

ASCI marks World Social Media Day with webinar on the future of influencer marketing, challenges and what lies ahead

Mumbai, 1st July 2021: The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) marked June 30, World Social Media Day, with a webinar that comprised two panel discussions involving stalwarts from the Indian and global advertising industries as well as stakeholders from the influencer marketing space and the government.

Fresh from the launch of its influencer marketing guidelines, ASCI aimed to expand the discussion to what lies ahead for the sector, the impact created with the introduction of the guidelines, the challenges that have surfaced, how they can be overcome as well as regulatory necessities like monitoring and the plan that takes-off from here.

The first panel presented the content creator's perspective. It focused on the need to balance creativity in influencer marketing with responsibility and the need to protect consumer interest. It showcased what influencers thought of the evolution of this new branch of marketing, why creative engagement works despite the labelling of content that is promoted and what brands think of it.

The panel comprised actor-influencer Karan Tacker, ASCI Secretary-General Manisha Kapoor and Founding Partner of the Collective Artists Network and CEO of BigBang.Social Dhruv Chitgopekar.

Key takeaways:

- We are observing various crossovers coming live in various formats with respect to finance, cryptocurrency, etc
- We will see the commercialisation of content creators with the evolution of technology
- We are in the midst of a major transformation. There is a tectonic shift in advertising with the COVID-19 intensifying the momentum of audiences' and brands' preference for digital
- Advertising is shifting decisively to digital platforms because the lockdown has accelerated digital consumption
- People are spending a lot of time on social media, so brands must recognise their responsibility to be transparent about promotional content

- ASCI has found strong allies in brands and content creators since the launch of the guidelines. Not only are they embracing labelling norms, they are seeing the benefits of it

Supporting the new normal in influencer marketing, Tacker said: “It is a myth that creative engagement and responsibility can’t go hand in hand. As we celebrate World Social Media Day, it is important that we educate new influencers, who are joining the space and contributing to our growth, to employ fair practices. In terms of importance, it is nice to have discipline and everybody should be aware of the guidelines”

Kapoor added: Many companies, brands, influencers and agencies continue to engage with us for clarifications. Since the launch of the guidelines, we have observed a significant interest and belief from all stakeholders. Complaints against influencers and brands for misleading ads in the digital space have also started coming in. The good part is, that as soon as ASCI reaches out to those influencers, the ads are either taken down or corrected within hours.”

Chitgopekar said: “The power of Influence, as we call it, is totally a new era. The market will have its own push and pull as we evolve together. The new labelling framework has given birth to an active dialogue and we believe that to be the best part because it symbolises success and acceptance. This is just the beginning; the nuances will change as we move ahead in the journey and so will the whole system.”

The second panel centered on social media and governance. The panelists were a unique mix of Indian and global advertising veterans as well as a representative of the government. While ASCI Chairman Subhash Kamath provided the Indian perspective, Guy Parker, President of ICAS and Chief Executive of ASA, UK, offered the global experience. Guillaume Doki-Thonon, Founder-CEO of Reech, spoke about why monitoring for violations of influencer marketing norms was critical and how his organisation is helping ASCI do that in India. The government point of view came from Abhishek Singh, CEO of MyGov, President and CEO of the National e-Governance Division, and MD and CEO of the Digital India Corporation.

Key takeaways:

- Influencer marketing norms exist in many countries without any adverse impact on the engagement or creativity of content creators
- The common thread across all the guidance is to remain upfront and transparent with the content you create
- Technology now has the power to sort sponsored content from un-sponsored

- With the help of a machine learning algorithm, it can be detected whether brand-influencer partnership has been disclosed or not
- Influencers are becoming more creative with their ads, which underscores the need to constantly improve the algorithm
- Many brands and agencies have reached out to ASCI for advice or course correction before the campaign is executed
- This ASCI advisory isn't pre-approval of campaigns but to see whether they violate any norms
- The government is very keen on tapping into the expertise of influencers to raise creativity levels and engagement around its messages
- The government has collaborated with many well-known influencers to achieve more impact
- Social media in India should be used extensively to reach a larger audience and in different languages to establish stronger connections
- Awareness and communication have always been part of the government's outreach but, so far as social media is concerned, the government can target people better and bust myths of fake news
- A great example is the awareness campaign for COVID-19, which was very impactful because of the power of social media
- Here on, the use of social media will be more video- and audio-driven with regional languages at the forefront

Asserting that the government is very keen on associating with influencers to raise creativity levels and engagement, Singh said: "We are very happy to work with influencers because of the impact and the power they wield. We collaborate with several influencers to work on social media. In addition, the government promotes the use of regional languages and Indian social media apps to increase engagement."

