

Public perceive alcohol adverts breach regulatory code, research finds

8 May 2014, by Alison Barbuti

A majority of the UK general public perceive alcohol adverts to breach the Advertising Standards Authority's Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP) Code suggesting that the current regulatory system for UK television is inadequate, research from The University of Manchester shows.

Researchers surveyed 373 adults, aged 18-74 years, showing them one of seven [adverts](#) that had been broadcast in the previous month on leading commercial television channels.

Overall 75 per cent of the participants rated the adverts as breaching at least one rule from the BCAP Code rules in all seven adverts, the study published in the journal *Alcohol and Alcoholism*.

Rules about alcohol being presented as contributing to popularity or confidence, and implying that alcohol is capable of changing mood, physical condition or as nourishment were seen as being breached by over 50 per cent.

Professor David French, who led the research, said: "Previous research in the US and Australia has found non-industry experts perceived television adverts to be in breach of their country's code. We wanted to find out whether this was also the case in the UK.

"Overall we found three in four participants perceived the adverts to breach at least one alcohol-specific rule in the BCAP Code."

Around £100million is spent on television adverts for alcohol each year with advertisers arguing these promote brand loyalty but don't influence the amount of alcohol that people drink.

But previous studies have found that the greater volume of [alcohol advertising](#) that young people are exposed to, the earlier they start drinking and the more frequently and heavily they drink.

Over half of participants perceived breaches of the rules which prohibit advertisements from implying that alcohol can contribute to popularity or confidence or that it was capable of changing mood, [physical condition](#) or behaviour.

The Manchester team say the sample of people questioned, at the city's main railway station, was representative of the adult population (aged 18-74 years) in terms of age and gender, but might have under-represented people from rural locations, low socio-economic groups and ethnic minorities. Despite these limitations, which the team argues future research should address, the results suggested a need to review the current code.

Professor French added: "Our results suggest that the UK alcohol and advertising industries design advertisements do not appear to comply with the letter or the spirit of the BCAP code.

"Many adverts allude to themes such as youth culture, immoderation and social and sexual success, although many may not explicitly show them.

"The results of the present analysis, along with the comparatively small number of breaches judged by the ASA, indicate that co-regulation of UK television [alcohol](#) adverts is ineffective and requires further consideration.

"It also suggests that only a minuscule proportion of members of the public who perceive adverts as containing elements that breach the BCAP Code actually report them."

More information: The paper entitled: "Do UK television advertisements abide by the Code of Broadcast Advertising rules regarding the portrayal of alcohol?" (Rebecca Searle; Daisy Alston and David P. French) has been published in the *Journal Alcohol and Alcoholism*.

Provided by University of Manchester

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