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Drinkaware – Breast cancer communications research

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drinkaware

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Background, sample and method

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Background

Drinkaware has included messaging illustrating the causal link between alcohol and breast cancer as part of its social marketing campaigns over the last two years. Despite positive testing in previous research / evaluations, the messaging has attracted a small number of complaints from the public, predominately from paid for Facebook adverts

As a result, Drinkaware are looking to commission independent qualitative research to;

- Hear from women with a close experience of breast cancer and understand in detail the context in which Drinkaware's messaging could cause offence;
- Identify specific breast cancer messaging and language that is appropriate for these audiences and relevant to the Drink Free Days message, without compromising on its impact

Sample / method

YouGov conducted 2 online focus groups (2 hours duration) with those impacted by breast cancer in order to evaluate Drinkaware's messaging

10 new / draft messages were shown to all respondents, as well as the message from the 2019 campaign and a range of potential images and messengers. The messages were shown in a different order across the two groups

Research was conducted on the 17th March 2020

The sample specification:

Group 1

- 9 participants
- All women aged 40-65
- Mix of social grade and ethnicity
- Currently / previously (within last 12 months) have had breast cancer
- Participants were from across the UK

Group 2

- 8 participants
- All women aged 40-65
- Mix of social grade and ethnicity
- Have close friend of family member who currently / previously has had breast cancer
- Participants were from across the UK

Message testing

Those who have / have had breast cancer were more likely to associate alcohol with a range of health problems, including breast cancer

Group 1 tended to be knowledgeable about potential harms....

- Noting potential issues with the liver, brain as well as weight
- Cancer, as well as breast cancer were both mentioned spontaneously
- There is also an awareness of the mental / emotional impact of alcohol, exemplified in aggression, relationship breakdown and mental health
- Many discovered this information through health care professionals, often during their cancer treatment
- Some had seen research on the NHS website, through charities, or through other cancer survivors (e.g. relevant social media groups), as well as in the media (TV and radio)
- Though there is still some cynicism, due to mixed messaging about certain harms and their own personal experiences of cancer

Whilst those in group 2 were more cynical

- Group 2 discussed how drinking leads to general deterioration in the body
- Having an impact on the liver, brain and blood pressure.
- Participants were less likely to attribute drinking alcohol to cancer
- This group were more likely to associate health problems with an excess of drinking and were more cynical about the health messaging we explored
- Some indicated the positive benefits when drinking in moderation and tended to be defensive about their current drinking habits

Messaging performed well when it offered a positive and motivating call for action

What performs well overall?

- ✓ Giving a clear and positive call for action e.g. drink less, take Drink Free Days
- ✓ Taking Drink Free Days was seen as an achievable step, it also implied a sense of empowerment
- ✓ The idea of educating the public about the causation between alcohol and breast cancer was viewed positively across both groups

