

## YOUNG PEOPLE AND ALCOHOL ADVERTISING

Recent research shows that there is a causal link between alcohol advertising, drinking attitudes and behaviour amongst young people

It is both the content and the volume of alcohol advertising which impacts upon under- age drinking – young people are exposed to more alcohol marketing than adults

Alcohol brands rely increasingly on sophisticated online marketing strategies enabling them to reach millions of young people in unregulated environments

### Issue

Advertising has long influenced how people purchase and consume goods. Young people are particularly susceptible to the influence of advertising due to their potential for forming brand loyalties at an early age, limited scepticism, and high use of social media—where alcohol marketing is increasingly found.

Although there is a downward trend in youth drinking, teen alcohol use is a major public health problem, with negative consequences ranging from injuries, underperformance at school and risky sexual behaviour, to damage to the developing brain.

### How does alcohol marketing impact upon young people?

There is a significant body of evidence to show that alcohol advertising has an impact upon drinking attitudes and behaviour amongst young people. Alcohol marketing encourages young people to drink earlier and once they have started, it encourages them to consume more; and it is both the content and volume of advertising and marketing that causes the damage<sup>1</sup>. Historically, much of the research into alcohol advertising and its impact on young people has focused on levels of exposure. However, recent studies have explored whether the links between alcohol advertising and teen drinking attitudes are causal.

### **Key studies**

#### **1. RAND Europe – exposure study**

- In 2012, RAND Europe carried out an extensive assessment of young people’s exposure to alcohol marketing through TV and online media. This found that young people in the UK (aged 10–15 years) were exposed to 11% more alcohol advertising than adults, taking viewership patterns into account.

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, P et al (2009) Impact of alcohol advertising and media exposure on adolescent alcohol use: a systematic review of longitudinal studies. *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, 44, 3, 229-243.

- Exposure also varied by the type of alcoholic beverage and associations were strongest for ready-mixed drinks (alcopops), with young people exposed to 51 per cent more advertising than adults.<sup>2</sup>

## **2. “They’ll drink bucket loads of the stuff”**

- A memorandum by Professor Gerard Hastings from Stirling University, entitled “They’ll Drink Bucket Loads of the Stuff”, considered internal marketing documents generated by alcohol producers and their advertising agencies. These revealed major shortcomings in the current self-regulatory codes covering alcohol advertising and found that young people were a key target group.
- Professor Hastings found that market research data on 15 and 16 year olds was used to guide campaign development, and there was a clear acknowledgement that particular products appealed to children. For instance, Lambrini was referred to as a ‘Kids’ drink’ and references were also made to the need to recruit new drinkers and establish brand loyalty: Carling took a particular interest in becoming “the first choice for the festival virgin”, offering free branded tents and a breakfast beer<sup>3</sup>.

## **3. Report on the extent, nature, and consequences of children and young people’s exposure to alcohol advertising and sponsorship – Monash University, Australia**

- A recently published report by Monash University in Australia examined the available evidence on the nature and extent of alcohol advertising and sponsorship in Australia, and the impact of exposure to alcohol advertising and sponsorship on children and young people’s drinking attitudes and behaviour.
- It found that there are over 40 peer reviewed empirical studies (longitudinal and cross-sectional) in this area involving approximately 100,000 children, from Australia, New Zealand, Europe, the United States, and the United Kingdom.
- The studies are consistent in showing that exposure of children and young people to alcohol advertising and sponsorship is associated with earlier age of initiation of alcohol use in previously non-drinkers, and more hazardous drinking in children and young people who are already drinking.
- The evidence base suggests that more frequent exposure to alcohol advertising and sponsorship is associated with more problematic alcohol attitudes and drinking behaviours. That is, there is dose-response.
- Australian studies examining the amount of children’s exposure to alcohol advertising and sponsorship when watching TV suggest that children are frequently exposed to alcohol advertising and sponsorship throughout their day.
- Children and young people watching free to air televised live sport are likely to be the most exposed to alcohol advertising and sponsorship. This is because the current advertising

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<sup>2</sup> RAND Europe (September 2012) Assessment of young people’s exposure to alcohol marketing in audio-visual and online media

<sup>3</sup> Professor G Hastings et al (2009) “They’ll Drink Bucket Loads of the Stuff” Memorandum University of Stirling

regulations for live sport allow alcohol advertising and sponsorship messages at any time of the day, regardless of the number of children watching.

- The study also found that the content of alcohol advertising and sponsorship messages has an effect on children and young people’s engagement and liking of alcohol. There is, however, limited evidence on the impact of online alcohol marketing on young people’s alcohol-related attitudes and drinking behaviour.

