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Media Release

Advertising Of Beauty Services And/Or Products Tops ASAS Feedback List

Advertisements promoting beauty services and/or products received the most feedback for three consecutive years from 2011 to 2013. The Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS), an advisory council to the Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE), however saw a decline in the total number of feedback received over the three-year period. These feedback included advertising advice, consumer-to-business, and business-to-business complaints and queries.

Year	Total No. of Feedback Received
2011	547
2012	375
2013	307

Table 1: No. of feedback for 2011 to 2013

Although there is a decrease in the total number of feedback received by the ASAS in 2013 as compared with previous years, it does not mean that consumers have become indifferent. Consumers are now better educated and more aware of what they want and what is available out there. There are more avenues of information available, such as the Internet, where consumers can look up the advertised product or service before making an informed decision. With this knowledge, consumers can then exercise their judgement when making purchases.

Most of the feedback submitted were about advertisements that were misleading, unclear or contained claims that required to be substantiated.

The breakdown of the top five industries (2011 – 2013) with the most number of feedback can be viewed in the table below.

No.	2011	No. of feedback	% of Total feedback	2012	No. of feedback	% of Total feedback	2013	No. of feedback	% of Total feedback
1	Beauty (Includes Hair & Slimming)	68	12.4%	Beauty (Includes Hair & Slimming)	40	10.7%	Beauty (Includes Hair & Slimming)	78	25.4%
2	Food & Beverage	47	8.6%	Travel	27	7.2%	Food & Beverage	22	7.2%
3	Telecommunications	35	6.4%	Telecommunications	26	6.9%	Travel	19	6.2%
4	Travel	22	4%	Food & Beverage	25	6.7%	Telecommunications	12	3.9%
5	Health	21	3.8%	Clothing	20	5.3%	Electrical & Electronics	12	3.9%

Table 2: Comparison of feedback received about top 5 industries from 2011 - 2013

Beauty Industry

Advertising by the beauty industry consistently topped the feedback list from 2011 to 2013. The total number of feedback on advertising by the beauty industry in 2013 saw an increase of 95% and 14.7% over 2012 and 2011 respectively.

This spike may be due to a demand for such services and products. Businesses placed advertisements on various media platforms mainly television, newspapers, magazines and online websites to reach out to as many people as possible. In addition, the rapid advances in technology meant that companies could offer new and sophisticated treatments or services.

In a bid to stay competitive, some businesses resorted to advertising claims, which were misleading or could not be substantiated. Advertisers were told to revise their advertising copies if they were not able to provide evidence to support the claims made, or cease advertising totally.

A seminar was held in December 2013 to help businesses better understand the advertising environment and guidelines. Businesses would then be able to frame their advertising in an appropriate and responsible manner.

Food and Beverage Industry

The food and beverage industry is another area which the ASAS has constantly received feedback for the past three years. In 2013, there were 22 feedback received. The fall in the number of feedback could be due to smarter and more informed consumers who were able to search online product reviews on food and beverages to check if there had been any negative feedback from other consumers. Most of the feedback had to do with misleading promotions. A few of the feedback were concerns over advertising of food targeted at children.

The Ministry of Health (MOH), Health Promotion Board (HPB), the ASAS as well as the industry represented by the Singapore Manufacturing Federation and Food Industry Asia are currently working together to develop a self-regulatory framework and a code for food advertising to children. These guidelines will restrict the food advertisements targeted at children in all media channels. In addition, the guidelines will be incorporated into the Singapore Code of Advertising Practice (SCAP) for self-regulation in the industry.

Travel Industry

The ASAS received 19 feedback about advertising by the travel industry in 2013. The feedback was mainly about advertisements not being clear or upfront about the cost components that went into the travel fare. The ASAS released an updated travel advisory, effective 15 January 2014, that aimed to encourage all travel agencies to state the full prices of their packages in their travel advertisements.

The travel advisory was circulated to the industry and is also available on the ASAS/CASE website for public reference.

Telecommunications Industry

Most of the feedback in 2013 had to do with advertising that was not clear or featured claims that had to be substantiated. Often, telecommunications companies failed to draw consumers' attention to further information about their products or services in the advertisements. A few of the advertisements also attracted business-to-business feedback, particularly with reference to certain claims.

Other Observations

The ASAS noticed that there had been an increase in the number of advertisements on investment seminars in the media. Although the number of feedback received is not as many as those in the top five clusters, there appears to be an upward trend. The first quarter of 2014 noted seven feedback compared with eight for the whole of 2013. The main concern with such advertisements had to do with claims promising high returns without clear accountability. The ASAS is monitoring the situation and will be engaging the relevant players to address the concern.

Moving Forward

The ASAS intends to have more engagement with the different industries, advertisers and media owners to share with them the self-regulatory framework and the advertising code. In the process, the ASAS will also get the industry perspective of the issues and concerns. Through this collaborative effort among the various stakeholders, the ASAS hopes to raise the standards of advertising and create a level playing field for all.

The ASAS will also work in tandem with the Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE) to educate consumers through media releases and consumer alerts.

In view of the fact that some advertisements may be misleading, unclear or unsubstantiated, consumers should exercise care and carry out their own checks with regard to any advertising content.

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