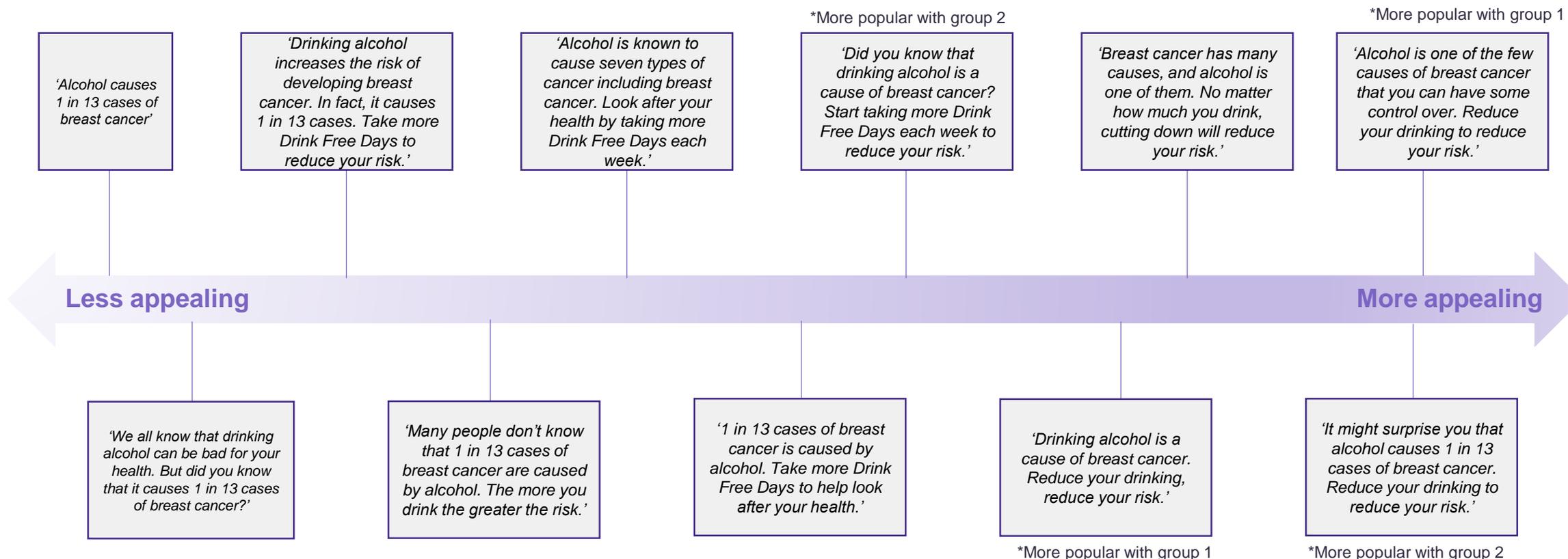
Where was there a mixed response?

- ? Statistics like '1 in 13 or 1 in 7' often made participants focus more on the other potential risks, rather than alcohol
- ? Structuring the message as a question worked well for those who weren't knowledgeable about health harms, though some others found it patronising

What performs less well overall?

- X The lack of evidence (e.g. data not being attributed) throughout the messaging lead many to question the overall credibility
- X Lack of specificity regarding the amount of alcohol which needs to be consumed in order to increase the risk of breast cancer
- X If the tone is too direct, it can lead some to feel guilty / blamed; many then switch off from the message

Summary: Group 1 and 2 had different perspectives on the appeal of certain messages, but an empowering tone was important to both groups



The breast cancer message is felt to be important to share, but the execution must be supportive, not accusatory

Participants felt that this message was shared abruptly, leaving some feeling upset with the information shared

'Alcohol causes 1 in 13 cases of breast cancer'

Language and tone

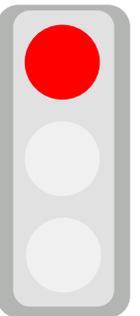
- The fact was shocking to those who were not aware of the link between alcohol and breast cancer (esp. group 2)
- However, the 1 in 13 statistic was not high enough to be motivating for some, with a few taking an 'I'll take my chances' attitude
- Overall, the statistic was felt to be vague, without any indication of how much alcohol would need to be consumed in order for there to be a risk
- Furthermore, it was felt to be an awkward number which was difficult to visualise and not memorable
- The tone made some feel guilty and blamed, which turned them off from the message

"If it was true it would make me feel guilty and angry at myself for bringing it on myself" (Group 2)

Impact and call to action

- Many questioned the believability and credibility of the statement, the lack of follow up information or supporting evidence lead many to question or reject the message
- Group 2 were more likely to reject the fact on the grounds that it 'doesn't seem believable'
- Without indicating next steps many felt powerless, with no indication with what to do with this 'new and surprising' information
- Many felt that this message was 'shocking'

"Just needs to offer something more as I think people almost become hardened to messages like this, or over anxious" (Group 2)



Though this message has an informative tone, most do not know what to do next

'We all know that drinking alcohol can be bad for your health. But did you know that it causes 1 in 13 cases of breast cancer?'

