than make expensive changes later.
- **Endorser Due Diligence** service to help endorsers meet their obligations not to make misleading claims and potentially violate the law.
- **Thought Leadership reports and White Papers** on topics impacting advertising and consumer protection to drive meaningful dialogue and provide actionable insights to industry stakeholders.

To know more about ASCI Academy please visit: www.ascionline.in/academy/

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Offshore/Illegal Betting and Gambling ads** continue to **target Indian consumers incessantly, and lead objectionable advertisements.**
- **Personal Care leads in misleading ads**, largely driven by influencer promotions
- **Digital** platforms host the **majority of objectionable ads**
- **Top 100 digital star influencers are major violators** of the Consumer Protection Act 2019 and the ASCI Code
- **Voluntary compliance shows a steady rise, now at 88%**

THE STORY IN NUMBERS

6841 complaints looked into by ASCI

6117 ads scrutinised for potential ASCI Code violation

98% ads processed required some modification

93% identified through proactive monitoring

97% violations originated on digital media

62% cases not contested

17 days average complaint resolution time

NATURE OF VIOLATIONS

81.48% of ads promoted harmful products or unsafe situations, violating the Code Against Harmful Products/ Situations. **Rise driven by proactive monitoring of legally disallowed ads**

23.22% of ads misled consumers through dishonest claims. Though the absolute number remained steady, their share fell due to the surge in harmful product ads.

(An ad may have multiple code violations)

ADS ESCALATED TO GOVERNMENT

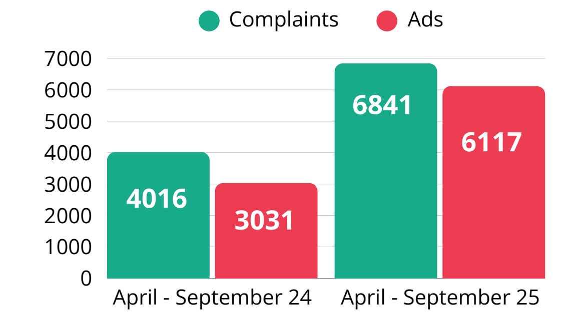
4575 - offshore/illegal betting ads to MIB, I4C and DGGI

271- ads violating the DMR ACT 1954, to Ministry of Ayush

10 - direct promotion of alcohol ads to State Excise and MIB

113 ads were escalated to DoCA, MIB, and other sectoral regulators **for non-compliance**, including 47 cases of influencer non-disclosure

SHARP FOCUS ON OFFSHORE/ILLEGAL BETTING ADS LEADS TO STEEP RISE IN ADS PROCESSED

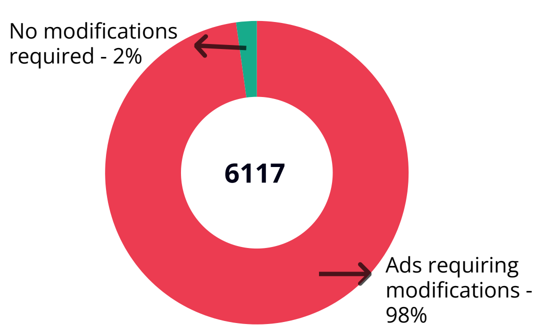


Between April and September 2025, ASCI saw a 70% rise in complaints and a 102% increase in ads reviewed for potential violations, driven by stronger surveillance and public vigilance. Enhanced monitoring and reporting to regulators led to over 4,575 offshore/illegal betting ads being flagged.

The introduction of the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025, aimed to establish a clear ban on betting and real money games. However, ASCI's monitoring demonstrates the widespread presence of offshore/illegal betting sites that are accessible to Indian consumers in violation of this Act.

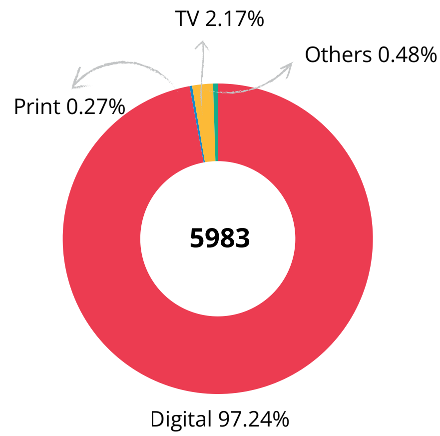
Complaints from consumers, industry and consumer organisations also rose from 306 in 2024 (April-Sept.) to 407 in 2025 (April-Sept.), reflecting growing awareness and engagement in ad self-regulation — reinforcing ASCI's role as a front-line resolver of consumer concerns.

