

“A DRINK THAT MAKES YOU FEEL HAPPIER, RELAXED AND LOVING”: YOUNG PEOPLE’S PERCEPTIONS OF ALCOHOL ADVERTISING ON FACEBOOK

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Introduction and Aims: Studies have identified Facebook as a route for advertising alcohol to young people, including advertisements that potentially breach the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC). Young people may interpret advertising messages differently to adults and trained researchers; in this study we used receiver-oriented message analysis to explore young people’s perceptions of Facebook alcohol advertisements.

Design and Methods: An online cross-sectional survey was conducted with 172 Australians aged 16-29 years, recruited through online advertising. A collection of images were compiled from six popular alcohol brand’s Australian Facebook pages. Respondents were asked to describe the advertisement’s main message in an open-ended question, and then answered a series of closed-ended questions on their perceptions of the advertisements relating to items prohibited by ABAC.

Results: Open-ended responses most commonly indicated that the main message of the advertisement was related to social success; “Make you more sociable” “it’s a good way to have a good time and relax and impress people.” In closed-ended questions respondents perceived advertisements to imply that alcohol facilitated; relaxation (67%), improved mood (65%), social success (57%), confidence (49%), sexual attractiveness (33%), professional success (17%), and sporting success (16%).

Discussion and Conclusions: Through the use of receiver-oriented message analysis we found that young people identified the main theme of alcohol advertising on Facebook to be related to success, particularly social success, and a significant change in mood. The interpretations of Facebook alcohol advertising by young people suggest breaches of multiple of the ABAC guidelines.

Implications for Practice or Policy: This research provides further evidence for the need to strengthen the enforcement and application of the ABAC and social media alcohol advertising policies.

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