Language and tone

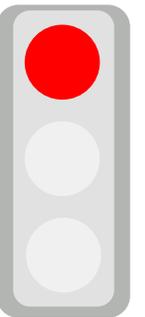
- There is an assumption of knowledge which was rejected by some in group 2, who were less likely to know about the link between breast cancer and alcohol
- The overall tone is informative but does not feel directive enough, the rhetorical question left some feeling confused

"There needs to be statistical information to back up the statement, it needs quantifying" (Group 1)

Impact and call to action

- There is a lack of call to action in this message, leaving participants powerless with this new information
- Include a call to action or research / evidence to increase credibility and impact

"Love the first sentence. The second is also okay but I prefer the alcohol-free days as something concrete for people to try" (Group 2)



This message was felt to be too long and ‘clunky’, reducing the overall impact

‘Drinking alcohol increases the risk of developing breast cancer. In fact, it causes 1 in 13 cases. Take more Drink Free Days to reduce your risk.’

Language and tone

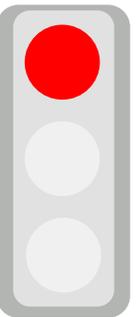
- ‘Drinking alcohol’ was felt to be vague, some participants questioned whether this was only the case when binge drinking
- This message was felt to be too lengthy; supplying too much information does not make it memorable or impactful
- Participants across both groups wanted this information to be supported by research and evidence

“To make it more concise and read better, perhaps link the first two sentences with ‘causing 1 in 13 cases’” (Group 1)

Impact and call to action

- Structuring the message with a fact, followed by a call to action works well
- ‘Reducing your risk’ doesn’t feel like a positive / empowering step forwards, it feels more like a step away from something negative

“I think it needs to be clear about whether its the units of alcohol taken that lead to higher risk rather than frequency. Does the research spell that out?” (Group 2)



The lack of call to action in this message lead some to feel powerless

'Many people don't know that 1 in 13 cases of breast cancer are caused by alcohol. The more you drink the greater the risk.'

Language and tone

- Appealed to some in group 2 who had less knowledge of the health risks; they appreciated the informal tone
- 'The more you drink' made some participants assume that this message is aimed at those who are heavy drinkers

"I think this one is more realistic, in that it's not saying don't drink, but 'don't drink so much" (Group 2)

Impact and call to action

- This message is made up of two statements of fact but does not compel the reader to take action, therefore many felt that it creates a sense of guilt
- This message provoked a dramatic response as there was no forward looking suggestion, only a reflection on past consumption and its impact

"It just a statement, it is not impelling you to action" (Group 1)



There was a mixed response to this message as the statistic used lacked clarity and was difficult to visualise

‘Alcohol is known to cause seven types of cancer including breast cancer. Look after your health by taking more Drink Free Days each week.’

Language and tone

- Many immediately questioned what other cancers alcohol causes, the statistic used felt ‘weak’
- Though it motivated some to look further, it led others to reject the overall message
- The overall tone was informative and advisory, which worked well
- Some felt it was lengthy and not punchy enough

*“It is more vague because you don't know what cancers they are talking about”
(Group 1)*

Impact and call to action

- For some the statement to ‘look after your health’ was empowering, whilst those in group 2 felt that it was guilt inducing
- ‘Taking more Drink Free Days’ was understood and is relevant to a broader range of drinking habits

“There are around 100 types of cancer and only 7 have alcohol as a cause” (Group 2)



The message worked better for group 2, as the tone felt friendly

‘Did you know that drinking alcohol is a cause of breast cancer? Start taking more Drink Free Days each week to reduce your risk.’

Language and tone

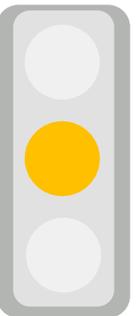
- Mixed reaction to question posed at the start of the message; with those in group 2 feeling that it made the message more friendly, but those in group 1 who were already aware of the fact finding the message to be less engaging
- Those in group 2 found the overall tone to be supportive and easier to digest compared to the 1 in 13 statistic

“First sentence is questioning and not threatening. Second sentence implies we don't have many drink free days” (Group 2)

Impact and call to action

- There was a positive reaction to Drink Free Days; it was felt to be empowering, and allows individuals to take control of their future health
- Though many were already taking ‘Drink Free Days’, and felt the use of ‘start’ did not seem relevant to them, adjusting to ‘take more’ may be effective
- Many described the message as ‘motivating’

“It gives you information and advice in one communication” (Group 1)



This message had a mixed response across participants, due to the statistic lacking real impact

'1 in 13 cases of breast cancer is caused by alcohol. Take more Drink Free Days to help look after your health.'

