

Poppi's Power Play: Can Influencers Really
Sell Gut Health?: A TARES Assessment of
Poppi's Super Bowl Commercial Titled
“Soda Thoughts”

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OVERVIEW

Poppi is a prebiotic soda brand that aims to provide the flavor and same sensation as the sodas people know and love, without the added sugars and calories. Poppi is also well known for its bright and bold colored cans, and the name is supposed to be a “play on” soda pop. Each Poppi contains 5 grams or less of sugar and 35 calories or less. Allison Ellsworth and her husband Stephen created Poppi, combining fruit juice and prebiotics. Ellsworth created Poppi to keep up with the changing culture and provide a soda alternative that left people feeling better after drinking it.

Ellsworth and her husband took the drink to Shark Tank and gained a deal with Rohan Oza, which started a rebrand and jumpstarted Poppi helping it become one of the fastest growing beverage brands for dollar sale. The drink's soaring popularity has helped it gain the audience of many influencers who had taken on the advertising to help young viewers be drawn to drink Poppi. A recent commercial run during the 2025 Superbowl directed by Dave Meyers highlighted multiple influencers including Alix Earle, Jake Shane, and Rob Rausch. The ad expresses the decision between choosing various drinks and considering Poppi the best choice. The younger audience of these influencers impacted the decision by Poppi in the ad to showcase the popularity of the drink hoping to draw in more customers.

The commercials’ goal is to encourage viewers to switch to drinking Poppi, which they highlight as a healthier alternative in the form of a prebiotic soda. The ad directly targets viewers and uses well known influencers to emphasize authenticity and relate to younger audiences. The youthful energy of the ad is shown through the various scenes, such as influencers by the pool featuring Alix Earle, going through a fast food line with Jake Shane, in a convenience store, or

receiving a pizza order from Rob Rausch, but only taking the Poppi. This commercial highlights Poppi as the go-to prebiotic soda brand people are thinking about.

TARES ASSESSMENT

Truthfulness

The truthfulness component of the TARES Assessment aims to fact-check the information presented in the Poppi ad and whether it is inaccurate or misleading. This part of the TARES test breaks down each claim made by the Poppi brand and if they were untruthful to their audience. In the Poppi ad they make multiple claims about Poppi's popularity and the increasing want by individuals for a healthier soda option. Using influencers, it claims to the audience these popular figures are in support of the claims by Poppi. Which seems to remain true based on the continuous support these influencers show on social media.

Further analysis of the ad reveals claims made about Poppi's health benefits. The ad showcases Jake Shane among other actors in a drive-through and on the order screen, Poppi is shown to have "5g of Sugar, Prebiotics, No Baggage." (Soda Thoughts") The claim made about Poppi containing 5 grams of sugar remains true according to Today.com, however, some research challenges the prebiotic notion of Poppi. ("Is Poppi good for you?") Poppi contains two grams of inulin that has prebiotic properties, however according to a Cornell Health review it says, "research on gut health has shown that more than two grams of prebiotics are needed to provide sufficient benefit to the gut" and this challenges the truthfulness of the ad because it is an inaccurate claim given to the audience. ("Examining Poppi: Gut Health or Misleading Marketing?")

If Poppi put into the commercial that it is more beneficial to drink more than one Poppi this could further validate their claim. The truthfulness is discounted due to this misleading claim to Poppi consumers, however the ad remains truthful because the claims are valid according to the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) which considers Poppi a prebiotic gut healthy soda due to the absence of regulations in place over the quantity of prebiotics needed to claim it's gut healthy. Overall, the Poppi ad passes the truthfulness part of the TARES test due to the accuracy of the claims made and while research shows you must consume multiple Poppi's to get the gut healthy benefits from the soda the FDA does not require a certain quantity to claim it's a gut healthy drink therefore the ad passes and Poppi is still considered a prebiotic soda.

Authenticity

The authenticity component of the TARES Assessment evaluates Poppi's sincerity, intent, and framing of the information in their commercial. This part of the TARES test challenges the authenticity of Poppi's brand and determines whether the brand would take responsibility for the ad. This includes Poppi's authenticity to the influencers used in the ad, the claims made in the ad, and other promotional examples relevant to the ad.

