

Alcohol advertising has little effect on overall consumption, study finds

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Credit: Kevin Casper/public domain

Despite alcohol advertising facing increasing regulatory pressure in the U.S. and abroad, new research from The University of Texas at Austin shows that advertising has little if any effect on overall alcohol consumption.

In a study published March 23, 2015 by the *International Journal of Advertising*, researchers have found that there is either no relationship or a weak one between alcohol advertising and total [consumption](#) of beer, wine and liquor. However, they found that advertising may be related to consumers' choice of brands or categories of alcohol beverages.

Professor Gary Wilcox, Stan Richards School of Advertising and Public Relations.

The study, "Beer, Wine or Spirits? Advertising's Impacts on Four Decades of Category Sales," was authored by Gary Wilcox, professor in the Stan Richards School of Advertising and Public Relations; and Eun Yeon Kang and Lindsay Chilek, both Ph.D. candidates in the Richards School.

Researchers studied per capita sales of alcohol beverages in the U.S. from 1971 to 2011. During this time, they found that per-capita consumption remained relatively constant, with changes only occurring only between the three categories of alcohol.

The study also found that alcohol advertising media expenditures for all alcoholic beverages have increased more than 400 percent since 1971. Researchers concluded based on theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence that total alcohol advertising does not affect overall alcohol consumption.

"Since the overall alcohol market is not growing, competition for a greater share of that market is intense and constant," Wilcox said.

"Brands try to increase their revenue through stronger, more innovative marketing efforts like advertising. For example, liquor brands that took advantage of the recent ability to advertise in the electronic media saw market share gains associated with their ad spending."

Restricting or banning alcohol advertising comes at a time when total per-capita consumption of alcohol in the U.S. has remained fairly constant during the past 40 years. Placing bans on alcohol advertising in correlation with consumption has provided conflicting results. Several cities in the U.S. have recently passed bans on alcohol advertising. Los Angeles and Philadelphia now prohibit alcohol advertising on municipal property, and San Francisco prohibits alcohol advertising on [public](#) transportation.

Internationally, Turkey prohibits alcohol advertising and even the sale of alcoholic beverages in certain situations. In 2013, Russia banned alcohol advertising on TV, radio, the Web, public transportation and billboards and all print media.

Researchers suggest alternatives to banning [alcohol advertisements](#) might be to inform the public about the problems of [alcohol abuse](#) and misuse.

"Although criticisms of alcohol advertising and promotional methods abound, remedies that would restrict or overly regulate such communication activities usually do not have the desired effect of reducing consumption," Wilcox said. "Instead, a more logical alternative would be to communicate as much information as possible to the public about the subject and encourage all viewpoints so our society makes an autonomous, rational choice regarding alcohol consumption."

More information: "Beer, wine, or spirits? Advertising's impact on four decades of category sales." [DOI: 10.1080/02650487.2015.1019961](https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2015.1019961)

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