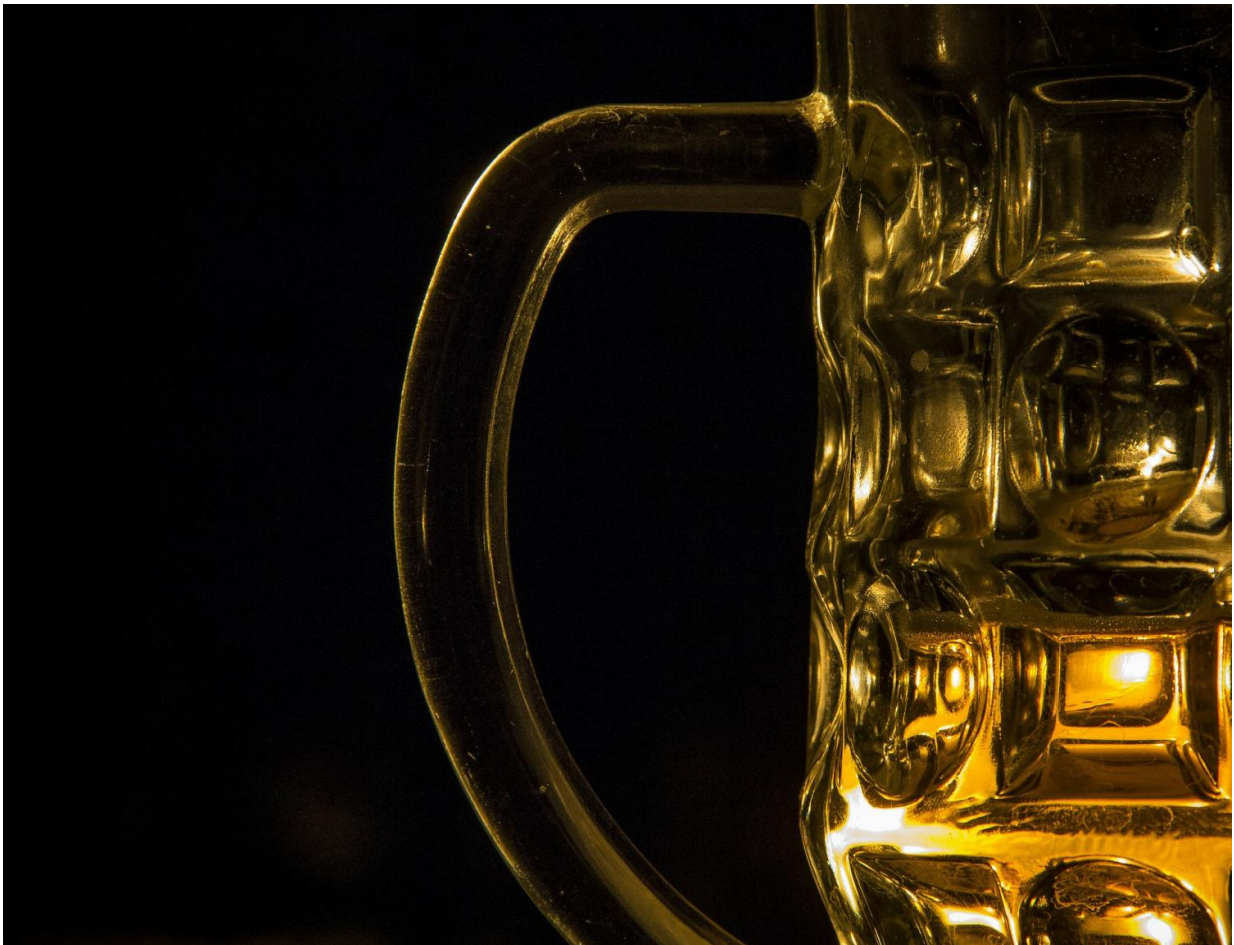


# Marketing of lower strength alcohol products may increase drinking

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Wines and beers with lower alcohol content aren't being actively

marketed as alternatives to regular strength alcohol products and thus may not be promoting healthier drinking habits in consumers, according to a study published in the open access journal *BMC Public Health*.

A research team led by the University of Cambridge analyzed the marketing messages on producers' and retailers' websites for lower and regular strength wines and beers sold online by the four main supermarkets in the UK (Tesco, ASDA, Sainsbury's, Morrisons).

The authors found that lower strength wines were more likely to be marketed as suitable for consumption on any occasion or every day, with messages describing them as "lunchtime treats" or "perfect for all occasions". Lower strength [beer](#) was described as suitable for consumption on additional occasions to regular strength products including sports events ("to refresh thirsty sportsmen and women"). Marketing for lower strength wines and beers was also more likely to include text or images associated with health, information about calorie and carbohydrate content, and images of fruit.

Dr Milica Vasiljevic, corresponding author of the study said: "Increased availability of lower strength [alcohol](#) products has the potential to reduce alcohol consumption if consumers select these products instead of ones with higher [alcohol content](#). If not, they may simply increase the number of occasions on which people drink alcohol."

"Our findings suggest that products containing less alcohol than regular strength wines and beers may be being marketed to replace soft drinks rather than products with higher alcohol content. Marketing lower strength alcohol wine and beer as being healthier than regular strength products and suitable for all occasions may paradoxically encourage greater alcohol consumption. Thus, measures apparently intended to benefit public health, such as the wider availability of lower alcohol products may in fact benefit industry to the detriment of health."

The authors compared messages marketing lower strength wines and beers (across 86 web pages marketing 41 lower strength wines and 48 web pages marketing 16 lower strength beers) with messages marketing comparable regular strength wines and beers (across 86 web pages marketing regular strength wines and 48 web pages marketing regular strength beers). Low strength alcohol products were defined as containing less than 1.2% alcohol, lower strength alcohol products as containing less than 8.5% for [wine](#) and 2.8% for beer, and regular strength products as wines above 8.5% and beers above 2.8% alcohol by volume (ABV) - the standard measure of how much alcohol is contained in a given volume of an alcoholic drink.

The marketing messages analyzed by the authors had four themes: occasions, health-related, alcohol content and taste. Of these, messages about occasions, alcohol content and health were more often present for lower strength alcohol products than for regular strength products. No messages about drinking less or alcohol associated harms were identified.

The authors caution that because they only considered lower strength wines and beers found on the websites of the four main UK supermarkets, the extent to which their findings can be generalized outside of these marketing platforms - for example to billboards or social media - is limited.

Dr Vasiljevic said: "Future studies could usefully extend the present findings by including other marketing platforms, and going beyond the UK context to examine the marketing messages associated with lower and regular strength wines and beers in other countries."

**More information:** Milica Vasiljevic et al, Marketing messages accompanying online selling of low/er and regular strength wine and beer products in the UK: a content analysis, *BMC Public Health* (2018).

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