



A content analysis of alcohol imagery in season 2 of *The Kardashians*

Alexander B. Barker¹ · Charlotte L. Scott¹ · Emma E. Sharpe¹

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Abstract

Aim The aim of the current study was to quantify the amount of alcohol content and branding in season 2 of the reality TV show *The Kardashians*.

Subject and methods Content analysis of alcohol content in all 10 episodes of season 2 of *The Kardashians* was undertaken, and alcohol content measured using 1-minute interval coding. The presence of alcohol in the following four categories was noted: (1) actual use, (2) implied use, (3) other alcohol reference, and (4) brand appearance.

Results Alcohol content was seen across all 10 episodes. Actual alcohol use was seen in six episodes across 13 intervals. Implied alcohol use was seen in all 10 episodes across 74 intervals. Alcohol branding was seen in six episodes, across 23 intervals. The Tequila brand 818, owned by Kendall Jenner, was seen 65 times across 17 intervals.

Conclusion The current study shows that alcohol content was highly prevalent in season 2 of *The Kardashians*. This programme was popular on the Disney+ streaming platform and likely resulted in widespread population exposure to alcohol content and branding, particularly to a brand owned by Kendall Jenner. Current rules and regulations are not sufficient to protect against exposure to this potentially harmful content.

Keywords Alcohol · Advertising · Media · Marketing

Introduction

Exposure to alcohol adverts or other audio-visual content (AVC) in the media is associated with alcohol initiation and subsequent use by adolescents (Anderson et al. 2009; Smith and Foxcroft 2009; Hanewinkel et al. 2012; Chang et al. 2016) and adults, especially those with/at risk of an alcohol use disorder or those in recovery (Alcohol Focus Scotland 2022).

Reality TV programmes are an effective medium for advertising and promotion to the young audiences they are popular with, and have a history of being used in this way (Deery 2004). This has included the promotion of unhealthy commodities such as the use of Lucky Strike cigarettes in *Love Island* (Barker et al. 2018) or Smirnoff Vodka in *Geordie Shore* (Lowe et al. 2018). Content analyses in this area have shown how the alcohol industry may use these programmes to promote their products (Barker et al. 2018) and bypass international advertising regulations (World Health

Organization 2022). Highlighting this alcohol industry tactic has led to the removal of this content from future iterations of these programmes (Barker et al. 2023), thus having a positive impact on public health.

According to social learning theory (Bandura 1977), people will imitate the behaviours of influential others, positing the idea that reality TV influences peoples' behaviours based on what they see on screen (Stefanone and Lackaff 2009). In this way, reality TV programmes could be considered a major driver of unhealthy behaviours among their viewership.

Reality TV programmes have been shown to contain a large amount of alcohol content and branding (Barker et al. 2023). While *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* has been previously explored (Barker et al. 2023), season 2 of the new iteration of the show, *The Kardashians*, has received media attention due to the amount of alcohol promotion occurring in the show, with viewers saying 'it's just constant ads and product placement'. This is in particular with regard to family member Kendall Jenner's tequila brand, 818 (Buzz-Feed 2022). The programme follows the daily lives of the Kardashian family as they navigate 'motherhood, relationships and career goals', with an international age rating of

✉ Alexander B. Barker
a.barker@derby.ac.uk

¹ University of Derby, Kedleston Road, Derby DE22 1GB, UK

16 (Internet Movie Database 2024). Season 2 of *The Kardashians* was made available to stream via Disney+ in late 2022, allowing the programme to be viewed internationally (despite country-specific alcohol regulations) and resulting in potential cross-border promotion of the 818 alcohol brand.

