

ASCI's 'A Pill for Thought' report flags gaps in evidence backing nutraceutical advertising claims

- Report highlights gaps between ingredient-level evidence and whole-product claims, stressing the need for robust claim substantiation
- Findings highlight concerns around weight management, anti-ageing, skin health, respiratory health and disease-related claims

Mumbai, October 28, 2026: The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) has released its report, 'A Pill for Thought: Review of Health and Wellness Claims in Nutraceutical Advertising'. The report is based on the suo-motu investigation of nutraceutical ads between July and September 2026. It highlights recurring concerns around the substantiation of health and wellness claims, including time-bound results and representations that may lead consumers to be misled about the benefits of nutraceutical products.

Valued at USD 38.77 billion in 2025, India's nutraceuticals market is projected to reach USD 1,151.5 billion by 2033, driven by rising health consciousness and demand for preventive healthcare, according to Grand View Research. As the category grows across functional foods, beverages and dietary supplements, advertising plays a growing role in shaping consumer perceptions of product efficacy.

Of the 61 advertisements evaluated, one case is currently under process. All 60 ads where processing is complete, were found in violation of the ASCI Code. Of these, 29 ads were not contested. The 31 advertisers who contested the objections failed to provide adequate substantiation for claims made in their advertisements.

Key violations related to claims around weight management, anti-ageing, skin lightening, UV protection and respiratory health. The report also flagged advertisements claiming to address conditions such as asthma, COPD, blood pressure, cholesterol and PCOS, highlighting how exaggerated outcomes and misleading visuals can create unrealistic expectations and blur the distinction between general wellness support and medical treatment.

Examples of such claims included "Lose 6 kgs in 60 days", "Your thigh fat will be gone in 12 weeks" and "300% stronger skin defence against UV damage".

Often, ingredient-level evidence was used to substantiate product-level claims, without robust evidence that the finished formulation delivered the advertised results. Also, visuals often amplified claims of rapid, visible results, using before-after comparisons, without robust, product-specific substantiation.

Across the cases reviewed, three patterns emerged:

- **Claims without adequate proof:** Advertisers failed to provide adequate clinical evidence or independent test reports demonstrating that the finished product could deliver the advertised benefits.
- **Superiority without a benchmark:** Terms such as "faster" and "more effective" implied a comparative advantage, but the basis of comparison was not always clear or substantiated.

- **Promises ahead of proof:** Advertised benefits were sometimes communicated without adequate substantiation. When challenged by ASCI, advertisers often chose to withdraw or modify their advertisements rather than provide evidence to support the claims.

A link to the list of cases processed are provided at the end of the report.

Manisha Kapoor, CEO and Secretary General, ASCI, said: “Consumers turn to nutraceuticals in good faith, often seeking solutions for concerns that directly affect their health and wellbeing. When advertising promises rapid weight loss, reversal of aging or relief from specific health conditions, the evidence must be strong enough to support those claims. Research on an individual ingredient cannot automatically be used to substantiate the efficacy of a finished product. As the category grows, it is important that the strength of advertising claims matches the evidence available, so consumers can make informed decisions, and trust is not compromised by promises that go beyond proof.”

Through this review, ASCI reiterates the importance of responsible health and wellness advertising, where claims are supported by credible evidence and the overall impression created by words, visuals and promised outcomes is not misleading. For advertisers, robust substantiation is not merely a compliance requirement; it is fundamental to protecting consumers and sustaining trust in the nutraceutical category.

About the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI)

The 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, point of sale material, etc. ASCI has collaboratively worked with various government bodies, including the Department of Consumer Affairs (DoCA), the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), the Ministry of AYUSH, and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB). In August 2023, the ASCI Academy, a flagship program of ASCI, was launched to build the capacity of all stakeholders to create responsible and progressive advertising. ASCI Academy aims to raise standards of advertising content through training, education, outreach, and research on the preventive aspects of advertising self-regulation.

The Advertising Standards Council of India	Avian WE.
Ashraf Engineer ashraf@ascionline.in	Tirsha Roychowdhury tirshar@avianwe.com