Applauding the strides India has made, Parker said that influencer marketing norms exist in many countries and that there has been no impact on engagement or creativity. He added: "Influencer advertising has exploded in the past 10 years. Consumers shouldn't have to play detective to deduce the authenticity and status of the content. The need to keep the principles of advertising intact called for guidance across influencer markets. ASCI's guideline is a good example of high-quality guidance because it's easily understandable, practical and pragmatic. Globally, the same principle runs through all the guidance as a common thread, which is to be upfront with people about the content you are putting out."

Doki-Thonon, explaining the monitoring system Reech is setting up for Indian influencer marketing, said: “At the end of the day, the consumer will gain from transparency – that is now the norm of the influencer market, thus boosting the confidence of consumers. With the help of a machine learning algorithm, we can detect whether a partnership between an influencer and a brand has been disclosed or not. Influencers are becoming more creative with their ads, but the good thing is that the algorithm also learns and adapts constantly.”

The codification of the declaration of promotional content and labelling requirements are not only indicators of the maturity of Indian influencer marketing but also why self-regulation is critical for industries like advertising. Other stakeholders like brands are also modifying their marketing approach to build in greater safeguards for consumers.

ASCI.Social, a repository for everything about the influencer marketing guidelines as well as the home for a community of stakeholders, has taken off well. Not only are influencers visiting it for guidance, they are also taking the online pledge to employ only ethical practices. The platform is also a great forum for the exchange of ideas.

Kamath had the last word: “We have been focusing on bringing in more clarity in the digital space. We don’t want to just police the narrative, but help shape a more responsible one. There is a lot more that is coming up. We want to thank everyone who supported us. Ask questions, discuss, debate and join us on ASCI.Social.”

Later that evening, ASCI also participated in a Clubhouse discussion with nearly 200 creators, moderated by noted influencers Scherezade Shroff and Janice Sequeira, on how to be creative while also being responsible.

About The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI)

The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), established in 1985, is committed to the cause of self-regulation in advertising ensuring the protection of the interest of consumers. 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 and point of sale material etc. In January 2017, the Supreme Court of India in its judgement affirmed and recognized the self-regulatory mechanism as an effective pre-emptive step to statutory provisions in the sphere of advertising content regulation for TV and Radio in India. ASCI’s role has been acclaimed by various Government bodies including The Department of Consumer Affairs (DoCA), Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), Ministry of AYUSH as well as the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB). MIB issued an advisory for a scroller providing ASCI’s WhatsApp for Business number 77100 12345, to be carried by all TV broadcasters for consumers to register their grievance against objectionable advertisements. ASCI is a part of the Executive Committee of the International

Council on Ad Self-Regulation (ICAS). Among several awards bestowed by the European Advertising Standards Alliance (EASA), ASCI bagged a Gold Global Best Practice Award for the Mobile App “ASCIonline ” (2016). As well as a special recognition for its “Guidelines for Celebrities in Advertising” at the first-ever ‘Global Awards for Effective Advertising Self-Regulation’ hosted by the ICAS (2019). The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) also recently won two International Council for Advertising Self-Regulation (ICAS) awards, one each for the ‘Best Awareness Raising Initiative’ and in the ‘Special Category’. Also got a special mention in the ‘Best Sectoral Initiative’ category.

About BigBangSocial

A trusted marketplace for social storytellers with a pulse on all things pop-culture. A growing community that is trusted by global and Indian brands; by talent; and the audiences they nurture.

About Reech

Reech is an Influence Marketing company expert that has been working with the biggest brands since 2015, such as Coca-Cola, Carrefour, Spontex, Philips, Yves Rocher. With its support offer, Reech defines the strategy and operates the influence campaigns for the brands. Since 2020, Reech is selling Reech Influence Cloud, a solution that allows organizations to manage all of their influencer activities.

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