Language and tone

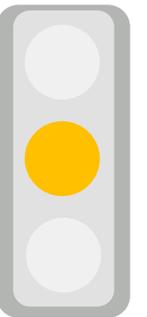
- 1 in 13 statistic was felt to be awkward to some, as it is difficult to visualise, and was not felt to be motivating enough to make a significant change in their lifestyle
- The two sentences did not seem connected enough to some

"This one wouldn't motivate me because I already have drink free days. I drank last night but not today, so today is a drink free day" (Group 2)

Impact and call to action

- Drink Free Days had a positive reaction from most participants, as it suggested that they were able to take control over their health
- Though a few suggested it would work better for younger women, as older women think their health is a foregone conclusion and they can no longer have an impact

"I personally think that younger women would take note... My daughter would respond positively to that message" (Group 1)



This short and succinct message worked particularly well for group 1

‘Drinking alcohol is a cause of breast cancer. Reduce your drinking, reduce your risk.’

Language and tone

- The overall message was felt to be direct and punchy, therefore has the potential to be more memorable
- The shocking aspect was welcomed most by group 1 participants who were already aware of the health risks
- Though ‘drinking alcohol’ was not felt to be specific enough, as there is no indication of how much needs to be consumed in order for there to be causation

“Its too the point, punchy. I like it” (Group 1)

Impact and call to action

- ‘Reduce your drinking, reduce your risk’ was easy to understand and was thought to be catchy
- Participants in group 1 felt that this message was ‘rational’ and ‘motivating’

“None of us knew that it causes breast cancer so I think its blunt enough to be shocking” (Group 2)



The friendly, informal tone of this message was appealing

‘Breast cancer has many causes, and alcohol is one of them. No matter how much you drink, cutting down will reduce your risk.’

Language and tone

- The overall tone of this message was advisory not judgemental, using friendly and informative language
- Recognising that there are other causes of cancer of breast cancer was appealing and many then found it more credible
- This message was popular amongst both groups, with group 2 noting that the softer approach was more appealing as it was not accusatory

“It makes me feel that I can actually do something positive myself to reduce my risk” (Group 2)

Impact and call to action

- The idea of ‘cutting down’ was not felt to be as hard hitting or memorable as Drink Free Days, thought it was more universally understood
- ‘No matter how much you drink’ implied to some that this message was aimed at heavier drinkers
- Participants felt that this message was ‘motivating’ and ‘factual’

“You are in control of your own alcohol consumption, therefore you can impact on outcomes” (Group 1)



This message was popular with group 2 participants as it recognised their surprise around the causation

'It might surprise you that alcohol causes 1 in 13 cases of breast cancer. Reduce your drinking to reduce your risk.'

Language and tone

- For group 2, the 'surprise' language appealed as it was felt to be new news to them, therefore the tone felt friendly
- However those who already had knowledge of the link felt that the message was patronising. 'It might surprise you' was felt to be 'too wordy' for group 1
- The direct comparison of 'reduce your drinking' and 'reduce your risk' works well

"I think that saying it might surprise you is good, because it did surprise me"(Group 2)

Impact and call to action

- As mentioned previously, the use of 'reduce' was felt to be a negative choice rather than a positive one like 'taking drink free days'. Some participants questioned how much they would need to reduce to make an impact on their risk
- The addition of the word 'to' in the second sentence is not felt to be needed as it lengthens the message unnecessarily

"Quite like the first sentence, however its quite gentle"(Group 1)



This message was particularly popular with group 1 participants as it implied that they could have control over their future health

‘Alcohol is one of the few causes of breast cancer that you can have some control over. Reduce your drinking to reduce your risk.’

