

YouTube videos promote positive associations with alcohol use

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"F**k it! Let's get to drinking - poison our livers!" According to researchers at the UK Centre for Tobacco and Alcohol Studies, lyrics such as these in YouTube music videos may harmfully influence adolescents in Britain. Their study is published in Springer's *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*.

The new research is an extension of previous work which found that UK teenagers were heavily exposed to images of [alcohol](#) and tobacco in YouTube music, effectively glamourising the habits and promoting underage drinking and smoking.

Now the researchers have specifically studied the portrayal of [alcohol content](#) in popular YouTube music videos, analysing song lyrics and visual imagery in 49 UK Top 40 videos previously found to contain alcohol content.

They found that content involving alcohol was also associated with sexualised imagery or lyrics and the objectification of women, and that alcohol was linked to personal image, lifestyle and sociability. Some videos also showed encouragement of excessive drinking including those with branded alcohol, with no negative consequences to the drinker shown.

Psychologist Dr Joanne Cranwell, from the UKCTS, based at The University of Nottingham and lead author of the study said: "Adolescent alcohol consumption, including binge drinking, is a significant health

problem in the UK. Among young people particularly it is also linked to criminal behaviour, unprotected sex, progression to illegal drug use and is a risk factor for [alcohol dependence](#) in later life. In the UK 11 percent of 15-16 year olds out of a sample of 2,000 had had sex under the influence of alcohol and regretted it and almost 10 percent of boys and 12 percent of girls reported having unsafe sex after drinking.

"We know that alcohol imagery and references in advertising, films, TV and music videos are a risk factor for uptake of drinking in young people but we wanted to pin down the exact extent and type of content in the Official Singles Chart UK Top 40 and the Vodafone Big Top 40 music chart to explore the true extent to which alcohol is being portrayed and whether UK alcohol industry advertising codes of practice are being violated."

The study also found that the overt use of celebrity endorsement or brand ambassadors of [alcohol products](#) in music videos appears to contravene voluntary codes of practice. The music artists involved in this direct promotion in the video sample include Robin Thicke, who is described as a 'brand ambassador' for Remy Martin, Jay Z, who is a 'brand ambassador' for D'USSE and Icona Pop who are the 'brand face' of Absolut Tune.

The UK Centre for Tobacco and Alcohol Studies is calling for new measures to try to curb the inclusion of smoking and drinking content in YouTube [music videos](#), which unlike TV and film, are not classified according to age suitability. Artists and music video producers should change their policy of effectively glamourising and normalising excessive drinking and linking it with sexual attractiveness and luxury lifestyle. The research claims several alcohol companies have adopted marketing strategies that contravene their own advertising codes of practice and calls for the music industry to implement new standards to reduce the use of branded and generic alcohol content in videos.

The researchers say the UK Department of Health's Public Health Responsibility Deal Alcohol Network is failing in its remit to police the YouTube music industry, particularly in tackling videos that use alcohol brands in content that is not developed, sponsored or distributed by the companies themselves.

More information: Jo Cranwell et al, "F*ck It! Let's Get to Drinking—Poison our Livers!": a Thematic Analysis of Alcohol Content in Contemporary YouTube MusicVideos, *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine* (2016). [DOI: 10.1007/s12529-016-9578-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12529-016-9578-3)

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