#### **4. NYU School of Global Public Health and Grossman School of Medicine – comparing alcohol and tobacco – Babor et al.**

- A new study led by NYU School of Global Public Health and NYU Grossman School of Medicine, uses a framework developed to show causality between tobacco advertising and youth smoking, and applied it to alcohol advertising.
- There is scientific consensus that advertising by the tobacco industry—which has had a long history of marketing directly to youth—causes teen smoking. This conclusion set the framework to investigate a potentially causal relationship between marketing and alcohol use amongst young people.
- The research on alcohol synthesized the results of 163 studies on alcohol advertising and youth alcohol consumption. Each of the review articles evaluated a different aspect of alcohol marketing and drinking among young people. The reviews covered hundreds of studies that used different research designs and measurement techniques, and the data came from a variety of countries and scientific disciplines.
- The research found that, in every aspect studied, the influence of tobacco and alcohol advertising on teens was analogous. For instance, both tobacco and alcohol companies have used mascots in advertisements, which research shows are easily recognized and trusted by children.
- In addition, both tobacco and alcohol companies use or have used movies, television, and sporting events as opportunities for advertising and product placement, with studies showing that exposure to smoking and drinking increases the risk for youth initiation.
- Finally, the researchers found that exposure to tobacco and alcohol advertising and teen knowledge, attitudes, initiation, and continued use of the products are extraordinarily similar.
- Many studies show that advertising is a risk factor for both smoking and drinking, with several studies showing a dose-dependent relationship, with more exposure to advertising increasing consumption.<sup>4</sup>

#### **5. Systematic review of research on association between alcohol marketing and youth drinking – Jernigan et al.**

Similarly, a recent systematic review of research on the association between alcohol marketing and youth drinking (Jernigan et al., 2017), based on studies published since 2009, using sophisticated

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<sup>4</sup> “Alcohol Marketing and Youth Drinking: Is There a Causal Relationship?” (*Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, Supplement 19*)

longitudinal designs with more than 35,000 persons, reported a significant association between youth exposure to alcohol marketing and subsequent drinking behaviour.

### **Online / Social Media Environments**

The alcohol industry has also been quick to exploit the opportunities offered by online and social media environments and evidence suggests a growing trend amongst drinks firms to promote their products online, particularly via websites which appeal strongly to younger audiences. Recent years have also seen a significant increase in the deployment of celebrity alcohol ‘brand ambassadors’ who appeal directly to young people and use their own social media platforms to promote particular alcohol brands. Finally, recent studies show that young people (either consciously or sub-consciously) are responsible for promoting specific alcohol brands, through user generated content on popular and influential social media sites.

Key developments over recent years include:

- In 2011, Diageo struck a multimillion-dollar advertising contract with Facebook and research carried out into US purchasing trends found that sales of Diageo brands increased by up to 20% in the first year of the partnership.
- Bud Light was the first alcohol brand to advertise on Snapchat, using the messaging app’s age-gated ads to link images of Bud Light to the content people share around events.
- Budweiser has also joined corporate giants like Samsung and McDonalds in buying media to appear in the montages of photos and videos Snapchatters are creating around specific events.
- Bud Light’s Snapchat campaign came shortly after its use of Tinder ads and fellow AB Inbev beer Stella Artois’ use of Instagram ads, further cementing the reach of alcohol brands via social media.
- Jack Daniel’s marketing has collaborated with Buzzfeed and Vice Media – information sources that are highly popular with young people and young adults, perhaps partly explaining why it is now one of the top five brands of choice for young people engaging with alcohol treatment services in England and Wales.
- Alcohol brands have employed celebrity ‘brand ambassadors’ such as Rita Ora and the Jonas Brothers, to promote alcohol products via their online platforms, giving exposure to millions of children and young people.

The online environment is also under-regulated – official alcohol sites tend to use ineffective, self-reported date of birth pages to filter out under-18s, whilst unofficial alcohol images (e.g. photos of alcoholic drinks or brands) can freely appear on social media sites such as Facebook and You-Tube.

### **Balance Public Perceptions**

There is considerable concern about the impact of alcohol advertising on children. In Balance’s Annual Public Perceptions Survey 2019<sup>5</sup>:

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<sup>5</sup> Balance Public Perceptions Research 2019

- Almost three quarters (72%) of the North East population supported measures to restrict children and young people’s exposure to alcohol advertising;
- 74% felt that alcohol advertising should only appear before an 18 certificate film in the cinema;
- 76% supported controls to limit the exposure of children to alcohol advertising on social media sites;
- Almost two thirds (64%) supported a ban on TV alcohol advertising between 6am and 11pm;
- 63% supported a ban on alcohol advertising in outdoor and public spaces such as streets, parks and on public transport; and
- 48% supported a ban on alcohol companies sponsoring sporting events, such as football tournaments.

### **What do we want to happen?**

We support one of the key recommendations in the PHE evidence review, that *“Government agencies—independent from the alcohol industry—should restrict alcohol marketing exposures in the adolescent population<sup>6</sup>.”*

This means that the Government should introduce **statutory** advertising bans, rather than the current voluntary codes, which have been shown to be completely ineffective. Specifically, we support the recommendations in Health First, an evidence-based alcohol strategy for the UK<sup>7</sup>:

- An independent body should be established to regulate alcohol promotion, including product and packaging design, in the interests of public health and community safety.
- All alcohol advertising and sponsorship should be prohibited. In the short term, alcohol advertising should only be permitted in newspapers and other adult press. Its content should be limited to factual information about brand, provenance and product strength.
- Alcohol producers should be required to declare their expenditure on marketing and the level of exposure of young people to their campaigns.
- The sale of alcohol products that appeal more to children and young people than to adults should be prohibited.

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<sup>6</sup> PHE Evidence Review 2016

<sup>7</sup> Health First: an evidence based alcohol strategy for England