98% ADS PROCESSED REQUIRED MODIFICATIONS



Of the ads that required modification, **4859 cases are reported to the government** as these ads were disallowed by law. Of the remaining cases investigated, **62% were not contested** by the advertiser, and they promptly modified or withdrew the ads.

DIGITAL MEDIA MAIN SOURCE OF VIOLATIONS AT 97%



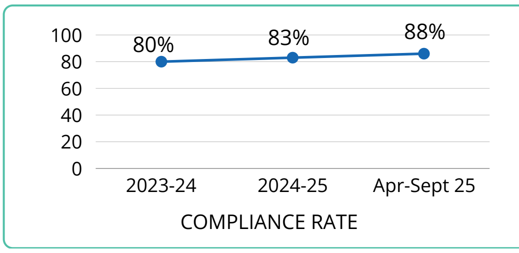
- Meta |78.96%
- Websites |13.75%
- Property Portal |3%
- Google |4.59%
- Linkedin |1.07%
- Twitter/Telegram| 0.48%
- Gaming streaming platforms |0.36%
- E-commerce| 0.24%
- OTT |0.33%
- Mobile App |0.15%
- News aggregator websites |0.10%
- Email |0.07%

Several advertisements have appeared on multiple platforms

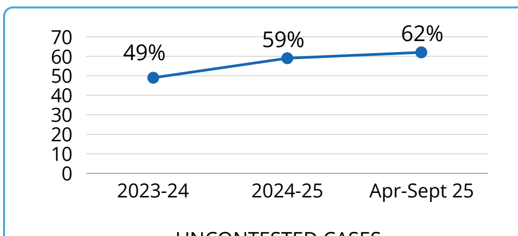
RISING VOLUNTARY COMPLIANCE - NOW AT 88%

Compliance on Print & TV - 97%

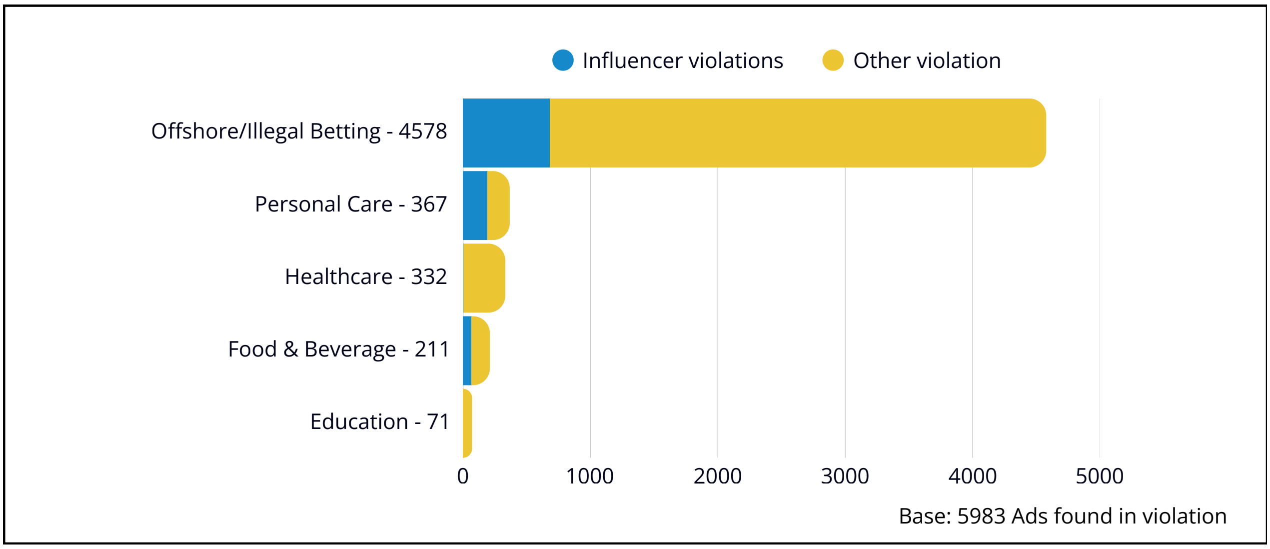
(Compliance calculated as on 30th October 2025)



Voluntary compliance rose from 80% to 88% with non-contested cases increasing from 49% to 62% over the last 2 years, reflecting stronger advertiser response to ASCI's recommendations.