Language and tone

- Those in group 1 found this message appealing, the overall tone was empowering as it implied that they had control over their own health
- However, some in group 2 felt that this could potentially be guilt inducing, and lead them to question the inevitability of their future health

“I like the idea that you can take back some control at least. But if its 1 in 13 I am not sure its worth giving up a lovely glass of wine or a cold beer watching football” (Group 2)

Impact and call to action

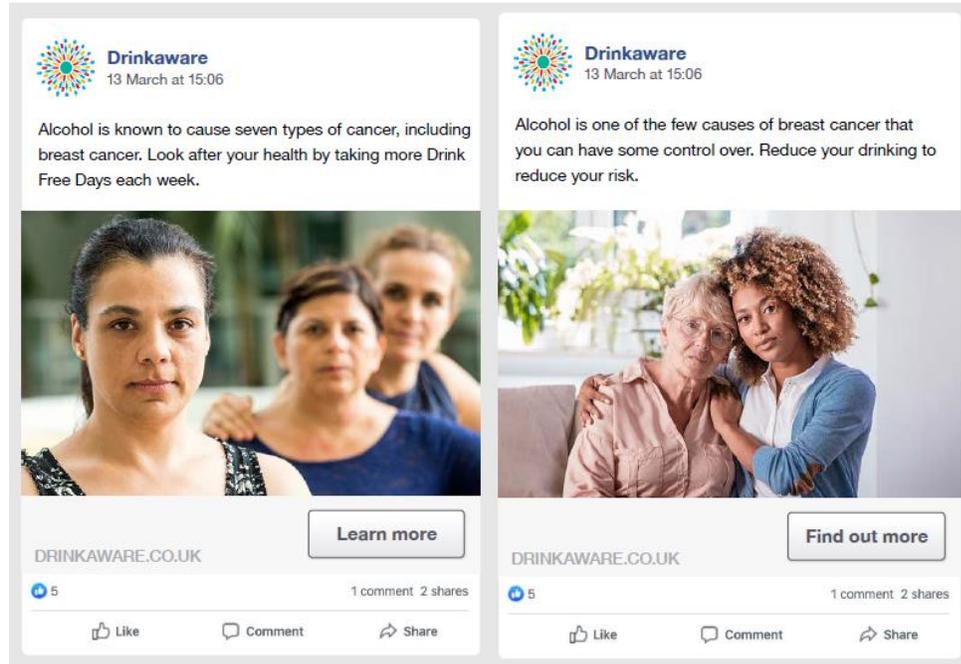
- The call to action feels attainable but not impactful enough for all
- Use the ‘take more Drink Free Days’ call to action, this was something already being done by participants and could be increased

“It gives you the control of how you go about using the information” (Group 1)