In the UK, the Disney+ streaming service is popular with 23% of subscribing homes (Ofcom 2022). Similar to traditional broadcast TV, Ofcom, the independent broadcast regulator, regulates Disney+ (Ofcom 2022). The Ofcom Broadcasting Code (Ofcom 2017) protects under-18s by restricting depictions of alcohol use in programmes made for children, and discouraging the glamorisation of alcohol use in programmes likely to be widely seen, heard, or accessed by children. While the broadcasting code prevents paid-for alcohol product placement, brands can still appear in programmes if they are considered 'editorially justified' and were acquired at no significant value, with providers not being paid for inclusion of the product (Ofcom 2021, 2017). We have previously demonstrated that young people view the show *Keeping up with the Kardashians*; it delivered approximately 2.5 million alcohol impressions to under-16s in the UK (Barker et al. 2023), and it is likely that young viewers will also watch the present iteration. Furthermore, we have suggested that alcohol producers may be using reality TV programmes to circumvent the Ofcom Broadcasting Code by having their products featured as props in programmes, therefore receiving brand exposure (Barker et al. 2023). This is especially pertinent, considering that the World Health Organization considers identifying and restricting cross-border alcohol promotion (World Health Organization 2022) and promoting a global and comprehensive approach to regulating alcohol advertising a goal of its European framework for action on alcohol (World Health Organization 2022). As the programme is broadcast worldwide, it is important to identify alcohol content and marketing within this programme. Therefore, the aim of the current study was to explore the amount of alcohol content and branding in season 2 of the reality TV show *The Kardashians*.

Method

We chose to include all 10 episodes of *The Kardashians* season 2 which were released to view weekly via the streaming platform Disney+ between September and November 2022. Episode run times ranged from 38 to 48 minutes, with an average run time of 44 minutes. We viewed all episodes and measured alcohol content using 1-minute interval coding, a semi-quantitative method, which involved coding every episode for the presence of alcohol in four categories (Barker et al. 2019, 2020, 2023):

1. **Actual use:** Use of alcohol on screen by any character.
2. **Implied use:** Any inferred alcohol use without actually being seen on screen. This could include verbal references to drinking or behavioural cues such as a character holding a bottle.
3. **Other alcohol reference:** The presence of alcohol-related material, such as a beer pump or bottle which is not being interacted with.
4. **Brand appearance:** The presence of clear and unambiguous alcohol branding, such as seeing a brand on a bottle.

Alcohol content was recorded as present in the 1-minute interval if there was one appearance in any category. Multiple categories could be coded in a single interval, for example, both alcohol use and branding. Multiple instances in the same category in the same interval were recorded as one event, but if the same event overlapped two intervals, this was coded as two separate events. To ensure reliability in the coding method, 20% of episodes were double-coded for accuracy, with 100% agreement between coders.

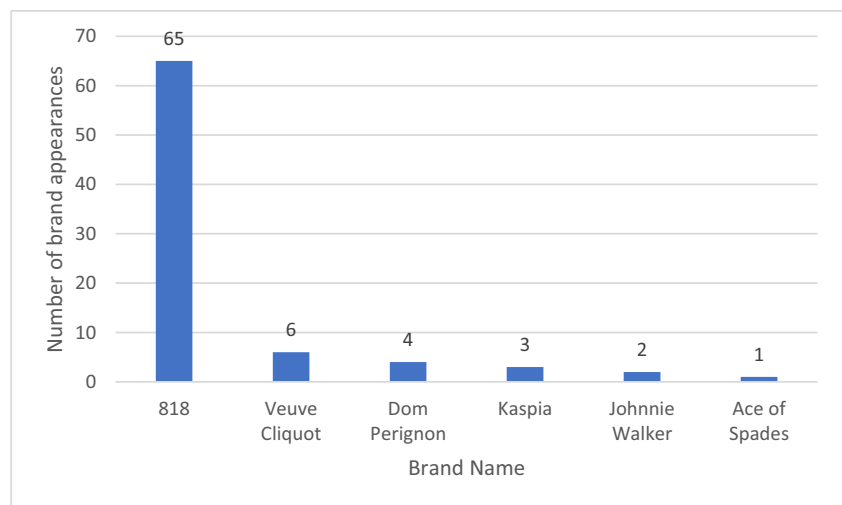
Results

In total, 436 minutes of footage was coded, across 10 episodes. Alcohol content was seen across all 10 episodes and occurred in 90 intervals (21% of all intervals). Actual alcohol use was seen in six episodes across 13 intervals and involved wine/champagne (7 intervals) or cocktails (6 intervals). Implied alcohol use was seen in all 10 episodes across 74 intervals (83% of intervals containing alcohol content). Alcohol branding was seen in six episodes, across 23 intervals. The brand 818, owned by Kendall Jenner, was seen 65 times across 17 intervals (see Fig. 1).

