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Media Release

ASAS's Feedback in 2016: Health Products & Services Advertisements Took the Top Spot While Anti-Mosquito Product Advertisements Emerged for the First Time

The Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS), an advisory council to the Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE), received feedback on 284 occasions in 2016, which was more than it did in 2014 (273) and 2015 (272). For 2016, ASAS received fewer business-to-business feedback (15) than it did in 2015 (22).

Feedback on advertisements for health products and services has been on the rise, with misleading claims in such advertisements being of particular concern. ASAS also noticed an emergence of feedback on advertisements for mosquito traps and repellents (four cases), with questionable efficacy, in the wake of the dengue fever outbreak last year.

The total feedback as well as the five industries with the most feedback may be viewed below.

Top 5 industries for feedback from 2014 – 2016. The feedback includes queries, requests for advertising advice and complaints that are either consumer-to-business or business-to-business in nature.

No	2014	Feedback	% of Total Feedback	2015	Feedback	% of Total Feedback	2016	Feedback	% of Total Feedback
1	Beauty (Includes Hair & Slimming)	117	42.8%	Beauty (Includes Hair & Slimming)	54	19.9%	Health	28	9.8%
2	Food & Beverage	21	7.6%	Food & Beverage	31	11.3%	Beauty (Includes Hair & Slimming)	25	8.8%
3	Finance	21	7.6%	Health	19	6.9%	Food & Beverage	24	8.4%
4	Health	17	6.2%	Finance	17	6.2%	Electrical and Electronics	20	7.0%
5	Electrical & Electronics	11	4%	Travel	13	4.8%	Telecommunications	19	6.7%

Increase in feedback on health advertisements

Feedback on advertisements for health products and services took the top spot in 2016 with 28 filed cases. It had been increasing steadily since 2014. The feedback on advertisements by these businesses came from members of the public who were sceptical of the marketing claims regarding the effectiveness of the promoted products and services.

As consumers spend more on alternative healthcare products and consult internet sources for health and nutrition advice, businesses have been targeting these consumers aggressively with products such as health supplements and wearable aids, claiming to treat ailments or improve the well-being of their users. ASAS required 22 advertisements to be amended as their claims were not supported by the appropriate studies and data.

For instance, the manufacturer of a health supplement stated in its advertisement that the ingredients could help improve sleep quality. However, the claim was based on an extrapolation of a study conducted on animals.

Another health supplement maker claimed that its product helped to fight toxins and eliminate free radicals, but they were unable to show that the product contained the same dosage of the active ingredient used in the study that they cited. In both cases, ASAS informed the advertisers to amend their advertisements.

Feedback on advertisements for anti-mosquito products

ASAS received feedback on advertisements for light and ultrasonic mosquito traps and repellents on four occasions that claimed to protect consumers against mosquitoes that spread dengue fever. This was linked to the aggressive promotion of these products by retailers during the dengue fever outbreak in the first half of 2016. The complainants questioned the descriptions of the products' efficacy. ASAS had not received such feedback in prior years.

Following consultation with the National Environment Agency (NEA), it was found that there was no evidence of these products working against the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, the main vector of dengue and Zika in Singapore. False claims about these devices' ability to protect consumers against dengue fever could create complacency among users, hence ASAS informed the advertisers to amend their advertisements. Consumers are advised to refer to NEA's Guide on the effectiveness of different types of mosquito traps at <http://www.nea.gov.sg/public-health/environmental-public-health-research/mosquito-traps> for more information.

Going forward

ASAS works closely with the relevant authorities to ensure that advertising for health product and services in Singapore is ethical, and that the Singapore Code of Advertising Practice (SCAP) complements existing legislation on the advertising of

health products. We urge consumers to continue informing ASAS of any advertisements that contain statements that appear “too good to be true.”

ASAS will continue to highlight and keep abreast of developments in the industry to ensure that advertisers maintain a high standard of ethical advertising in Singapore.

Prof Tan Sze Wee
Chairman
Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS)