

A STUDY ON ASCI AND CONSUMER ROLE IN REGULATING UNETHICAL ADVERTISING

Dr. Chitra Suraj Ashtekar Assistant Professor of Commerce, Shri P. L. Shroff College of Arts and Commerce, Chinchani : chitra2012.ashtekar@gmail.com

Abstract

The study on Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) and the consumer role in regulating unethical advertising reveals that most consumers are able to identify misleading advertisements but lack awareness about ASCI and its complaint redressal process. Participation in lodging complaints is very limited, with digital platforms being the most preferred medium. Low levels of trust and procedural barriers discourage consumers from taking action. The study highlights the need to enhance awareness, simplify procedures, and improve the effectiveness of ASCI.

Key Words: ASCI, Unethical Advertising, Consumer Awareness.

Introduction

Advertising plays a crucial role in influencing consumer choices and shaping market trends. However, growing competition among businesses has led to an increase in misleading, exaggerated, and unethical advertisements that misguide consumers and adversely affect fair market practices. To regulate such practices, the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) was established as a self-regulatory body to ensure that advertisements conform to ethical and responsible standards.

While ASCI provides a clear mechanism for consumers to lodge complaints against unethical advertisements, the effectiveness of this system largely depends on consumer awareness and active participation. If consumers are unaware of their rights or the role of ASCI, unethical advertisements may continue unchecked. Therefore, understanding the level of consumer awareness and participation is essential to assess the functioning of ASCI and to strengthen consumer protection in India. This study seeks to explore the extent of consumer awareness about ASCI and their willingness to participate in regulating unethical advertising.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To study the structure, functions, and complaint redressal mechanism of ASCI in regulating unethical advertising.
2. To examine the level of awareness among consumers regarding unethical advertising and the role of ASCI in regulating it.
3. To analyse the extent of consumer participation in lodging complaints against misleading or unethical advertisements.

Hypotheses:

H1: Consumers are aware of misleading advertisements but have low awareness of ASCI and its complaint process.

H2: Low awareness of ASCI significantly reduces consumer participation in filing complaints against unethical advertisements.

Research Methodology:

- This study follows a descriptive research method to study ASCI and the consumer role in regulating unethical advertising.
- Primary Data: Collected through a structured questionnaire from 105 respondents belonging to different age groups, genders, educational backgrounds, and occupations.
- Secondary Data: Gathered from ASCI annual reports, official websites, and research articles related to advertising regulations and consumer protection.

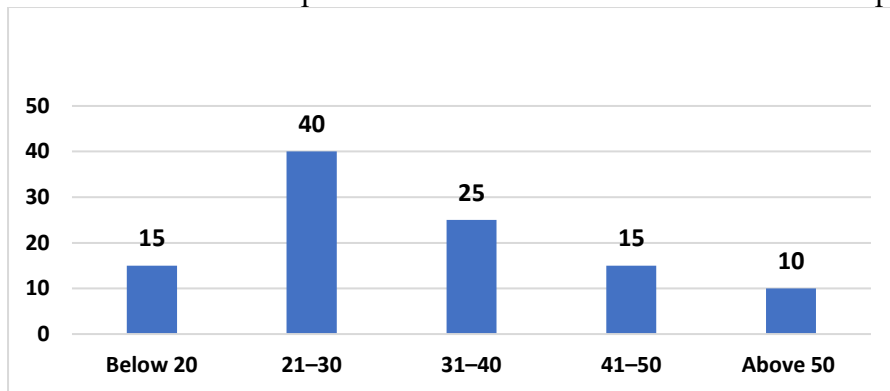
- **Sampling Method:** A convenience sampling method was adopted to capture diverse consumer perspectives.
- **Data Analysis:** Collected data was tabulated and analysed using simple percentages and interpretations. Charts and graphs were used to present the findings clearly.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

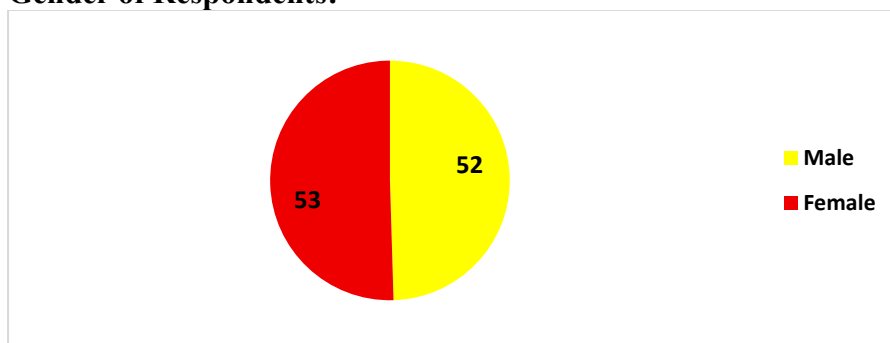
Section A: Demographic Information

Age of respondents:

