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Critical social marketing: assessing the impact of alcohol marketing on youth drinking

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**Critical Social Marketing: Assessing the Impact of Alcohol Marketing on Youth Drinking**

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**Abstract**
This paper presents data from wave one of a longitudinal cohort study examining the impact of alcohol marketing on drinking of 920 secondary school pupils in Scotland. Critical social marketing studies such as this can help to inform the evidence base, and policy and regulation. Variables were constructed for 13 different types of alcohol marketing, along with various measures of drinking behaviour. Confounding variables tested included media exposure, demographics and parental and peer influence. Regression analyses found significant associations between awareness of, exposure to, and involvement in, alcohol marketing, and drinking behaviours and attitudes towards alcohol. The findings add to the evidence base demonstrating an association between alcohol marketing and youth drinking behaviour, and can help inform policy and regulation.
Critical Social Marketing: Assessing the Impact of Alcohol Marketing on Youth Drinking

Introduction: Critical Social Marketing

The most commonly used definition of social marketing is offered by Kotler and Zaltman (1971). However Lazer and Kelley (1973) offered an alternative definition which also proposed that social marketing is concerned with assessing the impact commercial marketing has on society: “Social marketing is concerned with the application of marketing knowledge, concepts, and techniques to enhance social as well as economic ends. It is also concerned with analysis of the social consequence of marketing policies, decisions and activities.” (p. ix emphasis added)

Such an application of social marketing has links with the critical marketing paradigm (Hastings and Saren, 2003; Gordon et al., 2007). As a result of radical social, economic and political change over the last few decades academics have developed the critical marketing paradigm (Brownlie et al., 1994; Thomas, 1999) to use a critical theory based perspective to appraise marketing theory and practice. Critical theory is a social theory informed by structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, Marxist theory and several other streams of thought. Essentially it is oriented towards critiquing and changing society as a whole, rather than only to understand and explain it as traditional theory does (Horkheimer, 1937).

Therefore an important task of critical theory is to simultaneously offer a critique of contemporary society whilst envisioning solutions to problems. This concept has links to the development of upstream social marketing which seeks to encourage policymakers to adopt new policies, or organisations to make improvements to their services and practice, rather than solely focusing on individual behaviour change (Andreasen, 1995) A critical theory based perspective to social marketing research can be applied to examining the impact of commercial marketing on society. The findings from such research can then help inform upstream social marketing efforts and provide the opportunity to influence policy and regulation. The study described in this article takes such an approach by using a critical social marketing framework to assess the cumulative impact of alcohol marketing on youth drinking.

Alcohol, Alcohol Marketing, and Young People

The period 1995-2004 witnessed a 24% increase in per capita alcohol consumption in the UK (HM Government, 2007). Furthermore the UK now has one of the highest recorded rates of binge drinking and associated harm in the whole of Europe (Hibell et al., 2004). The level of youth drinking in the UK between 2000 and 2006 rose considerably – by 43.4% for 11-13 year olds males and more markedly by 82.6% for 11-13 year old females. Concurrently there has been a 20% increase in hospital admissions among youth due to alcohol use (Diment et al., 2007).

Binge drinking amongst young people is a strong predictor of alcohol dependency in later life (Jeffersis et al. 2005) and is associated with coronary heart disease, liver cirrhosis and stroke (Gutjaher et al., 2001; Leon and McCambridge, 2006, Britton and McPherson, 2001). Furthermore the social problems associated with youth drinking elicit high levels of public concern (HM Government, 2007). Nearly half of all 10-17 year olds who drink regularly have admitted to some sort of criminal activity or disorderly behaviour (Crime and Society Foundation, 2004).

The deleterious effects associated with problem drinking have generated a focus on factors which may causally influence drinking and associated behaviours. One factor which has been identified is the influence of alcohol marketing.
The alcohol market in the UK is big business, estimated to be worth in excess of £41.6bn in 2007 (Keynote, 2008). An estimated £300 million is spent on alcohol advertising (WARC, 2006), and in excess of £800 million is spent on all forms of alcohol marketing, per annum in the UK (Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit, 2003).