TOP 5 CATEGORIES ACCOUNT FOR 90% OF THE VIOLATIONS



Offshore/Illegal betting remains the most violative category, driven by high ad volumes and ASCI's focused monitoring of this high-risk sector. Of the **4,578 cases flagged,** 99% were identified through proactive surveillance, **including 683 influencer promotions.** High volume of **sponsored ads - accounting for 91% of cases,** prompted ASCI to implement rapid action and **daily reporting** to I4C and the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting to enable swift takedowns and protect consumers.

The **Personal Care category recorded the highest number of misleading ads, as well as the most uncontested cases.**

64% of ads were promptly modified or withdrawn following ASCI's intimation.

Within this category,

- Skin care 66%
- Hair care 17%
- Cosmetic products 13% of the violations

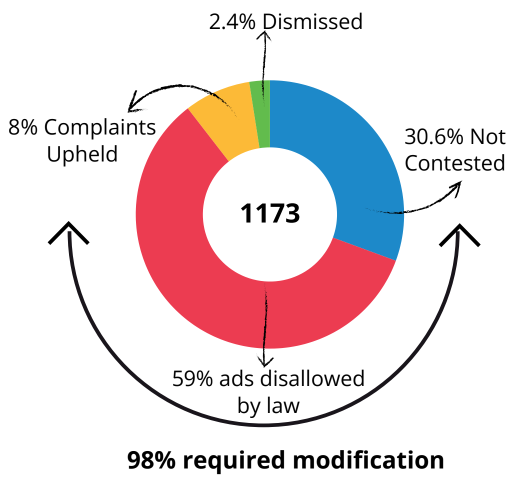
Notably, **53% of these involved influencer violations of disclosure guidelines.**

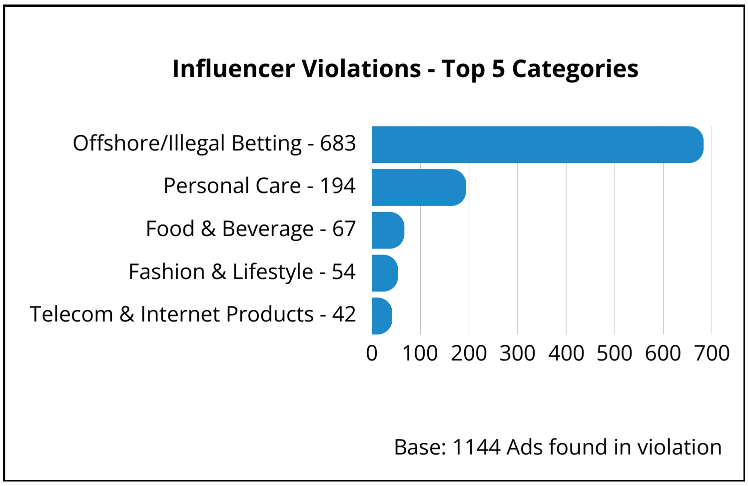
About **81.6% of the cases** under the **Healthcare sector violated the Drugs and Magic Remedies Act 1954**, while of the remaining cases investigated, 41% were not contested by the advertisers.

In the **Food & Beverages sector**, **59% of 211 ads were not contested** and withdrawn/modified following ASCI's intimation. Alcoholic beverage promotions prohibited by various state excise laws accounted for 5% of violations, while **Health & Nutrition made up 61%, with nearly all cases requiring corrective action.**

Education sector cases investigated accounted for 71 advertisements that required modification. Of these, 45% were not contested and were voluntarily withdrawn by the advertisers following ASCI's intervention.

MORE THAN 75% OF THE 1173 INFLUENCER ADS INVESTIGATED PERTAINED TO BETTING AND PERSONAL CARE





Out of the 1173 advertisements processed for influencers' violations, 98% required modification. While 30.6% promptly made corrections to their posts, 59% were found to be promoting products that are disallowed by law.

On average, 57% of the non-contested ads were modified within 6 business days. 90% (as on Oct 30, 2025) influencers have complied.

20 cases were investigated for lack of disclosure as well as misleading claims in the post.

