

ASCI and the Online Gaming Industry Unite to Protect Consumers against Offshore Betting ads

- Creation of a special monitoring cell

Mumbai, February 18, 2025: In a significant move to address the growing concerns over illegal betting and gambling advertisements of offshore entities, the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Federation of Indian Fantasy Sports (FIFS), the All India Gaming Federation (AIGF) and the E-Gaming Federation (EGF), with effect from January 2, 2025.

The MoU between ASCI and the online gaming industry federations establishes a framework to address these challenges through a special monitoring cell that will focus on screening and reporting offshore betting and gambling advertisements to the concerned ministries. The cell will also screen and process real-money gaming advertisements that are found to be in potential violation of the ASCI Code. The partnership aims to surface illegal ads and also strengthen compliance of the RMG industry.

Since the kickoff of the MoU in January 2025, ASCI has flagged 413 ads of offshore betting to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and processed 12 advertisements for potential violation of ASCI's RMG guidelines. Previously, ASCI flagged off 1336 ads in the period April 2023–March 24, to the Ministry of I&B. Based on this, the Ministry has taken action to block such ads and platforms. During the same period, 492 cases pertaining to Real Money Gaming were also taken up by ASCI.

Indian state laws prohibit gambling and offshore betting activities; making advertisements for these activities, illegal in these states. However, online real-money games (RMG) that require a predominance of skill, are permitted by most state laws, and their advertising is therefore allowed. Some offshore betting and gambling operators attempt to portray themselves as legally permitted gaming companies, necessitating the need to identify such advertisements and escalate the same to regulators. For the real-money gaming sector, ASCI's guidelines for "*Advertising of Online Gaming for Real Money Winnings*" needs advertisements to ensure that the content of such ads remains responsible and does not depict minors or represents winnings as a means of livelihood. In addition, these ads are required to carry disclaimers to inform consumers of the risks associated with such games.

Manisha Kapoor, CEO and Secretary General, ASCI, said: "*Indian consumers are exposed to numerous ads of offshore betting and gambling companies that have no accountability in India. Several Indian celebrities too have been a part of such advertisements. Since gambling ads are prohibited in most parts of the country, their*

large-scale presence is a breach of the law. ASCI would like to surface such advertising to the regulators for necessary action. It is also key that the gaming industry, whose advertising is permissible in India, remains compliant with the ASCI Code. We welcome the proactive initiative of the gaming associations of working with the self-regulator to create a special monitoring cell for the industry.”

Neil Castelino, CEO, Federation of Indian Fantasy Sports, said: “Members of FIFS have demonstrated their commitment and compliance to responsible advertising through implementation of the ASCI guidelines and FIFS Charter. We are further committed to adopting the global best standards in responsible advertising, and through this collaboration, we hope that Indian consumers are not exposed to illegal platforms in the guise of online gaming while promoting responsible advertising practices amongst the Indian RMG industry.”

Anuraag Saxena, CEO, E-Gaming Federation, said: “Indian citizens have been duped and scammed by unscrupulous operators for years. The nation suffers, so do consumers, so does the domestic industry. Which is why we at EGF have been pioneering responsible gaming, and mandatory audits of our gaming companies. The monitoring cell of ASCI will only turbo-boost our efforts. Together, we will uphold high ethical standards and create a safer, more trusted gaming landscape for all.”

Roland Landers, CEO, All India Gaming Federations, said: “As the oldest and largest industry federation, AIGF has been at the forefront of advocating for responsible gaming practices and addressing the menace of offshore and illegal betting and gambling. We remain steadfast in our mission to ensure a robust, transparent, and responsible gaming environment in India. By collaborating with ASCI and fellow industry federations, we aim to tackle the growing challenge of offshore gambling ads and non-compliant advertising practices. This MoU marks a pivotal step towards protecting consumers, fostering ethical advertising, and elevating the credibility of India’s online gaming sector. Together, we are dedicated to shaping a fair and sustainable ecosystem for all stakeholders.”

About the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI):

The ASCI, established in 1985, is committed to the cause of self-regulation in advertising, ensuring the protection of consumer interests. ASCI seeks to ensure that advertisements conform to its Code for Self-Regulation, which requires ads 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, the internet/website, product packaging, brochures, promotional material, point of sale material, etc. ASCI has collaboratively worked with various government bodies, including the Department of Consumer Affairs (DoCA), the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), the Ministry of AYUSH, and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB). In

August 2023, the ASCI Academy, a flagship program of ASCI, was launched to build the capacity of all stakeholders to create responsible and progressive advertising. ASCI Academy aims to raise standards of advertising content through training, education, outreach, and research on the preventive aspects of advertising self-regulation.

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