


ALCOHOL **DRUG FINDINGS** *Research abstract*

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▶ [Do UK television alcohol advertisements abide by the code of broadcast advertising rules regarding the portrayal of alcohol?](#)

Searle, R., Alston, D., French, D.P.

Alcohol and Alcoholism: 2014, 49 (4), 472–478.

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Three in four members of the UK general public perceive television alcohol adverts to be in breach of advertising standards, a finding which could have implications for the current independent review body system.

SUMMARY The Advertising Standards Authority Code of Broadcast Advertising (BCAP) code provides a general principle and 16 rules to prevent adverts implying, condoning or encouraging excessive, irresponsible or antisocial drinking. The aim of this study was to assess the extent to which members of the UK general public perceive television alcohol advertisements to comply with the code.

373 adults (aged 18–74 years) were recruited at Manchester Piccadilly train station between 8:00 and 19:00 hours on six weekdays. They were selected to be representative of the general population in terms of age and gender. Participants were shown one of seven advertisements that had been broadcast in the previous month on the two leading commercial television channels, and then asked to complete a questionnaire with 40 statements representing the code rules.

Breaches of the code rules were reported against all seven advertisements, and 75% of participants perceived that advertisements breached at least one rule. There was significant variation (from 49% to 91%) across advertisements in the proportion of participants who perceived them to breach at least one rule. Rates of perceived breaches were highest for the rules “must not imply that alcohol can contribute to popularity or confidence nor imply that alcohol can enhance personal qualities” (52% of participants) and “must not imply that alcohol has therapeutic qualities ... capable of changing mood, physical condition or behaviour or as nourishment” (51% of participants). In contrast, the rule “must not link alcohol to illicit drugs” was rated as breached by only 1% of participants.

This study was the first to investigate compliance of television alcohol advertisements with the code from the perspective of the UK general public. The high proportion of perceived breaches indicates that the current regulatory system, may not be acknowledging the potential for counterproductive effects that members of the public see in advertisements. Further research could explore the feasibility of involving members of the public in the formal regulation of UK television alcohol advertisements.

 **FINDINGS COMMENTARY** The authors ensured that the age and gender demographics of the sample corresponded with the UK general population. However, a number of other features of the study (including the response rate of just 39%) suggest that the sample may not be that *typical*. Ethnic minority participants were under-represented in the sample, comprising only 6% of all participants, compared with 18% of the UK population. Due to the site of data collection (a metropolitan train station during the day) it is also likely that people from rural areas or of low socioeconomic status were under-represented. Though participant characteristics may affect perceptions of breaches of the code, the authors argued that “the biases in representativeness would have to be very large, and the perceptions of under-represented groups very

different from those of included participants” in order to change the overall conclusion of the study that a high proportion of members of the public perceive television advertisements to be in breach of advertising standards.

This draft entry is currently subject to consultation and correction by the study authors and other experts.

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