The largest group is 21–30 years (38.09 per cent), showing the dominance of youth in the sample. Respondents below 20 years (14.28 per cent) and those in the 31–40 years age group (23.80 per cent) also form considerable portions. This indicates active awareness and participation among young adults.

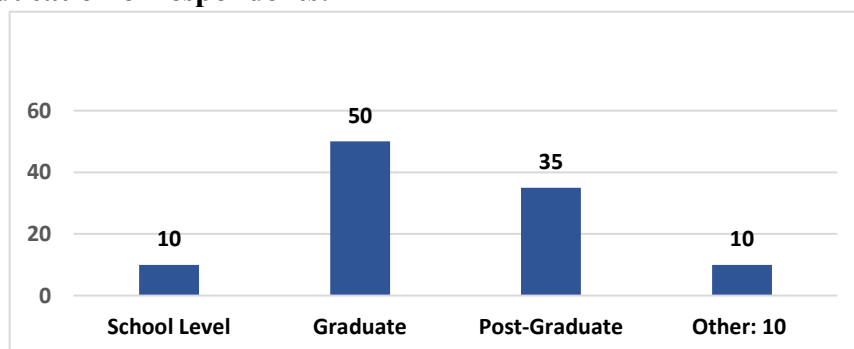


Gender of Respondents: -



The data shows a balanced representation with 52, (49.52 per cent) males and 53 females (50.47 per cent). This ensures gender-neutral insights and minimizes bias in responses.

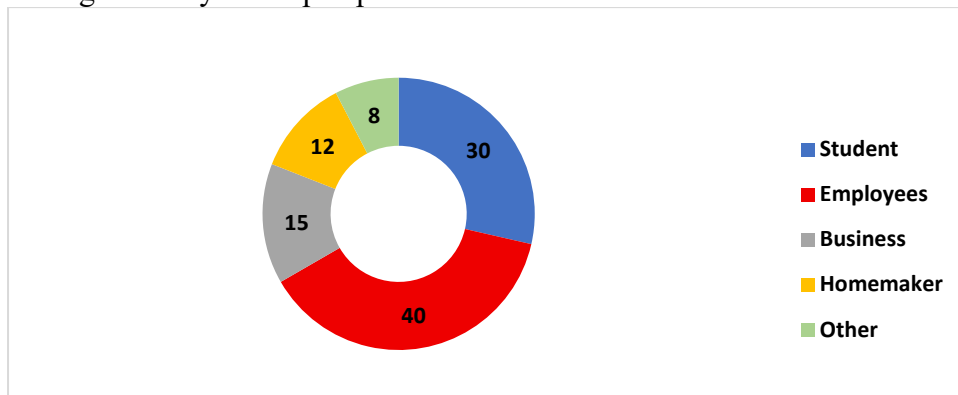
Education of respondents: -



Graduates form the highest share, with 50 respondents (47.61 per cent), followed by postgraduates, with 35 respondents (33.33 per cent). Only 10 respondents (9.52 per cent) are at the school level, while 10 respondents (9.52 per cent) fall under the ‘other’ category. This suggests that most participants are well educated, contributing informed opinions.

Occupation of respondents:

Employee-class respondents, numbering 40 (38.09 per cent), dominate the sample, followed by students, with 30 respondents (28.57 per cent). Respondents engaged in business account for 15 (14.28 per cent), homemakers number 12 (11.42 per cent), and others constitute 8 (7.61 per cent), thereby adding diversity to the perspectives.



Section B – Achievement of Objectives and Testing Hypothesis

Objective 1: To study the structure, functions, and complaint redressal mechanism of ASCI in regulating unethical advertising

The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI)

The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), established in 1985, is the self-regulatory body of the Indian advertising industry. It monitors advertisements across all media, including television, print, digital, outdoor, radio, packaging, and point of sale. ASCI works with various stakeholders to ensure consumer protection and ethical advertising. Its Code forms part of the Advertising Code under the Cable TV Networks (Regulation) Act, 1994, giving it legal backing.