Research on the effect of alcohol marketing on drinking behaviour has taken two principal forms. Econometric studies involve statistical analysis of the relationship between overall levels of alcohol consumption, typically using sales data, and overall levels of advertising or marketing expenditure. Consumer studies examine how individual people’s knowledge, attitudes and behaviour are influenced by their exposure to alcohol marketing.

The majority of econometric studies in this area suggest that alcohol marketing has little or no effect on overall alcohol consumption (Duffy, 1991; Nelson, 2003). However econometric studies suffer from a number of methodological weaknesses (Hastings et al., 2005).

Consumer studies use individuals as the unit of analysis and attempt to explore and predict the responses of young people to alcohol marketing. Findings from recent systematic reviews of this evidence base suggest that alcohol marketing does have an effect on drinking behaviour (Smith and Foxcroft, 2009, Anderson et al., 2009, Booth et al., 2008). However gaps in the evidence base have been identified.

Currently there have been no longitudinal consumer studies carried out in the UK. There is a paucity of studies considering the impact of below the line channels such as new media. Indeed existing consumer studies tend to focus on one or two channels rather than examining the cumulative impact of the whole alcohol marketing mix.

**Research Design and Methodology**

The study used a longitudinal cohort design to investigate the cumulative impact of the whole alcohol marketing communications mix in the UK on youth drinking during the period when most young people start experimenting with alcohol aged 13-15. Our main research hypothesis was that all things being equal, young people who are more aware and appreciative of alcohol marketing would be more likely to be drinkers and report future drinking intentions. A baseline survey sample was collected amongst 2nd year secondary school pupils, with a follow up survey in 4th year. This article presents cross sectional data from first wave of the study, on the associations between of awareness of, exposure to and involvement with alcohol marketing on drinking status and future drinking intentions.

A stratified random sampling approach (Sapsford and Jupp, 1996) was used. Invitation packs for potential respondents were sent out to the homes of all S2 pupils attending schools in three local authority areas in Scotland. This generated a potential sample frame size of approximately 9500 respondents. From this a random sample of 920 was drawn following screening for required sample characteristics and attrition during fieldwork. An extensive piloting and pre-testing process was conducted to ensure the acceptability, appropriateness and comprehension of the questionnaire content, and to ensure respondents could accurately reflect their views and experiences without constraining responses (Kinnear and Taylor, 1991; Fink and Kosecoff, 1998). The final questionnaire was split into two parts, an interview administered questionnaire measuring awareness, appreciation and involvement with alcohol marketing and a self completion questionnaire measuring drinking and associated behaviours.

A range of drinking behaviour measures were collected including, drinking status and future drinking intentions (reported here), as well as type of drink and amount in units consumed last time had a drink, and frequency of drinking. Dichotomous
questions were used when asking young people about their contact with alcohol marketing. Measures for awareness of alcohol marketing were taken across 15 different types of alcohol marketing (see table 1). Measures for young people’s appreciation and involvement in alcohol marketing communications were also taken. Likert scales and semantic differential scales were used in measures to assess respondent’s awareness, appreciation and perception of selected key alcohol brands.

Control variables used in the analysis included parental, family member and peer influence (Petraitis et al., 1995; Szalay et al., 1996), liking of advertising (Robinson et al., 1998), level of deviance (Ellickson et al., 2001), and age.

