# UK MPs launch inquiry into anti-sunscreen influencers spreading health risks



Social media influencers known for promoting anti-sunscreen messages and endorsing potentially harmful tanning products are facing increased scrutiny from Members of Parliament (MPs) in the UK. A parliamentary inquiry is poised to delve into the activities of TikTok and Instagram personalities who frequently engage in paid promotions while neglecting to disclose the associated health risks. This inquiry emerges in response to a rising anti-sunscreen rhetoric proliferating on platforms like TikTok, where viral posts have controversially likened sun protection to "rubbing cancer into your skin."

Labour MP Carolyn Harris, who chairs the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Beauty and Wellbeing, emphasised the importance of public awareness regarding the dangers of UV radiation, underscoring that the push for a crackdown aims to educate the public on the dangers of excessive sun exposure. "It is vital that the public understands the dangers of UV, and the risks they are taking to get a tan," Harris stated. The inquiry will not only scrutinise misleading claims made by influencers but also address how to effectively inform the public to prevent a potential health crisis.

The British Beauty Council supports this initiative, highlighting that misinformation and disinformation abound across various media platforms with scant accountability or recourse. The inquiry seeks to empower the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) with the authority necessary to confront the "dangerous" narratives propagated by certain influencers, a sentiment echoed by various health experts who caution against the DIY sunscreen recipes circulating online, which may fail to provide adequate protection against harmful UV rays.

In an age where influencer marketing significantly shapes consumer behaviour, concerns extend beyond the beauty industry into financial realms. The UK's Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) has recently issued warnings to financial influencers to comply with advertising rules when promoting financial products. With the emergence of 'finfluencers'—social media personalities who offer financial advice—there is a strong impetus to ensure that promotions are clear and that risks are adequately communicated.

The FCA's rigorous scrutiny has resulted in the removal of approximately 10,000 misleading adverts in the previous year alone. This proactive approach reflects a growing recognition of the influencer's role in consumer decision-making, particularly among younger demographics who increasingly trust their guidance. Non-compliance with these regulations can lead to severe penalties, including criminal prosecution, reinforcing the necessity for influencers to act responsibly.

In tandem with the inquiry into anti-sunscreen narratives, the ASA is ramping up its efforts to hold influencers accountable for misleading advertising. Reports indicate that the watchdog has begun to name and shame influencers who consistently breach advertising guidelines, particularly regarding transparency in paid promotions. Chief Executive of the ASA, Orla Twomey, highlighted the simple yet crucial requirement for influencers to disclose commercial content clearly, asserting that this transparency is vital for maintaining audience trust.

With the potential health risks linked to unregulated influencer messages growing increasingly urgent, the UK government and its regulatory bodies are facing a moment of reckoning. Ensuring that consumers are protected from misinformation, whether it be about skincare or financial products, has become a pressing priority. The inquiry and subsequent regulatory responses serve as critical reminders of the responsibility borne by those who wield influence over vast online audiences, necessitating both ethical standards and protective measures to safeguard public health and informed decision-making.

As this narrative unfolds, it will be essential to monitor the developments arising from the proposed parliamentary inquiry, as well as the wider implications for social media regulation across all sectors, presenting a compelling case for sharper guidelines and increased accountability in the influencer marketing landscape.

### Reference Map:

1. Paragraphs 1-3: Lead Article
2. Paragraphs 4-5: Related Article 2
3. Paragraphs 6-7: Related Articles 3 and 4
4. Paragraph 8: Related Articles 5 and 6