Types of Complaints Handled by ASCI

Consumers can approach ASCI if they find an advertisement that is:

- Misleading or untruthful
- Indecent, vulgar, or offensive
- Unsafe or harmful to individuals or society
- Unfairly disparaging other products or brands

Who Can Complain to ASCI?

ASCI accepts complaints from any individual or organisation, including:

- The general public
- Members of the advertising or marketing industry
- Consumer organisations
- Government bodies

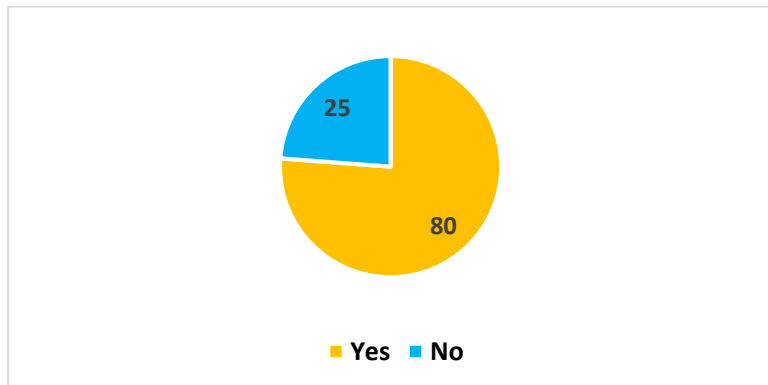
Information Required to File a Complaint

To register a complaint with ASCI, the following details are necessary:

- Name of the advertiser or brand
- Time, date, and medium where the advertisement appeared
- Name of the product or service being advertised
- A copy of the advertisement or a brief description of it
- Specific objections (claims, visuals, or content found objectionable, with reasons)
- The complainant's name and contact details (kept confidential and used only for communication with ASCI)

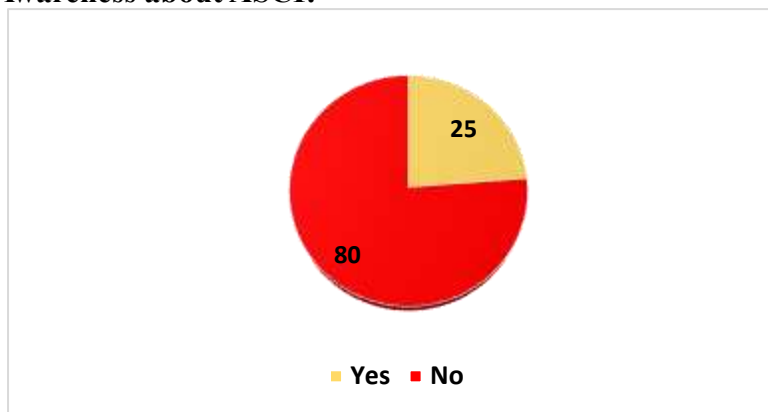
Objective 2: Awareness of Unethical Advertising and ASCI

Advertisements sometimes mislead or misinform consumers.



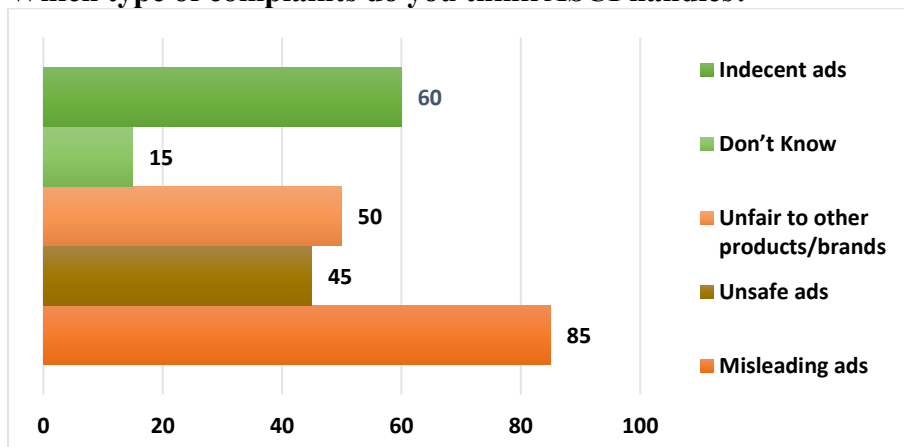
The chart shows a majority 80 respondents (76.19 per cent) believe ads mislead or misinform, highlighting strong consumer distrust. Only 25(23.80 per cent) disagree. This indicates that a majority of consumers perceive advertisements as misleading, highlighting concerns about their reliability.