Based on Poppi's values to provide what Poppi says, "all the soda feels with 5g sugar, ingredients you can love, and prebiotics," this ad works to reach its target audience utilizing influencers rather than celebrities to be authentic to their target audience of modern consumers who are health-conscious. ("Poppi") Using these influencers, Poppi hoped to relate to their consumers and make them feel surface level to each other. Poppi decided to run a marketing campaign in connection to the ad which received major backlash from consumers. Poppi sent out 32 social media influencers Poppi vending machines which caused uproar to consumers who felt

overlooked by the marketing of the gift. (“How Poppi’s Super Bowl”) In addition to this, consumers felt there was a lack of diversity in the campaign suggesting influencers were singled out to be “thin and white” to have received the vending machines. This marketing strategy reached widespread social media engagement”, but caused the Poppi ad to feel inauthentic to consumers. (“Popular Soda Brand”)

Consumers and other creators made claims about how Poppi’s efforts felt inauthentic due to the vending machines sent to influencers. One creator, Isabella Lanter said, “When it gets too extravagant...it feels very out of touch,” challenging the authenticity of the action by Poppi. (“How Poppi’s Super Bowl”) Consumers felt the ads goal of being genuine to the audience failed because of the marketing campaign connected to it. This left consumers conflicted on the use of influencers in the ad. The authenticity portion of the TARES test falls short because of the marketing campaign connected to the commercial. This makes the ad ingenuine to the audience by falsely claiming to be authentic and true to all consumers.

Ellsworth came forth after the backlash making claims about the marketing strategy by Poppi suggesting, “We actually do a lot of that type of stuff,” hoping to reach her consumers she emphasized the 3.4 million cans they donated and also noted that one of the creators they sent vending machines to was a party of first responders. Ellsworth said the vending machines were not for influencers to hold on to forever. Ellsworth defended Poppi by expressing the original hope for the marketing campaign strategy and the steps they were taking moving forward. (“How Poppi’s Super Bowl”)

The Poppi commercial is authentic to its branding as a healthy prebiotic soda that they encourage people to reach for, but fails due to the insincere campaign connected to the use of

influencers on the consumers. The marketing campaign connected to the Poppi ad created a false narrative for the commercial, downgrading its authenticity.

Respect

The respect component of the TARES Assessment evaluates whether the ad respects the audience it aims to persuade. In this case it would be whether Poppi respects the well-being of the audience and does not include stereotyping. It's also important in this part of the test that Poppi shows respect towards the audience being persuaded, involving the light of day test, which considers if a rational person would understand the information being represented in the commercial.

The Poppi ad aims at encouraging consumers to make the 'right choice' and choose Poppi when it comes to drink options. Doing so the Poppi ad showcases influencers in a variety of situations that they are faced with picking a drink. The ad claims why consumers should choose Poppi for its healthy alternative benefits to regular sodas. The ad uses a diverse group of influencers in hopes of relating with their target audience and although the ad received backlash for the campaign in coherence with this commercial the ad respects a variety of demographics through this lens. The Poppi ad introduces the product and uses relatable and culturally relevant humor. The ad appeals to all demographics by representing the soda as a lifestyle choice. In this regard the ad acknowledges the consumers have control over their decision to choose Poppi or not. ("Behind Poppi's Influencer Led Super Bowl Commercial")

The ad showcases five scenarios, including Poppi, a girl's night, a diner, a convenience store, drive-through, and a pool party. ("Soda Thoughts") Each of these scenarios aim to relate to circumstances people could find themselves choosing between a regular soda or a Poppi. These

scenarios are common to everyday lives of consumers and therefore the ad passes the light of day test. The publication of this commercial passes the light of day test because it is respectful to rational people and provides an easy understanding of Poppi and why consumers should buy the healthy alternative soda. Poppi's relatable concepts are what make the ad pass the respect part of the TARES test and although the Poppi ad was criticized for the marketing strategy in accordance with the commercial. The respect portion, therefore, passes because the ad does not reveal negative stereotypes nor does the ad coerce the audience in a negative light.