Image and messenger testing

Both images feel forced and unrelated to the overall message



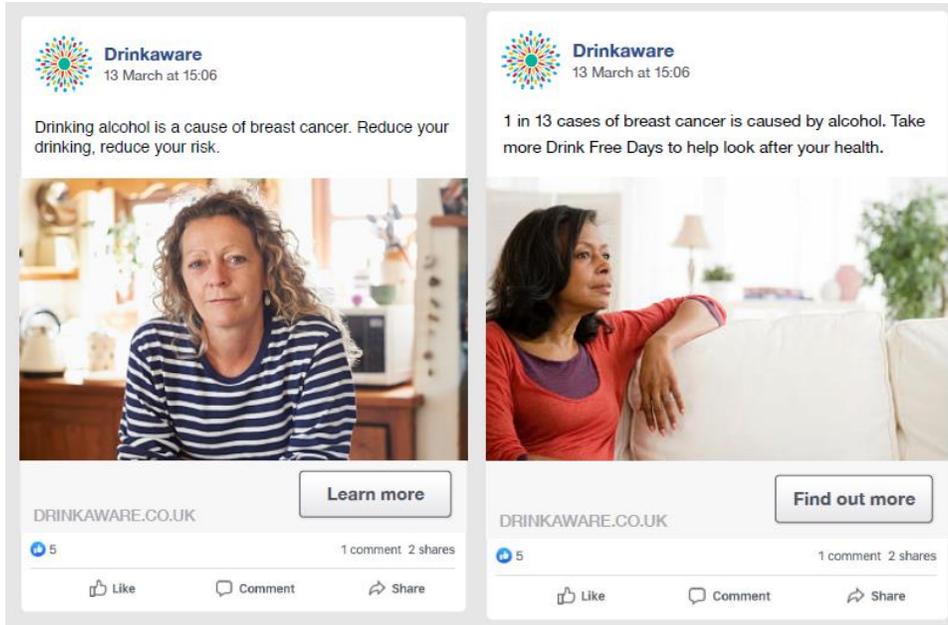
Participants want 'authentic' imagery

- Both images look forced and unnatural, participants are looking for 'authentic' imagery with 'real' people, not actors
- Furthermore both images do not feel specific enough to the overall message of breast cancer, with participants indicating that they could be images used for anything
- The tone of both images are confrontational and negative, participants want to feel that they are taking an empowering step towards having control over their health
- Images should be used to support the message, visualising or illustrating the information shared, using a graphic would be welcomed

"I don't like the ones with the stock images of women - they would be for anything - sanitary pads or Alzheimer's... These stock images mean nothing" (Group 2)

"I'm not a fan of either, they are too negative" (Group 1)

As in the previous set of images, these images felt negative and did not support the breast cancer message



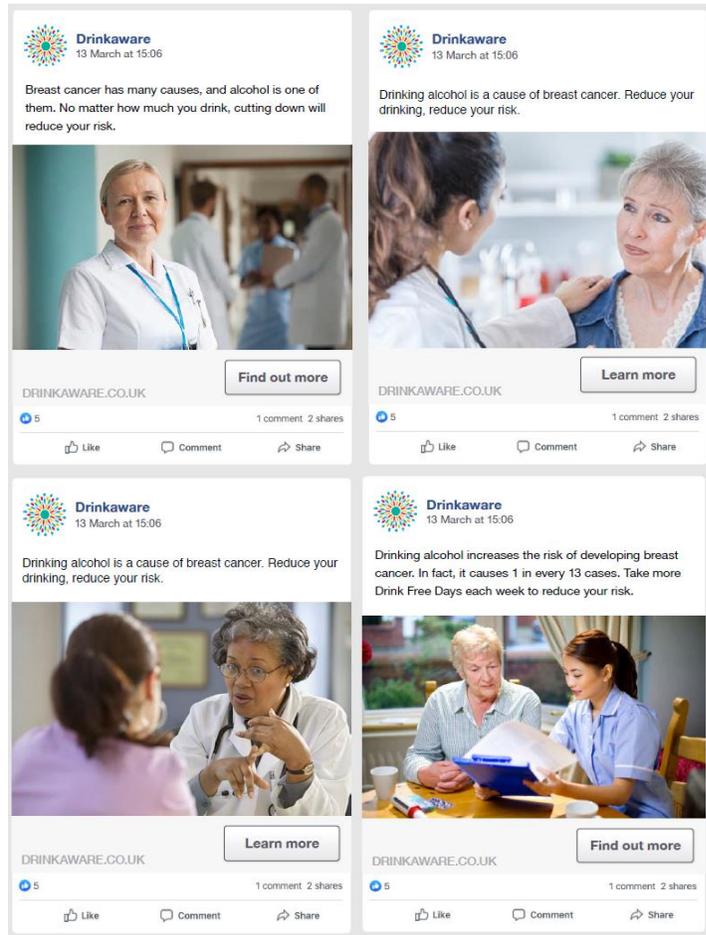
Participants need imagery that ties, and adds to the overall message

