

Alcohol-branded merchandise: association with Australian adolescents' drinking and parent attitudes

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Summary

There is growing evidence that young people own alcohol-branded merchandise (ABM), and that ownership influences their drinking intentions and behaviors. However, there is a paucity of research on parents' knowledge or attitudes in relation to ownership of ABM. Study 1 (n=210), identified high levels of ownership of ABM and associations between ABM and drinking attitudes and behaviours. In Study 2, focus groups with Australian parents found that they were aware of ABM – and many had items of ABM in their home – but they had generally not engaged in consideration of the potential impact on their children. They clearly perceived ABM as advertising and, on reflection, acknowledged that this form of marketing may influence children's decisions about drinking. There is a need to raise parental awareness of the effects of ABM, and to endeavor to reduce children's exposure to this influential form of alcohol marketing.

Key words

alcohol, children, merchandise, marketing

BACKGROUND

Decades of research with young people have demonstrated that children recall (Lieberman and Orlandi, 1987) and like alcohol advertising (Grube, 1993). There is also a substantial

body of evidence that exposure to alcohol advertising is associated with drinking initiation and with frequency and quantity of drinking (Stacy et al., 2004; Ellickson et al., 2005; Snyder et al., 2006). The majority of this research has focused on communication messages that are clearly identified as advertising and thus overtly subject to the regulations that exist in the relevant jurisdiction.

A form of marketing that has more recently been the focus of research, but as yet not widely discussed in reviews of alcohol advertising regulation, is alcohol-branded merchandise (ABM) – that is, products such as clothing, gadgets, food and novelty items labeled with an alcohol brand. The studies reported in this paper focus on ABM, whilst recognising that it is only one small component of the barrage of alcohol marketing young people are exposed to.

A key aim of alcohol marketing is to establish a strong brand identity and build brand allegiance among (current and prospective) consumers (Casswell, 2004; Lin et al., 2012). There is increasing evidence that consumers form relationships with brands and that (particularly young) consumers use these relationships and associations in constructing their own identity (Patterson and O Malley, 2006; Lin et al., 2012). ABM is particularly important in this context as it is a form of alcohol marketing which young people can wear, carry or use in their everyday activities – providing constant exposure to, and identification with, a particular alcohol brand. This is not unlike other forms of alcohol marketing that are designed to embed themselves in (young) people's lives and identities, such as sponsorship of sporting and cultural events (Jones et al., 2010; Carter et al., 2013) and marketing on online social networks (Nicholls, 2012; Winpenny et al., 2014).

Do children and teenagers own ABM (and does it matter)?

Several studies have been conducted, particularly in the USA and the UK, examining young people's exposure to and/or ownership of ABM. Recent studies have reported ABM

ownership rates as: 51% of 12-14 year-old drinkers and 43% of non-drinkers in Scotland (Gordon et al., 2011); 34% of 13-14 year-old drinkers and 15% of non-drinkers in New Zealand Lin et al., 2012); and 21% of 6th to 8th grade never-drinkers in the US (Henriksen et al., 2008).

ABM influences drinking intentions and drinking behaviors both directly and indirectly (McClure et al., 2013). Studies in the US have found that middle school students who owned ABM were three times more likely to initiated drinking and 1.5 times more likely to be current drinkers (Hurtz et al., 2007); ownership of ABM was significantly associated with engagement in binge drinking (McClure et al., 2013); sixth to eighth grade non-drinkers who owned/wanted to own ABM at baseline were 77% more likely to have initiated drinking and 75% more likely to be current drinkers at 12-month follow-up; and ownership of ABM at 6th grade was associated with a greater likelihood of drinking (OR=1.76) and intending to drink (OR = 1.65) at seventh grade (Collins et al., 2007).

Purpose of the study

Despite growing evidence that young people own ABM, and that ownership influences their drinking intentions and behaviors, we found no published studies of ABM ownership and its impact outside of the US and the UK; and no studies from any country on parents' knowledge or attitudes in relation to ownership of ABM. Research indicates that parents play an important role in influencing their children's decisions about drinking (Nash et al., 2005; Koning et al., 2010; Miller and Plant, 2010), including evidence that parental guidance can lessen the influence of alcohol advertising (Austin et al., 2006). Thus, determining whether parents are aware of the impact of ABM on their children is an important first step in reducing children's exposure to this powerful marketing tool.

METHODS

Study 1

Instrument

The survey instrument was designed to assess adolescents' ownership of ABM, and explore the associations between ABM ownership and alcohol-related attitudes, intentions and behaviours. ABM ownership was measured using a modified version of the items used in a US longitudinal study (Collins et al., 2007); rather than asking a single question 'Do you own any hats, posters, or T-shirts that advertise alcohol (beer, wine, liquor, or wine coolers)?' this item was disaggregated into six separate questions: 'Do you own any [hats/t-shirts/cups or bottle holders/bags or coolers/sports equipment/other products] that have alcohol logos, brands, or names on them?'.

Three measures of alcohol use were collected: lifetime use; use in the last 12 months; and use in the last month. These items were taken from the triennial national Australian Secondary Schools Alcohol and Drugs Survey [ASSAD] (White and Bariola, 2012). Two items assessed perceptions of peer alcohol use. Frequency was assessed by the question 'Think of your closest friends your age who are the same sex. How often do you think they drink alcohol?' with eight response options from 'every day' through to 'they don't drink alcohol' (recoded for analysis into three categories: 2-3 days/month or more, 1 day/month or less, and they don't drink). Quantity was assessed with the question 'Think of your closest friends your age who are the same sex. How much do you think they drink on a typical occasion (in standard drinks)?', seven response options from '10 or more' to 'they don't drink alcohol' (recoded for analysis into three categories: 3-4 or more, 1-2, and they don't drink). Perceived peer approval of drinking was measured using five items (e.g., 'If you drank alcohol you would have more friends'). Finally, alcohol expectancies were measured using the 15 item Brief-Comprehensive Effects of Alcohol Questionnaire (B-CEOA) (Ham et al.,

2005); for example, ‘If I drank alcohol I would find it easier to talk to people’. Demographic questions from the triennial national school survey were also included, 13 items (White and Bariola, 2012).