TOP DIGITAL STARS SET A POOR EXAMPLE, CONTINUE TO ROUTINELY FLOUT DISCLOSURE NORMS

76% OF THE TOP 100 DIGITAL STARS FAILED TO MEET DISCLOSURE NORMS VS. 69% THE PREVIOUS YEAR

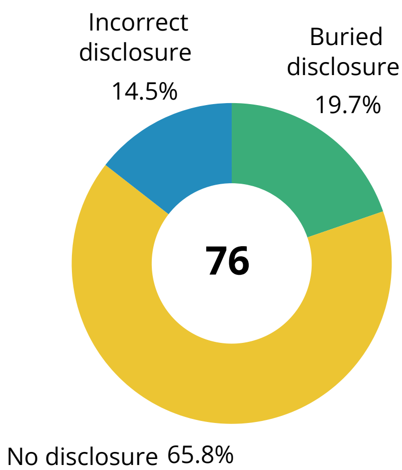
ASCI conducted its second dipstick study on Forbes India's Top 100 Digital Stars 2024, who collectively command a following of over 110 million. **The study revealed an increase in the number of influencers failing to disclose paid collaborations - 76% vs. 69% the previous year,** resulting in non-compliance with both ASCI's Influencer Advertising Guidelines and the Regulatory disclosure norms underlined by CCPA.

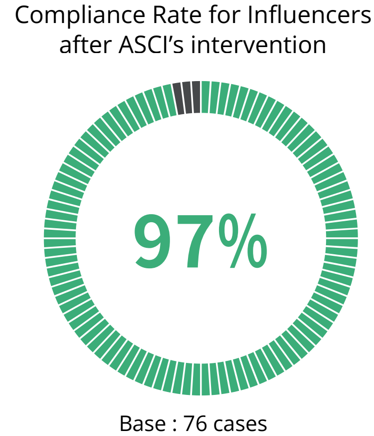
Despite these clear guidelines, many influencers continue to disregard their ethical and legal obligations. **Top influencers, backed by major brands and ample resources, remain frequent violators, increasing reputational and regulatory risks for both themselves and the brands they endorse.**

Methodology

The selection of influencers was based on the Forbes India's Top 100 Digital Stars 2024, for posts that appeared to promote brands, published between March 1, 2025 till July 15, 2025. The platforms screened were Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. Based on the findings, one post per non-compliant influencer was processed by ASCI for violation of its guidelines.

Of the 100 top influencer handles evaluated, **10 did not contain any promotional content** in the said period. Of the others, **12 had appropriate disclosures.** 78 cases were further investigated, of which 2 were dismissed as influencers and brands were able to provide evidence that there existed no material connection. **76 cases were found in violation** of the ASCI Code and the CCPA guidelines. Of the 76 cases that needed modification, **72 cases (95%) agreed to put the disclosure labels without contest. 2 cases changed the label after ASCI's jury recommendation,** and 2 cases (2.5%) were escalated to Department of Consumer Affairs for non-compliance.





While post-investigation compliance improved from 93% to 97%, and voluntary corrections rose from 85% to 95% (vs. the first dipstick - February 2025), this pattern suggests that many **influencers continue to take their chances with non-disclosure, correcting course only after intervention**. This reactive compliance highlights **a concerning trend that without sustained oversight, violations persist.**

IMPORTANT LINKS:

Click here for Cases Handled

The widespread exposure to betting ads despite the ban, as well as the disappointing standards set by top influencers, are some challenges that have come to the fore in our recent work. Consumer trust can be fragile in the digital age, and such practices create problems for the industry at large.

ASCI is however, pleased to note a strong increase in uncontested cases, as well as in rates of voluntary compliance, underscoring its growing role as the first line of defence. For repeat and wilful violators, stringent action by regulators would set a strong deterrent and help protect consumer interests.

We continue sharing information and data with the statutory regulators for action within the legal framework, and collaborate and cooperate with all stakeholders to build a strong advertising regulatory framework for consumer protection.

QUICK LINKS

COMPLAINTS FAQ

REGISTER A COMPLAINT

MASTER COMPLIANCE WITH ASCI ACADEMY

AD ADVICE

Pre-Publication Guidance

E-LEARNING CERTIFICATION

Self-Learning Courses to Master Responsible Advertising

MASTERCLASS

Bespoke Corporate Workshops

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