- Both images were felt to be 'depressing' and did not fit with the empowering nature of the messages
- Without the inclusion of alcohol or health related imagery, many found it difficult to connect the image with the overall main message
- Participants suggested using a breast cancer survivor or other true stories to support the information shared
- When choosing between the different sets of images, they felt the groups of women worked well as it indicated support

"Not relatable, boring, distanced" (Group 2)

"I'd use real women or relatable famous women (like the TV doctor). I would never use stock images or models" (Group 2)

Imagery with health care professionals indicated credibility



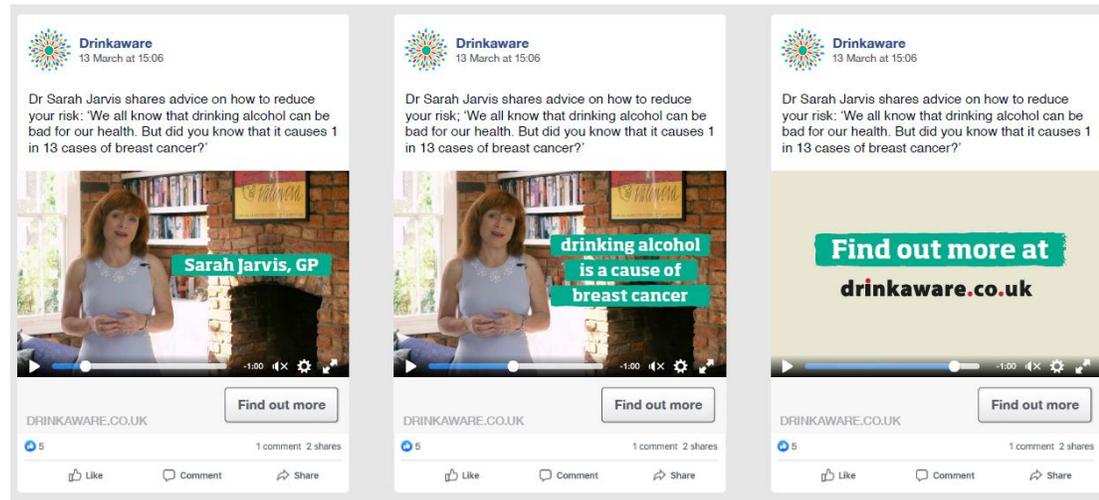
Though imagery was still felt to be forced

- This set of imagery was more appealing, the inclusion of health care workers made the overall message feel more credible
- Images which indicate active support were more popular for participants
- There were spontaneous mentions that using a 'real' medical professional would increase appeal
- This would also increase the authentic element which is still felt to be missing in this set of images, participants commented that some look staged and forced

"Medical professional, doctor, oncologist is absolutely more credible" (Group 1)

"Inclusion of a medical professional helps to focus on the key message that drinking has serious impacts upon breast cancer rates" (Group 1)

Dr Sarah Jarvis was viewed as a credible source of knowledge; she is personable and professional



“I don't know of her but I'm aware of the road of TV GPs in general, people usually respond very well to them” (Group 1)

“She's good at what she does and I trust her” (Group 2)

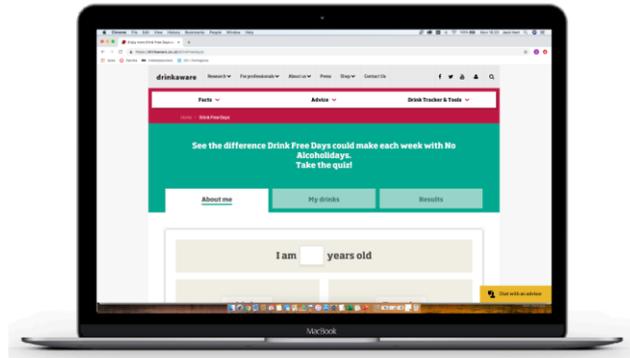
Participants have expectations for how her message would be delivered