Equity

The equity component of the TARES Assessment evaluates the balance of treating each persuadee of the Poppi commercial with the same level of respect and concern. This can be achieved through the commercial by treating all audiences equally. Evaluating the Poppi ad it's important to consider if the ad targets or harms marginalized groups. The Poppi ad uses friendly language in the commercial appealing to the audience, such as "hey," "yo," "hun," and "bestie." ("Soda Thoughts") The claims of the ad about Poppi's benefits are also straightforward being showcased on the drive-through screen. This makes it easy for the audience to understand the perks of Poppi.

The Poppi ad does not exploit the audience based on the features of the commercial, however, the campaign connected to the commercial had some audience members' questions about the inclusivity of the brand. This did not affect the outcome of the equity part of the TARES test although because the ad was fair to the audience and claims are straightforward. While the audience may feel the brand's message could be inequitable due to the influencers vs. everyday consumers, the ad content remained fair to the audience. The easy-to-understand

marketing not only provides the benefits of the soda but also shows the audience each of the flavors Poppi has.

Applying the veil of ignorance reveals that through the lens of an influence, regular consumer, or other person, the Poppi ad tells me about the potential benefits of drinking Poppi rather than sticking with a traditional soda and clearly states what those are and the different options I can choose from. While the ad uses influencers, it does not showcase any sort of favoritism towards them in the ad otherwise to gain the attention of the viewers.

Social Responsibility

The social responsibility component of the TARES Assessment evaluates that the Poppi commercial reflects the common good rather than the self-interest of the brand. Poppi is one of the fastest-growing beverage brands for dollar sales and campaigns to increase that number, however the commercial is true to its roots of demonstrating a healthy alternative soda for the audience that is delicious and refreshing. (“How Poppi Is Reshaping”) Although the ad serves the self interest of the brand to make more profit it does look to influence society in choosing a better soda for this health when it comes to common situations presented to society.

The Poppi commercial is considered socially responsible because it considers the benefits to the common good as whole based on the impact choosing a healthier soda can have on the diets of many. Based on the Code of Advertising, the Poppi ad is socially responsible due to its truthfulness, promotion of positive values, and prioritization of ethical behavior beyond profit. This ad encourages viewers towards healthier habits in a respectful manner. The emphasis of the prebiotic soda encourages wellness to viewers and avoids aggressive tactics by using humor and relatable language. (“Code of Advertising”)

While the showcase of influencers could impact the position of Poppi as exclusive, this does not affect the main goal of the ad, to sway consumers in a healthier direction without pressuring them. Referring to the Code of Advertising clarifies the Poppi ad as Socially Responsible because overall it looks to improve and not harm society.

DECISION

Based on this assessment, the 2025 Poppi Super Bowl commercial, “Soda Thoughts,” passes four out of the five components of the TARES test. Therefore, the ad passes and is considered mostly ethical and proves to be truthful, showing respect, equity, and social responsibility by promoting a healthier lifestyle by choosing to drink Poppi. The ad promotes this using relatable marketing strategies within the commercial and avoids being misleading. The most important parts of the TARES test fall under the truthfulness and social responsibility portion because consumers rely on the validity of the information in the ad to decide whether they want to purchase the product. The social responsibility portion works in adherence to the truthfulness because it is critical that the company focuses on the greater good of society rather than focusing on profit only. Poppi does this by encouraging people to drink Poppi, working towards a healthier lifestyle.

The Poppi ad falls short on the authenticity part of the TARES test due to the disconnect between the surrounding influence vending-machine marketing campaign in addition to Poppi’s use of influencers in their commercial, because many viewers found this to be exclusionary and brought up questions about the integrity of Poppi to its consumers. The Poppi aligned with Poppi’s values; however, their target consumers were outraged by the marketing campaign connected to the commercial, and this is why the authenticity portion of the TARES test wasn't

successful. While the content of the ad was authentic to Poppi's values the overall trust of the consumers towards the influencer narrative was lost. In conclusion, the Poppi commercial is considered mostly ethical to its consumers after completing the TARES test.

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