Awareness about ASCI:



The chart shows that only 25 respondents (23.80 per cent) are aware of ASCI, while 80 respondents (76.19 per cent) have no knowledge of it. This indicates that awareness of ASCI is very low, suggesting the need for stronger efforts to spread information about its role in regulating advertisements. This reflects a lack of awareness of the regulatory body among consumers.

Which type of complaints do you think ASCI handles?

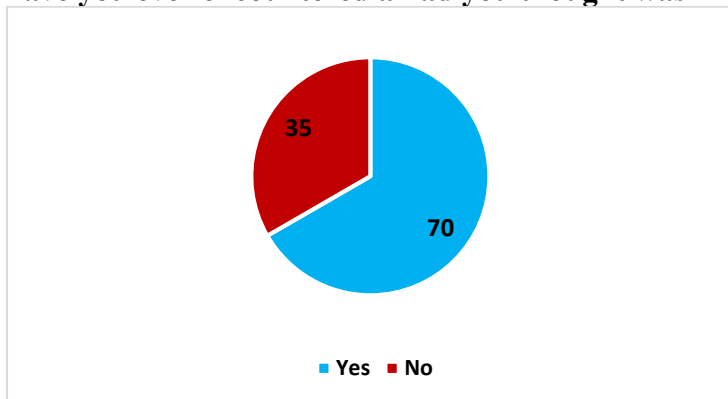


The chart shows that the majority of respondents (85) believe ASCI mainly handles misleading ads, followed by indecent ads (60), unfair ads to other products/brands (50), and unsafe ads (45), while only 15 respondents were unaware.

This indicates that consumers strongly associate ASCI's role with controlling misleading advertisements, while also recognizing its responsibility in regulating indecent, unfair, and unsafe ads.

Objective 3: Consumer participation

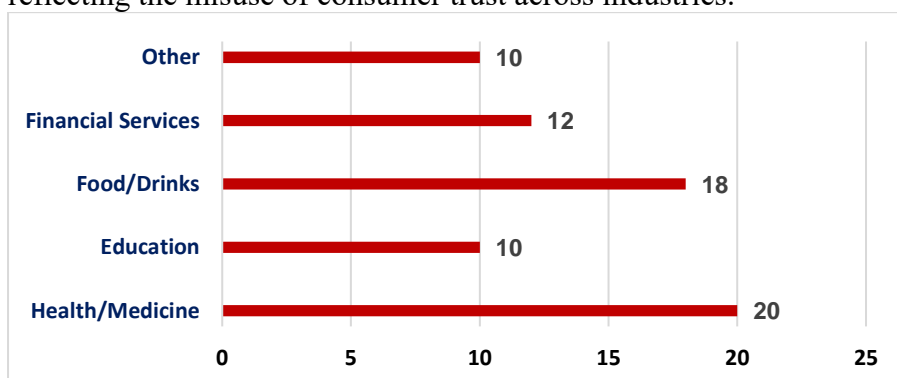
Have you ever encountered an ad you thought was misleading/unethical?



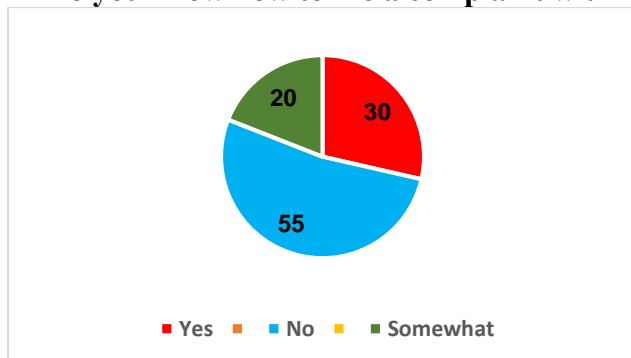
A majority of 70 respondents (66.7 per cent) reported encountering misleading or unethical advertisements, while 35 respondents (33.3 per cent) had not. This shows that unethical advertising is a significant concern among consumers, highlighting the importance of stricter regulation and monitoring.

If yes, what type of product/service was it?

