

## MEDIA RELEASE

---

### For Immediate Release

7 June 2021

#### **2020 COVID-19 ad complaints contribute to increase in feedback**

The Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS) received a total of 428 instances of feedback in 2020. The 19% increase over the 359 received in 2019 was partly attributable to feedback on advertisements for COVID-19-related products and services.

For the second straight year, ASAS saw increases in feedback across most categories. This is expected as more consumers turned to online purchases during the pandemic, thus increasing their exposure to advertisements on websites, apps and social media. The amount of feedback received is a function of both the volume of marketing and of public concerns.

Please view the total feedback that ASAS received and the top five most-complained industries in **Annex A**.

#### **Advertisements related to COVID-19**

ASAS received 37 instances of feedback on advertisements that were related to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The feedback spanned several categories of products and services, including health and electrical products.

Consumers gave feedback on marketing communication for new and existing products and on services that claimed the ability to protect users and people around them from COVID-19 infection. Where the claims could not be substantiated, ASAS informed marketers to remove these claims.

For example, ASAS received the most feedback on products that claimed to use sodium chlorite to create a shield around the user that would protect them from viruses. ASAS followed up with the marketers of the products and, in consultation with the relevant experts, found that the studies on the product were not based on real world conditions, and would have very limited

effectiveness in Singapore's climate. The marketers eventually removed the claims from their advertisements for the products.

In view of the feedback, ASAS published [an advisory](#) on 7 April 2020 to remind advertisers to ensure that their advertising claims during the pandemic should be reliably and robustly substantiated. Where there were possible breaches of national legislation, the relevant authorities were also alerted. We would also advise consumers to refer to the respective advisories published by the Health Sciences Authority and the National Environment Agency on products that feature claims to kill the coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

### **Advertisements for health products and service**

ASAS received 48 instances of feedback on advertisements under the health category in 2020, making it the most complained-about sector for the year. This increase of more than two-fold over the 20 feedback for 2019 is largely attributable to advertisements related to the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted above. Other feedback concerned claims about the effectiveness of the health supplements and skincare products from their manufacturers.

### **Breaches and Compliance**

The proportion of advertisements found to have breached the Singapore Code of Advertising Practice (SCAP) remained low. The vast majority of advertisers have also complied when ASAS informed them to amend their advertisements that may breach the SCAP. Advertisers are reminded that all advertisements should be prepared with a sense of responsibility to the consumer and society.

ASAS regards it as an encouraging sign that consumers, are increasingly aware that a channel exists for them to provide feedback to ensure ethical advertising.

### **What consumers and advertisers can do**

ASAS encourages consumers to write in if they encounter advertisements that are not legal, decent, honest or truthful. They can fill out their feedback on the ASAS website ([www.asas.org.sg/feedback/online-complaint](http://www.asas.org.sg/feedback/online-complaint)) with a clear copy of the advertisement and details on where they accessed or received it.

ASAS would like to remind advertisers not to overstate the benefits or returns that consumers could expect from using their services, and to ensure that they are capable of substantiation. Advertisers, media owners and agencies are encouraged to consider ASAS's paid copy advice if they are unsure whether their advertisement complies with the SCAP. The advertising copy should be submitted early to give the ASAS Council enough time to review it. More details on the fees and turnaround time required are available on the ASAS website at <https://asas.org.sg/advertising-advice>.

Prof. Ang Peng Hwa  
Chairman  
Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS)

---

---

**For media queries, please contact:**

The ASAS Secretariat  
Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS)  
Email: [asas@case.org.sg](mailto:asas@case.org.sg)  
Telephone: 6461 1888 / 6461 1840

**The Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS):**

The Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS) is an Advisory Council to the Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE). It was set up in 1976 to promote ethical advertising in Singapore and is the self-regulatory body of the advertising industry. The ASAS Council comprises representatives from advertisers, advertising agencies, government agencies, media owners and other supporting organisations. CASE provides secretarial support for ASAS.

For more information on ASAS, please visit: [www.asas.org.sg](http://www.asas.org.sg).

**The Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE)**

The Consumers Association of Singapore (CASE) is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation that is committed to protecting consumers' interest through information and education, and promoting an environment of fair and ethical trade practices. One of their key achievements is in lobbying for Consumer Protection (Fair Trading) Act (CPFTA), which came into effect on March 1, 2004.

For more information, please visit the CASE website at [www.case.org.sg](http://www.case.org.sg) or follow us on:

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/casesg](http://www.facebook.com/casesg)

Twitter: [www.twitter.com/casesg](http://www.twitter.com/casesg)

## Annex A: Feedback received in 2020

*The feedback includes requests for advertising advice and complaints that are either consumer-to-business or business-to-business in nature.*

Year	Total Feedback Received
2020	428

*Top 5 industries for feedback in 2020. The feedback includes requests for advertising advice and complaints that are consumer-to-business, government-to-business or business-to-business in nature.*

No.	Industry	Feedback	% of Total Feedback
1	Health	48	11.2%
2	Electrical and Electronics	35	8.2%
3	Telecommunications	34	7.9%
4	Food & Beverage	33	7.7%
5	Restaurants	31	7.2%