**Results**

Table one illustrates respondents’ awareness of alcohol marketing channels. For the entire sample awareness was highest for TV advertising (76%), branded clothing (66%), sport sponsorship (61%) and price promotions (60%). For electronic communications, approximately a quarter of the sample (24%) were aware of mobile phone/computer screensavers. Drinkers showed higher awareness of all marketing channels, except for music sponsorship, which 36% of both drinkers and non-drinkers were aware of, see table one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alcohol Marketing Channels*</th>
<th>Not had a proper drink N=594</th>
<th>Had a proper drink N=318</th>
<th>P value (X² test for trend)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TV/Cinema</td>
<td>75 (439)</td>
<td>85 (262)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posters/Billboards</td>
<td>54 (307)</td>
<td>59 (178)</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers/Magazines</td>
<td>30 (173)</td>
<td>40 (123)</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-store</td>
<td>54 (311)</td>
<td>64 (196)</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price promotions</td>
<td>59 (336)</td>
<td>70 (214)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Sponsorship</td>
<td>60 (343)</td>
<td>72 (217)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>66 (381)</td>
<td>72 (223)</td>
<td>0.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>4 (26)</td>
<td>7 (21)</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web sites</td>
<td>6 (37)</td>
<td>7 (22)</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Phone/Computer screensaver</td>
<td>21 (124)</td>
<td>32 (99)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social networking sites</td>
<td>7 (43)</td>
<td>22 (70)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Sponsorship</td>
<td>36 (205)</td>
<td>36 (107)</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV/Film Sponsorship</td>
<td>30 (170)</td>
<td>35 (105)</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity endorsement</td>
<td>14 (82)</td>
<td>18 (54)</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product design</td>
<td>18 (103)</td>
<td>25 (76)</td>
<td>0.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of marketing channels aware of***</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most common type of marketing involvement (table 2) was ownership of alcohol branded clothing (45%), free branded gifts (11%) and price promotions (10%), see table two. Significantly more drinkers reported involvement in all forms of alcohol marketing, except for branded gifts, whereas significantly more non-drinkers reported no involvement in any form of alcohol marketing.

Two logistic regressions were performed to measure association between alcohol marketing and drinking behaviour with drinking status as the dependent variable. Variables were entered in the following blocks using forward likelihood ratio: (1) how many of their friends drink, whether their mum, dad and sibling(s) drink and perceived prevalence of drinking among 13, 14 and 15 year olds; (2) demographics
(age, sex, social grade, ethnicity and religion); (3) whether sibling(s)/parents/friends consider it OK to try drinking to see what it is like; (4) liking of school, rating of school work, liking of adverts and liking of alcohol adverts; and (5) the number of alcohol marketing channels respondents were aware of (in the first analysis), types of alcohol marketing communications respondents were aware of (in the second analysis) and involvement in alcohol marketing.

The first logistic regression model examined the association between drinking status and the number of marketing channels adolescents were aware of and involvement in alcohol marketing, after controlling for the effects of the control variables listed in the methodology section. A total of 711 respondents were included in the analysis. The model was significant (p<0.001) and explained 38% of variance in drinking status, i.e. whether or not respondents had consumed a proper alcoholic drink (Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.384$). The total number of cases classified correctly was 78%, including 61% of drinkers and 87% of non-drinkers. It was found that being aware of more alcohol marketing channels (adjusted OR [Adj OR] = 1.108, Confidence Interval [CI] = 1.032-1.189, p<.005) and liking alcohol advertisements (Adj OR = 1.324, CI = 1.102-1.589, p=0.005) increased the odds of being a drinker by 11% and 32% respectively.

In logistic regression model two the total number of alcohol marketing channels of which adolescents were aware was replaced by the types of alcohol marketing channels of which they were aware. A total of 714 respondents were included in the analysis. The model was significant (p<.001) and explained approximately 39% of variance in drinking status (Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.393$). The total number of cases classified correctly was 78%, including 60% of drinkers and 88% of non-drinkers. Awareness of advertisements and promotions (Adj OR = 2.283, CI = 1.161-4.490, p<0.05) and liking alcohol adverts (Adj OR = 1.288, CI = 1.070-1.551, p<0.01) increased the odds of being a drinker by 128% and 29% respectively. Involvement in electronic marketing (including having looked at a website for alcohol brands or about drinking; downloaded a mobile phone or computer screensaver containing an alcohol brand name or logo; and used a web home page) increased the odds of being a drinker by 220% (Adj OR = 3.204, CI = 1.067-9.619, p<0.05).