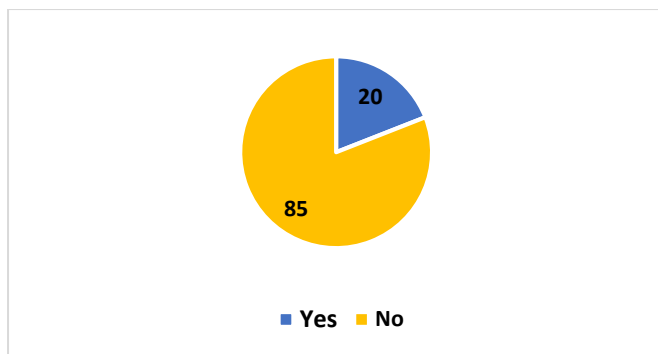
Twenty respondents found misleading advertisements in the Health/Medicine category (33.3 per cent), followed by Food/Drinks, with 18 respondents (30 per cent), showing that these sectors dominate unethical advertising. Financial services, education, and other categories also drew complaints, reflecting the misuse of consumer trust across industries.



➤ **Do you know how to file a complaint with ASCI?**

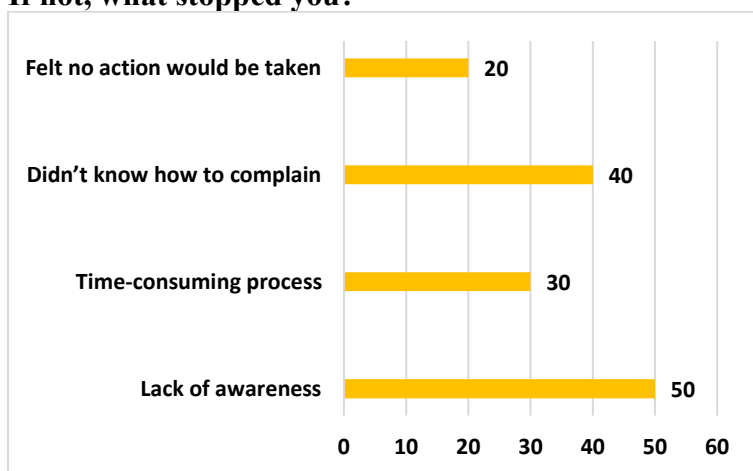


Only 30 respondents know how to file a complaint with ASCI, while the majority, 55 respondents, do not, and 20 respondents have only partial awareness. This indicates that awareness of the complaint process is quite low, as most respondents are unaware of it, highlighting the need for ASCI to improve consumer education on filing complaints.



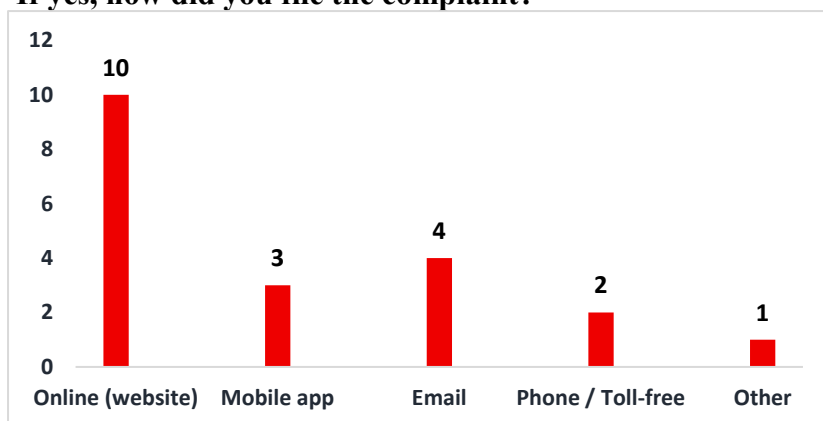
Only 20, (19.04 per cent) have filed complaints, while 85 (80.95 per cent) never approached ASCI. This shows low consumer participation in the grievance process.

If not, what stopped you?



As per the responses, lack of awareness among 50 respondents (58.82 per cent) and not knowing how to complain among 40 respondents (47.05 per cent) are the major barriers. Time concerns (35.29 per cent) and lack of faith in action (23.52 per cent) further discourage the filing of complaints.

If yes, how did you file the complaint?