Discussion

Given the widespread popularity of reality TV programmes among young people/adolescents, the aim of the current study was to explore the frequency of alcohol content and branding in season 2 of the reality TV show *The Kardashians*. Findings revealed that alcohol content (both actual and implied) was highly prevalent across all 10 episodes. Due to the popularity of this programme on the Disney+ streaming platform, this likely resulted in widespread population exposure to both alcohol content and branding.

There is now strong evidence to suggest that exposure to advertising and other AVC in the media increases subsequent use in adolescents (Anderson et al. 2009; Smith and Foxcroft 2009; Hanewinkel et al. 2012; Chang et al. 2016). Reality TV programmes are widely viewed by young people

Fig. 1 Number of alcohol brand appearances

(Barker et al. 2023) and are likely to influence viewers due to their inclusion of inspirational role models (Barker et al. 2023). Indeed, recent research has demonstrated a high likelihood that reality TV programmes have been used to promote unhealthy commodities (Barker et al. 2018; Lowe et al. 2018). As a result, it is plausible to suggest that the high frequency of both alcohol-related content and branding in *The Kardashians* affected drinking behaviours in its predominantly young viewers.

It has been suggested that programmes on video-on-demand platforms may depict more alcohol content than TV (Barker et al. 2019, 2023). The current study found that alcohol content was highly prevalent in this particular programme, hosted on Disney+. Disney+ have previously announced that they wish to keep their platform family-friendly by prohibiting alcohol adverts on the platform (Variety 2022). The current study demonstrates that by including the branding within the programme, alcohol brands can receive widespread, international exposure, an example of cross-border marketing (World Health Organization 2022).

The Ofcom Broadcasting Code (Ofcom 2017) protects under-18s by restricting depictions of alcohol use in programmes made for children, and discouraging the glamorisation of alcohol use in programmes likely to be widely seen, heard, or accessed by children. The Kardashians are influential celebrities (Venkatesan et al. 2023), and the high prevalence of alcohol content demonstrated in this study glamorises alcohol use in a programme which is likely viewed by young people. While the Ofcom Broadcasting Code (Ofcom 2017) prohibits paid-for alcohol product placement, brands can appear in programmes if they are ‘editorially justified’ and were acquired at no significant cost. We acknowledge that we cannot know for certain whether these products were provided at cost, but the owner of the 818 brand is also a member of the

Kardashian family and a part of this show. As such, the high quantity of 818 content and branding in the show has led to viewers questioning whether the series is a ‘press release’ for their businesses (BuzzFeed 2022).

Whilst it is likely that this programme resulted in exposure to alcohol-related content, viewing figures are unavailable and we cannot know for sure. Given that the programme was made available internationally, the exposure to this brand from a number of countries should be considered. Reality TV is believed to influence behaviour through a social cognitive mechanism, such as social learning (Bandura 1977; Stefanone and Lackaff 2009). While it is clear that exposure to alcohol content and brands leads to increased experimentation and use (Anderson et al. 2009; Smith and Foxcroft 2009; Hanewinkel et al. 2012; Chang et al. 2016), we cannot say for certain whether viewing *The Kardashians* led to increased alcohol use or purchasing of the 818 brand, or if this did occur, whether it was through a social cognitive mechanism. Future studies should explore this further.

Season 2 of *The Kardashians* featured a high prevalence of alcohol content including branding. Given the nature and popularity of the programme with young viewers, it is likely that the high prevalence of alcohol content influenced drinking behaviours in young people. The current rules and regulations are not sufficient to protect against exposure to this potentially harmful content and to prevent the cross-border marketing of alcohol products through programme content.

Authors’ contributions ABB conceptualised the study and completed data coding, analysis, and writing. CLS and EES completed data coding and writing.

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Data availability Data are available on request.

Declarations

Conflicts of interest/Competing interests The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval This study used publicly available data and no human participants.

Consent to participate Not applicable.

Consent for publication Not applicable.

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