Alcohol Marketing and Advertising: A review of the debate

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Irish alcohol consumption patterns

• Average consumption 58.6% more than max recommended level

• 56% of adults regularly drink in risky ways
  • 34% of adults binge drink every time they drink alcohol

• BUT...23% never drink
Social & medical consequences

- 28% of A&E visits in Ireland
- Alcohol-related cancers to double in Ireland by 2020
- 275% increase in alcohol related liver disease in 15-34 year olds between 1995-2009
- 50% of child protection cases; 50% of sexual assaults
- 33%+ of fatal car accidents
- Impact on families, relationships, STIs etc
Significant economic burden in time of austerity

- Cost: €3.72 BILLION in 2007
- 1.3% GDP
- €3,318 PER TAXPAYER
What role can marketing play?
Upstream drivers of consumption

- Income/price
  - Minimum unit pricing
- Family background
- Early experiences of alcohol and age of initiation
  - Perceived norms
  - Marketing
What is marketing?

- Product
- Price
- Place
- Promotion
EVERYTHING is marketing
Smartphone technology
But the industry argues it doesn’t work…

- “There is very little scientific evidence that advertising influences young people – parental and peer approval are much more influential” - *spiritsEurope, 2012*

- 2 arguments
  - Little scientific evidence
  - Peer approval more influential
Econometric studies

- Relationship between total expenditure and total consumption in specific countries/markets
  - Normally advertising in isolation

- Often relied on in industry argumentation

- No, or a very small, association between advertising and consumption

- Inappropriate method
  - Wrong measures
  - Wrong sample
  - Unrealistic
Consumer based studies

- More realistic
  - What brand managers actually do in practice

- Over a dozen longitudinal studies

- Indicate a cause-effect relationship between exposure to marketing and consumption/initiation
Anderson et al (2009)

Longitudinal studies consistently suggest that exposure to media and commercial communications on alcohol is associated with the likelihood that adolescents will start to drink alcohol, and with increased drinking amongst baseline drinkers. Based on the strength of this association … we conclude that alcohol advertising and promotion increases the likelihood that adolescents will start to use alcohol, and to drink more if they are already using alcohol.
Debate moves on

- Consensus around *whether* alcohol marketing influences consumption

- *How* and *when* does alcohol marketing work?
Social norms as one approach
What are perceived norms?

- Perceptions of what others do, or what others approve of

- Often misperceived
Perceived norms are powerful

- Alcohol consumption
- Smoking
- Littering/environment
- Sexual behaviour
- Gambling
- Tax compliance
- Eating and dieting
- Opinion formation

- Often more significant than other factors

- Especially powerful when:
  - Young
  - Situations of social ambiguity
Social norms and social media
Neknomination craze

- Early 2014

- Enormous levels of consumption in a short space of time

- 3 bottles of wine in 3 minutes

- Alcohol consumed with dog food, engine oil, live goldfish...

- Several deaths

- Peer norms a key driver
Where do social norm perceptions come from?

- Does the content, and pervasiveness, of marketing shape social norm perceptions?

- Is marketing likely to have an indirect impact on behaviour via normative pathways?
Irish study of third level students

- 1,071 undergraduate students
- Online, cross-sectional
- Controlled for key drivers of alcohol consumption

Cumulative measures of:
- Exposure (15 items)
- Engagement (17 items)
- Engagement online (12 items)
- Engagement in social media (7 items)

Consumption
- Frequency of drinking
- Frequency of drinking to get drunk

Perceived norms
- Both descriptive and injunctive
- Close friends
- Average student on campus
- Average person of the same age in Ireland
2 major conclusions

- Laddering effect driven by levels of interaction

- Marketing and the normalisation of consumption
Level of interaction predicts association

Exposure: Passive

Engagement: Active

Engagement online: Interaction with brand

Engagement in social media: Simultaneous interaction with brand AND peers
Marketing mediated by norms?

Perceived Norms

Marketing

Consumption
Marketing and normalisation

- Support for the argument that marketing normalises alcohol consumption

- Influence of marketing not entirely determined by the content
  - Regulatory codes
Implications

- Alcohol industry is correct: peers do matter...
- ...but they do not exist in a vacuum
Simultaneous interaction with marketing and peers

- Norms more powerful when they are made salient

- 2 particular dimensions of marketing highlight peer norms
The power of interaction

- Digital marketing and sponsorship

- High levels of passion and engagement with peers in a branded context
Move towards digital

- Significant shift towards digital marketing
  - Diageo: 21% of spend directed to digital in 2010
  - Diageo and Heineken special relationship with Facebook

- Key reasons
  - Below the radar
  - Harder to regulate
  - Better segmenting and targeting
  - More effective
Peer marketing

- “There is very little scientific evidence that advertising influences young people – parental and peer approval are much more influential” - spiritsEurope, 2012

- Peers are actively recruited
Inviting friends with branded tools

To be in with a chance to win €1,000 all you have to do is organise a night out via our invitation tool.
You can even win €1,000...
Sharing with friends is central
Peers in the marketing process

- Perpetuators and magnifiers of marketing
  - Personal communication forwarded by peers facilitated (and even paid for) by the industry

- Powerful simultaneous interaction with brand and peers
  - Particularly powerful in vulnerable situations
Implications for traditional alcohol marketing

- Strengthens argument for restrictions on all aspects of the marketing mix
  - Regulations with real teeth

- Content regulation
  - Regulate what can be said rather than what can’t be said

- Time and age regulations for cinema and television

- Sponsorship
Implications for digital marketing channels

- Digital marketing
  - International regulatory co-operation needed
  - No direct advertising to underage on social media sites
    - Age control
    - User generated material
  - Need for more transparency on what marketers actually do in the digital space
  - Heritage advertising
Digital: Age controls???

HOLD ON, ARE YOU OVER 18?

YES  NO
They even suggest ages...