Alcohol Advertising and Youth

Research clearly indicates that, in addition to parents and peers, alcohol advertising and marketing have a significant impact on youth decisions to drink.

"While many factors may influence an underage person's drinking decisions, including among other things parents, peers and the media, there is reason to believe that advertising also plays a role." (Federal Trade Commission, Self-Regulation in the Alcohol Industry, 1999)\(^1\)

Parents and peers have a large impact on youth decisions to drink. However, research clearly indicates that alcohol advertising and marketing also have a significant effect by influencing youth and adult expectations and attitudes, and helping to create an environment that promotes underage drinking.

Evidence from long-term studies

- A national study published in January 2006 concluded that greater exposure to alcohol advertising contributes to an increase in drinking among underage youth. Specifically, for each additional ad a young person saw (above the monthly youth average of 23), he or she drank 1% more. For each additional dollar per capita spent on alcohol advertising in a local market (above the national average of $6.80 per capita), young people drank 3% more.\(^2\)

- Another study found that, among a group of 2,250 middle-school students in Los Angeles, those who viewed more television programs containing alcohol commercials while in the seventh grade were more likely in the eighth grade to drink beer, wine/liquor, or to drink three or more drinks on at least one occasion during the month prior to the follow-up survey.\(^3\)

- Researchers followed 3,111 students in South Dakota from seventh to ninth grade, and found that exposure to in-store beer displays in grade 7 predicted onset of drinking by grade 9, and exposure to magazine advertising for alcohol and to beer concessions at sports or music events predicted frequency of drinking in grade 9.\(^4\)

- A study of 2,406 never-drinking New Hampshire middle school students found that ownership of alcohol-branded merchandise at baseline was significantly associated with increased likelihood of having initiated drinking (OR=1.5) at follow-up one to two years later, after adjusting for wide range of confounders.\(^5\)

- Researchers from Dartmouth Medical School followed more than 5,000 Vermont and New Hampshire students ages 10 to 14 from 13 to 26 months, and found that those with higher exposure to movie alcohol use at the initial assessment were more likely to have started drinking at time of follow-up. They also found depictions of alcohol use in 92% of 601 contemporary movies, including in 52% of G-rated films.\(^6\)

Evidence from studies of the effects of reductions in alcohol advertising

- An econometric analysis using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 estimated that a 28% reduction in alcohol advertising would reduce adolescent monthly alcohol participation from 25% to between 24% and 21%, and would reduce adolescent participation in binge drinking from 12% to between 11% and 8%.\(^7\)

- An effort to estimate the likely effects of several alcohol policies on youth drinking behavior in
the U.S. population concluded that a complete ban on alcohol advertising would be the most effective, resulting in 7,609 fewer deaths from harmful drinking and a 16.4% drop in alcohol-related life-years lost.\(^8\)

- An analysis of the impact of evidence-based personal and environmental interventions on disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs) in 12 regions of the world found that in regions where heavy drinking is less prevalent, targeted strategies such as brief physician advice, roadside breath testing, and advertising bans would be most effective.\(^9\)

**Evidence of how alcohol advertising attracts and influences young people**

- A study on the responses of young people to alcohol advertising found that underage youth are drawn to music, animal and people characters, story and humor in alcohol advertising. Ads that were liked by youth in the study were more likely to elicit responses from youth saying they wanted to purchase the brand and products advertised. The three most popular alcohol ads among youth in the study used animal characters as the leading actors.\(^10\)

- A review of the neuroscience, psychology and marketing literatures concluded that adolescents, because of how the human brain develops, may be particularly attracted to branded products such as alcohol that are associated with risky behavior and that provide, in their view, immediate gratification, thrills and/or social status.\(^11\)

- If young people like alcohol ads, they are more likely to have positive expectancies about alcohol use and to intend to drink or to drink.\(^12,13\)

- Exposure to alcohol advertising shapes attitudes and perceptions about alcohol use among both young people (defined in this study as ages 15-20) and young adults (ages 21 to 29). However, these attitudes and perceptions predict young people’s positive expectancies and intentions to drink, but not those of young adults.\(^14\)

**What teens and others think about alcohol advertising and youth**

- A USA Today survey found that teens say ads have a greater influence on their desire to drink in general than on their desire to buy a particular brand of alcohol.\(^15\)

- Eighty percent of general public respondents in a poll by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms believed "that alcohol advertising influences youth to drink alcoholic beverages."\(^16\)

- Another poll, done for an alcohol-industry-funded organization called the Century Council, found that 73% of the public believes that "alcohol advertising is a major contributor to underage drinking."\(^17\)

- The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) recognizes the influence advertising can have on youth: "[T]he impact of advertising on radio and television audiences, particularly kids, cannot be overstated. Clever jingles, flashy lights, fast talking, and quick pacing, all contribute to the message of commercials."\(^18\)

**How much alcohol advertising reaches youth**

- Alcohol advertisers spent $2 billion on alcohol advertising in measured media (television, radio, print, outdoor, major newspapers and Sunday supplements) in 2005.\(^19\)

- Working from alcohol company documents submitted to them, the Federal Trade Commission estimated in 1999 that the alcohol industry’s total expenditures to promote alcohol (including through sponsorship, Internet advertising, point-of-sale materials, product placement, brand-logoed items and other means) were three or more times its expenditures for measured media advertising.\(^20\) This would mean that the alcohol industry spent approximately $6 billion or more on advertising and promotion in 2005.

- The Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Georgetown University has found that:
Between 2001 and 2005, youth exposure to alcohol advertising on television in the U.S. increased by 41%. Much of this increase resulted from the rise in distilled spirits advertising on television from 1,973 ads in 2001 to 46,854 ads in 2005.21

Youth exposure to alcohol advertising in magazines decreased by 31% between 2001 and 2004. In 2004, more than half of youth exposure to alcohol advertising in magazines came from 22 brands, all of which exposed youth to their advertising more effectively than adults.22

In a sample of radio advertising for the 25 leading alcohol brands in the summer of 2004, more than two-thirds of youth exposure to alcohol advertising came from ads placed on youth-oriented programming, defined as programming with youth audiences larger than the population of youth ages 12 to 20 in the local market.23

From 2001 though 2003, youth in the United States were 96 times more likely per capita to see an ad promoting alcohol than an industry ad discouraging underage drinking.24 In fact, compared to underage youth, adults age 21 and over were nearly twice as likely per capita to see advertising discouraging underage drinking.25

A study of alcohol advertising in magazines from 1997 to 2001 found that the number of beer and distilled spirits ads tended to increase with a magazine's youth readership. For every 1 million underage readers ages 12-19 in a magazine, researchers found 1.6 times more beer advertisements and 1.3 times more distilled spirits advertisements.26

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18Cited in U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General, Youth and Alcohol: Controlling Alcohol Advertising that Appeals to Youth (1991), 2.
19Nielsen Adviews.
21Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, Still Growing After All These Years: Youth Exposure to Alcohol Advertising on Television, 2001–2005 (Washington, D.C., 2006).
22Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, Youth Exposure to Alcohol Advertising in Magazines, 2001 to 2004: Good News, Bad News (Washington, D.C., 2006).

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