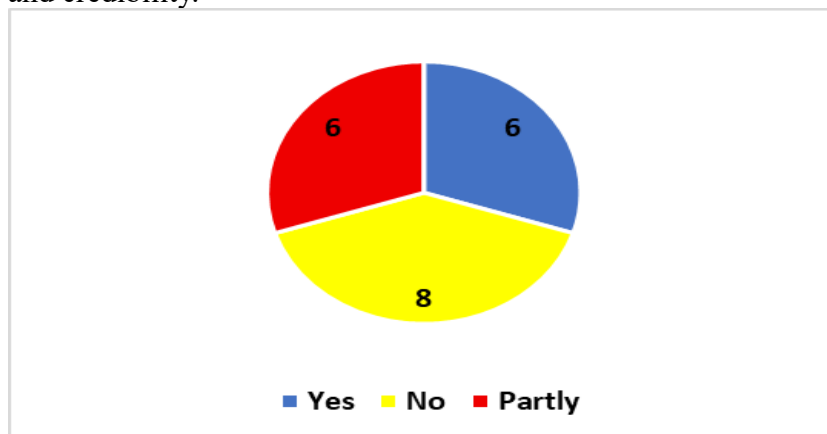


Since only 20 respondents out of 105 filed a complaint with ASCI, the mode of complaint filing becomes crucial. Among them, half of the respondents (10) preferred the official website, showing that the online platform is the most accessible and trusted channel. Email (4) and the mobile app (3) were secondary options, while very few respondents used the phone/toll-free option (2) or other means (1). This indicates that although the number of complaints is limited, digital platforms are the primary choice for those who do take action.

Were you satisfied with ASCI's action?

Out of the 20 respondents who filed complaints, only 6 were satisfied with ASCI's action, indicating limited effectiveness. Eight respondents expressed dissatisfaction, while another six were only partly

satisfied, reflecting mixed outcomes and highlighting the need for ASCI to improve its responsiveness and credibility.



Hypotheses Testing:

The study shows that 76.19 per cent of consumers recognize misleading advertisements, but only 23.80 per cent are aware of ASCI and 28.6 per cent know how to file complaints, confirming the first hypothesis. Low awareness directly affects participation, as only 19.04 per cent have lodged complaints, supporting the second hypothesis. Lack of knowledge and procedural barriers are major reasons for non-participation. Among those who complained, digital channels were preferred, while satisfaction with ASCI's action was limited.

Findings:

- A majority of consumers (76.19 per cent) believe advertisements are misleading or misinforming.
- Unethical ads are most reported in health/medicine (33.3 per cent) and food/drinks (30 per cent).
- Awareness of ASCI is very low, with only 23.80 per cent respondents familiar with it.
- Only 28.6 per cent know how to file a complaint with ASCI, showing lack of procedural awareness.
- Complaint filing is very low (19.04 per cent), mainly due to lack of awareness and knowledge.
- Among those who complained, 50 per cent used ASCI's website, showing preference for online channels.
- Satisfaction with ASCI's action is limited—only 6 satisfied, 8 dissatisfied, and 6 partly satisfied.

Suggestions:

1. ASCI should strengthen awareness campaigns through social media, colleges, and mass media.
2. Simplify the complaint process and promote mobile app usage for easier access.
3. Provide regular updates to complainants to build trust in the grievance redressal system.
4. Collaborate with government and consumer organisations for wider outreach.
5. Introduce periodic reviews and stricter enforcement to enhance credibility and consumer confidence.

Conclusion:

The study concludes that although consumers are aware of unethical advertisements, their knowledge and participation regarding ASCI remain inadequate. Limited awareness, lack of trust, and procedural difficulties hinder complaint filing. Strengthening awareness, simplifying processes, and ensuring effective action will improve consumer participation and ASCI's role in regulating unethical advertising.

Bibliography

- Farooque & Hussain, (2023), Role of Advertising Standard Council of India in Regulation of Advertisements of Consumer-Packaged Goods. Journal of Management and Entrepreneurship, ISSN: 2229-5348 UGC Care Group 1 Journal, Vol. 17, No.2.

- Srivastava M. K. (2021), Role of Asci in Regulating Advertisements: A Review, Shodh Sarita, ISSN- 2348-2397, UGC care listed journal, vol. 8, issue 29
- Vyshnavi A, etal.(2024), Role of Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) in Food & Beverages Industry: A Review, The Pharma Innovation, International Journal, E-ISSN: 2277-7695
- <https://www.ascionline.in/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Digital-ASCI-Annual-Complaints-Report-2024-2025.pdf>
- https://www.ascionline.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/asci_code_of_self_regulation.pdf
- <https://www.ascionline.in/complaint-process/>