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Marketing & Alcohol-Related Harm

Consumer studies show that alcohol advertisements encourage people to have positive expectations of alcohol and overlook the possible harm it can engender.

Research shows that there is a direct link between the volume of alcohol advertisements a young person is subjected to and their drinking habits. Thus, the more alcohol advertisements a young person sees, the more likely they are to start drinking, even at an earlier, and to drink more (Farke, 2008, p. 9)

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 occasion.

(2004 research sited in Farke, 2008, p.9)

Marketing of Alcohol to Young People

Alcohol products are being marketed in an increasingly sophisticated way, in order to make them attractive to young people in particular.

New products have been developed that target young people in particular. We have witnessed the trends of designer drinks, with brightly coloured and innovating packaging, to *alcopops* (alcoholic soft drinks) in the mid-1990s to *pre-mix cocktails*,

as well as the trend to mix high energy drinks with spirits (Anderson and Baumberg, 2006, p. 271).

The means employed to advertise alcohol products are also becoming increasingly varied and sophisticated. The alcohol industry invests in advertising in traditional media that attract youth, such as magazines with an important number of young readers. Television campaigns often portray young-looking people consuming alcohol with apparently no negative consequences. Sponsorship allows alcohol to be linked to sports or cultural events via sponsorship. New communication opportunities provided by the internet, text messaging and podcasts are also being employed by the alcohol industry. And the portrayal of alcohol in the entertainment sector, for example in films, songs, music videos, also contributes to building a positive image around alcohol consumption.

The new possibilities offered by new social media merit special reference. With a relatively small investment, advertising in social media such as Facebook, Twitter or MySpace allows producers direct access to a very wide target audience, often mainly composed of young people. As European youth spends an increasing amount of time on the internet, more than the time spent watching television, the alcohol industry has adjusted its advertising methods accordingly (EUCAM, 2009, p. 3).

Possible Policy Strategies

As the amount of alcohol advertisements young people are exposed to has been shown to have an impact on their consumption patterns, then restricting young people's exposure is a policy response.

Policy options when it comes to regulating alcohol advertisements range from:

→ A total ban of alcohol advertising, as has been applied in the EU for tobacco. This does not exist in Europe at present.

→ A ban on certain forms of alcohol advertising
France for example has banned alcohol sponsorship of sports events.

→ Regulating the contents of alcohol advertisements
This policy is applied both at European level and in Member States.

→ Regulating the contexts and times when advertisements are made public,
For example by stating that alcohol advertisements can only be broadcast after a certain time or only when the proportion of the young audience does not exceed a certain percentage of the overall audience.

→ Self-regulation

This approach brings together the relevant economic operators (alcohol industry, advertising sector, the media) and encourages them to develop and implement their own codes. However, this approach is successful only within a clear legal framework

and where there are clear incentives for the operators to cooperate (for example, the risk of imposing hard law if self-regulation efforts fail).
(WHO, 2009, p. 30)

EU Policy

The EU's **2006 Alcohol Strategy** made no reference to the marketing and advertising of alcohol among its five priority themes and the aims under these. However, the European Commission has committed itself to helping Member States exchange good practice on how to deal with irresponsible marketing. The Commission has also committed itself to working with stakeholders from different sectors to develop a code of commercial communication to be implemented at European and national level (European Commission, 2006, p. 13 and 16).

The **EU Directive on Audiovisual Media Services** (2007/65/EC) entered into force in 2007 and is part of national law since December 2009. Article 9.1(e) states that:

“audiovisual commercial communications for alcoholic beverages shall not be aimed specifically at minors and shall not encourage immoderate consumption of such beverages.”

Paragraph 3 of the same article forbids the sponsorship of audiovisual media services of programmes *“by undertakings whose principal activity is the manufacture or sale of cigarettes and other tobacco products.”* There is no equivalent provision for alcohol manufacturers.

These provisions are less detailed than those in force under the Television without Frontiers Directive (89/552/EC) [as amended by Directive 97/36/EC], which preceded the above-mentioned directive and which stated that:

“Television advertising and teleshopping for alcoholic beverages shall comply with the following criteria:

- (a) it may not be aimed specifically at minors or, in particular, depict minors consuming these beverages;*
- (b) it shall not link the consumption of alcohol to enhanced physical performance or to driving;*
- (c) it shall not create the impression that the consumption of alcohol contributes towards social or sexual success;*
- (d) it shall not claim that alcohol has therapeutic qualities or that it is a stimulant, a sedative or a means of resolving personal conflicts;*
- (e) it shall not encourage immoderate consumption of alcohol or present abstinence or moderation in a negative light;*
- (f) it shall not place emphasis on high alcoholic content as being a positive quality of the beverages.”*

However, the Audiovisual Media Services Directive does have a broader scope of application, as it covers not only television broadcasts but also on demand content that viewers select through for example the internet to watch when they wish.

The **European Alcohol and Health Forum**, established by the European Commission following the publication of the EU Alcohol Strategy in 2006 and bringing together diverse stakeholders in the field, has a task force focusing on Marketing Communication. Launched in June 2007, this Task Force has been mapping the situation and stakeholders' views on self-regulation, social marketing and targeting youth.

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- Further information on the AER Alcohol Peer Reviews is available at: <http://www.aer.eu/main-issues/health/alcohol-prevention/aer-alcohol-peer-reviews.html>

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