Stepwise linear regression analyses (tables 3 and 4) were then performed with drinking intentions within the next year as the dependent variable and the following independent variables: the control variables used in the logistic regressions, the number of alcohol marketing channels respondents were aware of (linear regression analysis 1), types of alcohol communications respondents were aware of (linear regression analysis 2) and involvement in alcohol marketing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Association between the number of alcohol marketing channels adolescents were aware of and their reported likelihood of drinking alcohol in the next year.</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>2.818</td>
<td>-.243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived parental /sibling / closest friends approval of trying alcohol to see what it's like</td>
<td>.232</td>
<td>.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of friends who drink alcohol at least once a week</td>
<td>-.211</td>
<td>.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking of alcohol ads</td>
<td>.179</td>
<td>.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling drinks alcohol</td>
<td>.353</td>
<td>.084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of alcohol marketing channels aware of</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking of school</td>
<td>-.115</td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mum drinks alcohol</td>
<td>.280</td>
<td>.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know if mum drinks alcohol</td>
<td>.385</td>
<td>.153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion: none</td>
<td>.191</td>
<td>.082</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first linear regression model (table 3), examining the association between future drinking intentions and awareness of number of alcohol marketing channels, included 704 respondents, was significant (F = 54.950, df = 9, 695, p<.001) and accounted for 41% of the variance. The more alcohol marketing channels respondents
were aware of and the more they liked alcohol advertisements, the more likely they were to think that they would drink alcohol in the next year.

Table 4: Association between the types of alcohol marketing channels adolescents were aware of and their reported likelihood of drinking alcohol in the next year.

| (Constant) | 2.866 | .237 | 12.073 | .000 |
| Perceived parental /sibling / closest friends approval of trying alcohol to see what it's like | .232 | .019 | .377 | 11.992 | .000 |
| No' of friends who drink alcohol at least once a week | -.207 | .041 | -.159 | 5.077 | .000 |
| Liking of alcohol ads | .171 | .038 | .138 | 4.522 | .000 |
| Sibling drinks | .344 | .084 | .123 | 4.114 | .000 |
| Liking of school | -.115 | .032 | -.108 | 3.541 | .000 |
| Awareness of ads and promotions | .368 | .134 | .067 | 2.883 | .004 |
| Mum drinks | .294 | .085 | .111 | 3.464 | .001 |
| Don't know if mum drinks | .389 | .153 | .079 | 2.542 | .011 |
| Involvement in electronic marketing | .557 | .229 | .075 | 2.430 | .015 |
| Religion: none | .194 | .082 | .069 | 2.349 | .019 |

The second linear regression model (table 4), examining the association between future drinking intentions and types of alcohol marketing channel, included 704 respondents, was significant (F = 49.823, df = 10, 694, p<.001) and accounted for 41% of the variance. Those who had seen alcohol advertising and promotion’s (including adverts on television, in the cinema, newspapers or magazines, posters/billboards, signs in shops, and special price offers) were significantly more likely to think that they would drink alcohol in the next year. Adolescents who more aware of advertisements and promotions for alcohol, and who liked alcohols advertisements, were more likely to think that they would drink alcohol in the next year. Also, those who had been involved in electronic marketing were significantly more likely to think that they would drink alcohol in the next year. Peer/parental influence, and perceived prevalence of drinking were also found to be significant.

**Discussion**

In summary our analysis from the wave one data found that whether or not adolescents had a proper alcoholic drink was found to be significantly associated with their awareness and appreciation of alcohol marketing communications. Adolescents’ predicted future drinking behaviour was significantly associated with their awareness and appreciation of alcohol marketing communications. Although cross-sectional our findings are consistent with the body of evidence suggesting a link between alcohol marketing and youth drinking behaviour. Longitudinal findings available later this year will enable discourse beyond association to causality. This subsequently generates discussion around the way alcohol marketing is regulated. Currently alcohol marketing regulation does not seem to prevent youth exposure and a subsequent impact on drinking behaviour (Anderson et al., 2009).

Returning to our critical social marketing framework, the findings from this research not only has the ability to inform understanding of the impact of alcohol marketing on society but can play a role in the debate around policy and regulation. For effective regulation of alcohol marketing to be achieved there is a requirement for a strong and sound evidence base to inform the regulatory framework. The findings from our research have already contributed to debate around policy and regulation of alcohol marketing in policy forums such as the European Alcohol and Health Forum, demonstrating the utility of critical social marketing research to inform upstream efforts. Research can not only contribute to the evidence base but assist policy makers in constructing effective regulation of alcohol marketing. Furthermore the involvement of the marketing sector in this process would correspond with long established marketing academic traditions (Wilkie and Moore, 2003). Critical social marketing can help develop the upstream social marketing and critical marketing
paradigms and provide avenues towards finding intelligent solutions. The research demonstrates that critical social marketing and upstream social marketing brings an important contribution to the debate surrounding alcohol marketing.

References


