

Re-structure advertising controls

Beverage alcohol is prominent among the many branded consumer goods that young people, in particular, increasingly use as a way of signalling their identity and place in the world. The producers and marketers of beverage alcohol, many of whom are global players, use sophisticated promotional practices to target specific groups such as those starting to drink, regular young drinkers and established young drinkers. This marketing utilizes multiple channels (youth radio, television, events, websites, mobile phones) and diverse modalities (advertising, sponsorship, branding). Such marketing of alcohol to young people is at the forefront of what is termed post-modern marketing. Advertising and branding are crafted to mirror and express dominant representations of youth culture and lifestyles. Promotion is never static, even in established markets, as new cohorts of young people become available as targets for marketing activity on a continual basis as they mature. Market segmentation and targeting is used by the alcohol industry to ensure that significant amounts of advertising are placed where youth are more likely to be exposed to it than adults. Paid placements of products in films, television, books, and video games is another way to embed alcoholic beverages in the daily lives of young people.

The rapid rise of **information technology** and, in particular, the Internet has given manufacturers a new promotional opportunity. Commercial alcohol web sites are easily accessible to youth, and are often accessed from search engines through non-related key word searches for games, entertainment, music, contests, and free screensavers. Content analyses of web sites that are registered to large alcohol companies reveal that young drinkers are targeted through a glorification of youth culture that offers humour, hip language, interactive games and contests, audio downloads of rock music, and community-building chat rooms and message boards.

Grass-roots level marketing has also increased during the 1990s through the use of technologies such as the Internet, the adoption of racial, ethnic, and other holidays and celebrations and the expansion of sponsorship from sporting events to popular music concerts as alcohol marketing opportunities, to events in which alcohol is often a central part of the activities, thereby embedding products in young people's lifestyles and daily practices.

Commercial sponsorship has expanded greatly since the 1980's, led by the tobacco industry, but with the alcohol industry in second place. As a result, alcohol sponsorship has become common across Europe in all the key areas of youth culture: music, sport, dance, film and television.

Content of advertisements

There is an enormous wealth of evidence that the content of advertisements increases positive attitudes and beliefs about alcohol amongst young people¹. In addition, the content of advertisements increases expectancies about the use of alcohol amongst young people and the role of alcohol in their lives. Young people are particularly drawn to elements of music, characters, story and humour. Young people who like advertisement believe that positive consequences of drinking are more likely, their peers drink more frequently, and their peers approve more of drinking. These beliefs interact to produce a greater likelihood of drinking, or of intention to drink in the near future.

Volume of advertisements

There is an increasing amount of evidence that shows that the volume of advertisements increases the likelihood of young people starting to drink, the amount they drink, and the amount they drink on any one occasion. These findings are similar to the impact of advertising on smoking² and eating behaviour³.

- Amongst Belgian secondary school children, more exposure to television viewing and to music videos in 2003 were both independently associated with more alcohol consumed whilst going out in 2004⁴.
- Amongst seventh grade South Dakota (US) school children, exposure to in-store beer displays predicted drinking onset in the next two years amongst non-drinkers, and exposure to alcohol advertisements in magazines or beer stands at sports or music events predicted greater frequency of drinking amongst drinkers two years later⁵.
- Amongst Los Angeles (US) youth, if a 11-12 year old, compared with the average, watched 60% more alcohol advertisements on TV, one year later, they were 44% more likely to have used beer, 34% more likely to have ever used wine/liquor, and 26% more likely to have had 3 or more drinks on one occasion⁶.
- Amongst American 15-26 year olds (who at baseline, on average, saw 23 advertisements per month, were exposed to \$3.4 per adult worth of advertisements per year, and who consumed 38.5 drinks per month), 21 months after baseline, for every 4% more alcohol advertisements seen on TV, radio, billboards and in magazines at baseline, they drank 1% more drinks per month, and for every 15% more exposure in their media market on alcohol advertising, they drank 3% more drinks per month⁷.

Self-regulating advertisements

In some countries, there is a reliance on 'self regulation' of alcohol marketing - voluntary systems implemented by the advertising, media and alcohol producing industries, and promoted by the industries as the most appropriate approach. There is no scientific evidence whatsoever that tests the effectiveness of self-regulation or shows that it works, but there is considerable documentation and experience that shows that these voluntary systems do not prevent the kind of marketing which has an impact on younger people and that these systems result in pervasive marketing of concern to public health and the community. Self-regulation can work to the extent that there is a current and credible threat of regulation by government, and, unless industry processes related to alcohol advertising standards come under a legal framework, and are monitored and reviewed by a government agency, governments may find that allowing industry self-regulation results in loss of policy control of the marketing of a product that impacts heavily on public health.

There are good examples of regulations on alcohol marketing in some countries. France's Loi Evin is one such model which bans most advertising and sponsorship and restricts permitted advertising to description of the product without any of the messages which make advertising particularly attractive to younger people. When the Loi Evin was challenged in the European Court of Justice, it was upheld, noting that it is in fact undeniable that advertising acts as an encouragement to consumption; the French rules on TV advertising are appropriate to ensure their aim of protecting public health; and they do not go beyond what is necessary to achieve such an objective.

¹ Anderson, P. & Baumberg, B. (2006). Alcohol in Europe: a public health perspective. http://ec.europa.eu/health-eu/news_alcoholineurope_en.htm

² Lovato C, Linn G, Stead LF, Best A. (2003). Impact of tobacco advertising and promotion on increasing adolescent smoking behaviours. *The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, Issue 3. Art. No.: CD003439. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD003439.

³ Hastings GB, Stead M, McDermott L, Forsyth AJM, MacKintosh AM, Rayner M *et al.* (2003). Review of Research on the Effects of Food Promotion to Children – Final Report and Appendices. Prepared for the Food Standards Agency. Published on Food Standards Agency website. Available at <http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/foodpromotiontochildren1.pdf>.

⁴ Van Den Bluck, J and Beullens, K. (2005) television and music video exposure and adolescent alcohol use while going out. *Alcohol and Alcoholism* 2005 40(3):249-253.

⁵ Ellickson PL; Collins RL; Hambarsoomians K; McCaffrey DF (2005). Does alcohol advertising promote adolescent drinking? Results from a longitudinal assessment. *Addiction* Feb;100(2):235-46.

⁶ Stacy AW, Zogg JB, Unger JB, Dent CW. (2004). Exposure to televised alcohol ads and subsequent adolescent alcohol use. *Am J Health Behav.*28:498-509.

⁷ Snyder LB, Hamilton M, Fleming-Milici F, *et al.* (2002). The effect of alcohol advertising on youth 15–26 years old. *Alcohol Clin Exp Res* 26(6):900– 6.