- Dr Sarah Jarvis was generally known across both groups and was seen as appealing and relatable, as well as being a trusted messenger
- They would expect her to signpost to more support, and for her to have a supportive tone
- Though participants find her credible they would expect to receive a link with further information and evidence
- Participants could imagine Sarah Jarvis appearing on TV programmes such as This Morning or Loose Women in order to deliver the message and respond to questions and concerns

Channel and format testing

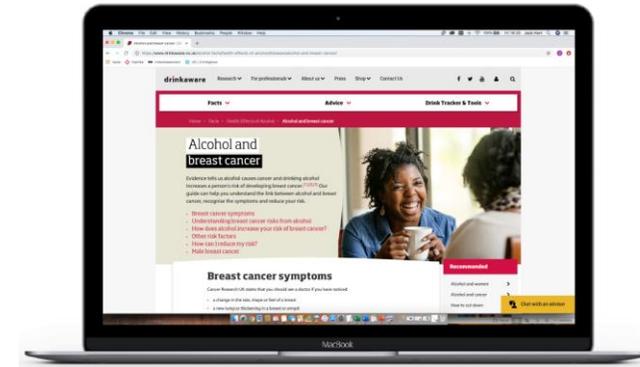
The interactive nature of the quiz landing page fits well with Facebook

Drinkaware quiz landing page



- Participants expected to see stats and evidence on the breast cancer and alcohol causation, as well as handy tips to reduce their drinking and an outline of the benefits of doing so
- The inclusion of the quiz works well as it's interactive nature suits the Facebook format. Though many commented that they would need to have the time to complete the quiz
- There was a negative response to 'No Alcohol holidays', it felt 'comical' and 'cheesy', which does not fit with the breast cancer message

Alcohol and breast cancer landing page



- The image used was felt to be eye catching and friendly, though not related to the health message
- Though the page looks informative some felt that the amount of detail was overwhelming and were turned off
- Details should be more succinct and must look consistent with the Facebook post which encouraged click through

Facebook was not seen as a trusted source for medical information, unless it is disseminated within relevant cancer support groups or charity pages

The breast cancer message needs to be explained and explored in detail...

- TV was felt to be a format which could work well to explore the topic in detail, participants imagined it could be a part of This Morning, Loose Women or a storyline in a soap opera

Facebook as the platform for the messages needs to be treated with caution...

- Facebook was often associated with fake news, therefore health messaging is treated with caution
- Overall the platform lacks credibility with this audience for serious health messages
- When health messages are shared on Facebook, they are most trusted if from official (charity) sites, cancer survivor groups or from pages which participants have 'liked' as this gives more permission to share information
- Drinkaware was generally known across both groups, and was felt to be a "trustworthy and credible" charity who would be a strong messenger
- Twitter and Instagram are not used regularly by this audience

"I could image the message on all of these formats. Probably on a TV talk show would have most impact, but if I saw the message on a digital image or posters I'd take it in" (Group 1)

"I don't trust Facebook that much - much prefer to talk my consultant at the hospital or read Macmillan leaflets or breast cancer leaflets for information" (Group 1)

"I think people are on Facebook for fun and not to think about cancer" (Group 2)

"There is a lot of false news publicised on Facebook don't trust everything you read without checking with other reputable sources" (Group 1)

"Some people will put anything on Facebook whether it is true or not" (Group 1)

Key takeaways

5 key take away's

1

There was no clear winner amongst the messages. Moving forwards, messages must offer clear information and have a friendly tone, as well as an empowering strategy / call for action

"It's an important idea and would be a good thing as long as it's done right" (Group 2)

2

Use 'Take more Drink Free Days' consistently throughout messaging as it is motivating and achievable

3

Use a medical professional to share the breast cancer message and address concerns, Dr Sarah Jarvis was viewed positively for this role. Including medical professionals and real people in imagery

"It's a very good idea. If it can make a difference or save a life or even make women think about what they drink it's a good thing" (Group 2)

4

Partner with supporter groups on Facebook or / and use TV slots to explore the topic in more detail and include real stories

"The fact that alcohol causes cancer is such an important piece of information. It has to be made clear" (Group 1)

5

Include links to research and evidence to increase credibility and trust

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