

# Booze ads designed to keep you laughing all the way to the bottle shop

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Credit: CC0 Public Domain

'Get them laughing to get them drinking' seems to be the motto of the alcohol industry according to an analysis of alcohol ads displayed across a range of media types in Australia.

The review of over 600 alcohol ads that were the subject of complaints found that humour was the most commonly used vehicle to sell the drinking message.

Lead author Professor Simone Pettigrew, Head of Food Policy at The George Institute for Global Health, said the self-regulatory alcohol advertising codes in Australia were meant to ensure that alcohol promotion meets community standards, especially in relation to minimising the exposure of children and [young people](#).

"Our analysis of the methods used by the alcohol industry to push its products has really exposed the regulatory loopholes in advertising content and placement that are being exploited to attract a younger audience," she said.

The analysis published in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, which aimed to identify patterns in the use of particular themes in alcohol advertising across different types of media, found:

- Over half of the ads featured themes that are known to appeal to young people or encourage risky drinking—these themes included humour, value for money, sports, and friendship.
- Overall, humour was the most common theme (present in 18% of ads), followed by value for money (14%), sports (14%), and bulk purchases (10%).
- Humour often co-occurred with other themes, including sexual attraction, mateship, manliness, and partying.

"We found TV ads were most likely to contain multiple themes, potentially because video gives marketers more time to be creative. This means we not only need strong regulations of alcohol advertising on TV, but we need controls on other platforms that use video, like social media," added Prof Pettigrew.

A further analysis of the ads published in the *International Journal of Drug Policy* found that those promoting alcohol via sponsorships were most likely to breach voluntary regulatory code provisions that attempt to protect youth (26%), followed by ads shown online (18%) and via traditional media such as television and radio (18%).

Co-author Julia Stafford, Alcohol Program Manager at Cancer Council WA, said it was concerning that alcohol ads seen outdoors and online made up the largest proportion of ads analysed.

"There are almost no rules restricting where alcohol ads can be placed outdoors, and the controls on digital alcohol marketing are very weak. It seems Australian kids are being surrounded by alcohol promotions, whether they're playing outside or online," she said.

The research team concluded that more effective restrictions are required to address current alcohol advertising practices, with a particular focus on the placement of ads including through sponsorship and online, as well as the use of themes that are particularly attractive to young people.

"Regulation of alcohol advertising in Australia needs to be encompassed within a mandatory advertising code that is appropriately enforced. This means regulations developed and implemented independent of the alcohol and advertising industries," added Prof Pettigrew.

"Sport has started returning to our TV screens, meaning Australian kids are once again being exposed to endless promotions for alcohol. Now more than ever, governments need to act on the calls to end alcohol advertising in sport."

## **Background**

Harmful alcohol use in Australia is a major health issue, associated with increased risk of injury, chronic diseases including alcohol-related cancers, and premature death. One in six Australians consume alcohol at levels placing them at lifetime risk of a related disease or injury, and one in four at levels placing them at risk of harm on a single occasion, at least monthly.

Over a third of drug treatment episodes in 2017–18 were primarily for alcohol, making it the most commonly treated drug-related health issue in Australia.

Alcohol advertising in Australia is currently self-regulated by the alcohol and advertising industries through the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code Scheme.

The Alcohol Advertising Review Board (AARB) is an [alcohol advertising](#) complaint review service established by public health groups in Australia. It accepts and reviews complaints from the Australian community about concerning [alcohol advertising](#). The sample of 628 [alcohol ads](#) in these studies had been the subject of complaints to the AARB over five years.

Provided by George Institute for Global Health

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