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14722893/MPs-online-personalities-anti-suncream-misinformation-TikTok.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/664b0879-c019-4401-b22a-0e6c76d57d06> - The UK's Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) has issued a warning to social media influencers, commonly referred to as 'finfluencers,' about adhering to advertising rules when promoting financial products and services. Failure to comply could lead to criminal prosecution, including up to two years in prison and an unlimited fine. The rules are part of the consumer duty regulations introduced last year, aimed at ensuring that financial promotions are accurate and allow consumers to make informed decisions. The FCA emphasized that firms are responsible for ensuring their promotions meet regulatory standards and that influencers communicate appropriately with their followers. The regulator has increased its scrutiny of financial promotions, removing 10,000 misleading adverts last year. The FCA is particularly concerned about the growing influence of social media on financial decisions, with a significant proportion of young adults trusting finfluencers' advice. The consumer duty also encompasses various financial products, including savings rates offered by banks and high charges by financial advice firms. The FCA will begin to name firms under investigation more frequently to enhance market deterrence.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/britains-financial-watchdog-warns-social-media-influencers-2024-03-26/> - Britain's financial watchdog set out guidelines on Tuesday to stop misleading adverts on social media, and warned 'influencers' that promoting a financial product without regulatory approval could be a criminal office. The Financial Conduct Authority set out how adverts must be fair, clear and not misleading by including risk warnings as social media becomes a central ... . Influencers or people paid to promote ... in a statement. 'Consumers need to be alert to ... ,' the Financial Conduct Authority said in ... . It also warned financial firms, saying ... . 'Firms need to consider whether ... ,' the FCA said. Scrutiny of financial promotions has been ... .
4. <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/2024/11/07/rule-breaking-influencers-will-be-named-and-shamed-if-they-do-not-comply-with-guidelines-asai-warns/> - Influencers who persistently breach guidelines on commercial content will be named and shamed and could face fines, the advertising watchdog has warned. The Advertising Standards Authority has written to 150 influencers who have consistently been in breach of guidelines introduced a year ago in relation to commercial content. The authority has had thousands of complaints from the public with 75 per cent being the absence of a label or hashtag stating that the content is commercial. Some 98 per cent of posts complained about are on Instagram. Clothing, food and drink and skincare were the categories that attracted the most complaints. Speaking at a webinar on social media influencers, ASA chief executive Orla Twomey said the guidelines are not complicated and involve using the hashtag #ad and also include, in some cases, #af (affiliated with a product) or #gifted if showcasing commercial content. It must also be included at the beginning of every post and it must be clearly visible. She said the ASA will name persistent offenders with a view to hurting both the reputation of the influencer and the products they are advertising. Given the profiles of many influencers, she anticipated a lot of media attention for transgressors. 'We will show audiences that these are the influencers who are not being honest with you when they are advertising products. It isn’t rocket science,' she said. 'It’s your reputation that is on the line if you are honest and transparent. Audiences are very clear themselves. They know when there is something a bit off.'
5. <https://www.marketingweek.com/asa-sanctions-influencers/> - The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is taking out Instagram ads exposing six rule-breaking influencers who have consistently failed to disclose ads on their own accounts, despite explicit warnings. The regulatory body’s rules state that any advertising on social media must be clearly signposted and labelled as such to protect consumers. This can be achieved with a label such as ‘#ad’ within the image or caption. In June 2021, the ASA set up a webpage naming and shaming influencers who were failing to abide by the rules. Francesca Allen, Jess Gale, Eve Gale, Belle Hassan, Jodie Marsh and Anna Vakili were among those influencers added to the site. As all six have failed the improve disclosure of their ads, the ASA is now escalating its sanctions against them. The ASA’s ads read: '[Name] has been sanctioned by the UK’s ad regulator for not declaring ads on this platform. Be aware that products and services recommended or featured by this influencer may have been paid for by those brands. Our non-compliant social media influencer page at asa.org.uk is regularly updated to inform consumers of those who break these rules.' Further sanctions are also being considered, including working with social media platforms to have the content of non-compliant influencers removed, or referring influencers to statutory bodies such as Trading Standards for consideration of statutory action, including possible fines. 'For the minority of influencers that repeatedly fail to disclose their paid-for posts, it’s important their social media followers are told,' explains the ASA’s director of advertising policy and practice, Shahriar Coupal. 'In a new front of enforcement activity, we’re using targeted ads to highlight the breaches of six social media personalities to the very same audience they’re seeking to influence. When we see the necessary changes to their disclosure practices, we’ll call off the ads. But, where non-compliance persists, we’ll look to more direct forms of enforcement.'
6. <https://www.asa.org.uk/news/rebalancing-toward-proactive-ad-regulation-for-the-digital-era.html> - Our Annual Report 2021, published today, highlights the innovative and world-leading ways in which we have harnessed technology, in line with our strategy, to tackle misleading and irresponsible ads online. Coinciding with the report, we are today also announcing how our use of artificial intelligence (AI) is revolutionising and enhancing our monitoring capabilities to help identify and take enforcement action against influencers who fail to disclose when their posts are ads. The Report also includes: For the first time, a breakdown of complaints by nation, providing us with a clearer picture of national differences alongside the overall complaint totals. The key themes and issues – from environmental claims, body image, harmful racial and ethnic stereotypes and cryptoasset advertising, to age-restricted ads seen by children – that we’re shining a regulatory spotlight on to ensure the public is protected. Details of our Intermediary and Platform Principles Pilot, a world first involving some of the largest companies in the digital advertising supply chain, that extends the ASA’s role online and aims to improve transparency and widen accountability in online advertising. Facts and figures including the record number of complaints we received last year, the ad campaigns complained about and the media in which they appeared.