



Deception on tap

Experts slam booze industry for 'health halo' advertising

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HEALTH experts have slammed the alcohol industry for marketing products under a "health halo", saying it misleads consumers into thinking drinks are good for them.

Vegan wines, low-carbohydrate beers and sugar-free pre-mixed spirits are now on offer, and market research company Nielsen has identified a rapid trend of people switching to alternatives they see as being more healthful.

Soda water and kombucha, a fermented tea, are being preferred to soft drinks.

Kombucha's popularity has grown sevenfold in two years, and it is being used as a mixer for alcoholic drinks.

According to recent figures from Nielsen, 4.3 million Australians believe there are benefits to drinking beer, and 28 per cent view beer as a "natural product".

And 7.6 million believe there are benefits to drinking wine; five million felt it was important that wine be additive- and preservative-free.

Advertised "healthy" drink alternatives include:

CARLTON & United Breweries' low-carb Pure Blonde, boasting 80 per cent fewer carbs than regular beer;

CUB's Spring Cider Co, a cider-blended soda water with a marketed alcohol content of 0.5 of a standard drink;

HAHN's "ultra-crisp" low-carb gluten-free beer; and

VODKA brand Absolut's website offers more than 200 soda-water based drink recipes, including the Absolut Soda and "Spritzer". Each

encourages the use of at least one shot of alcohol.

A researcher at Western Australia's Public Health Advocacy Institute, Julia Stafford, says current regulations do not do enough to restrict alcohol brands from making health-related claims.

She said a mixer did not confer health benefits on an alcoholic drink.

"It's a really big concern that alcohol companies are trying to make drinks look healthier, when really it's the alcohol content of these

products that is the major health concern," she said. "It doesn't matter what you put with it. All the risks (of) consuming alcohol stay the same ... intoxication, violence, injuries, drink-driving and longer-term risks of heart disease, cancer, stroke and chronic health conditions."

Andrew Buttery, the head of sales of kombucha brand Mojo, disagreed with Ms Stafford that the addition of alcohol deprived it of any potential health benefits.

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