

New York Magazine

Science of Us

How Alcohol Ads Affect Teens



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Underage drinking, particularly underage drinking done to excess, causes a [great deal of harm](#) (PDF), so researchers are always looking for ways to better understand it. One under-studied aspect of it has to do with advertising: To what extent are underage drinkers' choices affected by advertising? That's what a [new study](#) in *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse* set out to discover.

The authors, led by Dr. Michael Siegel of Boston University, used advertising data to measure the extent to which underage kids were exposed to alcohol ads by different brands in 2011–2012, and

then examined whether there was a correlation with their actual consumption habits, as reported in surveys. As it turns out, there was: "Underage youth were more than five times more likely to consume brands that advertise on national television and 36% more likely to consume brands that advertise in national magazines."

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Now, the authors themselves point out that there are some significant limitations to their study — it's just fundamentally *hard* to draw direct lines between advertising and behavior on such a large scale, since there are so many potentially hidden variables. They also note that their sole focus on print and TV advertising could be limiting, but explain that they didn't have much of a choice since "there is currently no source that tracks youth exposure to brand-specific alcohol advertising through social media or the internet," which is a bit surprising.

But this is still a useful data point in the ongoing debate about how advertising affects kids — a subject Science of Us will soon be tackling as part of our [ongoing series](#) about the science of advertising.

[The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse](#)