Participants

Twelve school principals were invited to register their school to take part in the study. Interested principals accepted a meeting invitation with the study’s project manager to further discuss the study’s objectives and procedure. Five principals agreed to their students’ participation; four were from a regional area of NSW and one was a metropolitan school. Active consent was obtained from parents via consent forms sent home with students and returned to the school.

Two hundred and sixteen students participated in the online survey; 39.8% (n = 80) were male and 52.3% (n=113) were female. Most were aged 13 (27.3%), 14 (33.8%) or 15 (18.1%); with a small number aged 12 (4.2%) and 16-17 years (8.8%).

The study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committees of the University and the NSW Department of Education.

Study 2

Semi-structured focus group interviews were utilized to investigate the extent to which parents were aware of, and concerned about, alcohol-branded merchandise; and particularly their awareness of the impact of ABM on children’s future alcohol-related attitudes and behaviors. Focus groups were an appropriate methodology as they allowed us to observe parents’ interactions as they discussed their knowledge and attitudes, and to provide them with an opportunity to look at and interact with items of ABM.

Three focus groups were conducted with 15 parents (12 mothers and three fathers).

Focus group participants were recruited by sending an emailed invitation to staff subscribing to ‘staff messages’ at the participating university. The sole inclusion criterion was parents of children aged 5-18 years of age; and recruitment ceased once sufficient participants were confirmed for three focus groups. The parents ranged in age from 31 to 51 years, and all but two were born in Australia; eight had one or more children aged <10 years, and eight had one or more aged 12 to 16 years.¹

Focus groups commenced with introductions and clarifications about the research including obtaining voluntary signed consent. Multiple examples of ABM in each category were displayed on a large table and participants were given the opportunity to look at and interact with them as they arrived, and throughout the discussion. This merchandise included: ABM related to drinking; ornaments and gimmicks; clothing; sporting equipment; and food. After some general discussion about each category, participants were asked about their opinion of the target markets for the ABM, followed by their perceptions of the purchase of ABM and whether they were aware of any rules or alcohol regulations regarding its form and distribution.

All focus groups were audio recorded, transcribed, and the transcripts analyzed for key issues and areas of concern. In order to inform potential approaches to the monitoring and regulation of ABM as a form of alcohol marketing, the data were analysed in the context of the two Australian industry self-regulatory codes (ABAC, 2012; ANA, 2012) that apply to alcohol advertising (exploring whether ABM meets the definition of ‘marketing communications’ and whether current ABM complies with the clauses of the relevant codes).

RESULTS

¹ Adds to more than 15 as some parents had a child in each age group

Study 1

Ownership of ABM

Survey respondents were asked whether they owned any of six types of ABM: hats, t-shirts, cups or bottle holders, bags or coolers, sports equipment, and ‘other’ ABM. One third (34.8%) of respondents reported owning a cup or bottle holder with alcohol branding, 25.7% a hat, 19.0% a t-shirt, 18.6% a bag or cooler, 10.0% sports equipment, and 5.7% other forms of ABM.

In total, the respondents identified 250 items of ABM they owned for which they could recall the brand (this excludes 12 who stated ‘lots’, 17 who couldn’t name the brand or named a non-alcohol brand, and 9 who gave a generic term such as ‘bourbon’). Overall, 210 adolescents named brands for 80 cups/bottle holders, 64 hats, 40 bags/coolers, 39 t-shirts, 19 items of sports equipment, and 9 other ABM items.

The brands most commonly identified were beer brands, with 200 of the 250 mentions. The remaining 50 mentions were spirit brands, predominantly bourbon (39). Beer brands held five of the top seven places for frequency of mention: VB (55), Bintang² (39), Tooheys (35), XXXX (34) and Carlton (12). The other two brands in the top eight were bourbon brands: Jack Daniels (21) and Jim Beam (14)

Overall, only two in five (41.0%) reported owning no items of ABM; 24.3% owned one type of item, 18.6% owned two types, 11.0% owned three, and 5.3% four or more.³

Association of ABM ownership with drinking attitudes and behaviours

² a Balinese beer, with merchandise being a popular tourist item

³ As the questions were “do you own any hats (t-shirts/cups or bottle holders/bags or coolers/sports equipment/other products) that have alcohol logos, brands, or names on them?” we can ascertain how many different types but not how many items (e.g., a respondent may have owned more than one t-shirt)

For the purposes of these analyses, ABM ownership was categorized as none (41.0%, n=86), one or two (42.9%, n = 90), and three or more (16.2%, n = 34).

There was a significant association between ABM ownership and lifetime alcohol use ($\chi^2 = 7.06$, $p = 0.029$), with a linear increase in the proportion reporting ever drinking by ABM ownership category (57.6%, 68.9% and 82.3% respectively). However, among those who had initiated drinking, there was no association between ABM ownership and last month or last 12 month alcohol use; suggesting that among this young cohort, ABM ownership was associated with drinking initiation rather than drinking frequency.

There was a significant association between ABM ownership and perceived peer alcohol consumption. Those who owned three or more types of ABM were significantly more likely to report that their friends drank alcohol at least 2-3 days per month ($\chi^2 = 15.60$, $p = 0.004$) and that their friends drank three or more standard drinks on a typical occasion ($\chi^2 = 10.88$, $p = 0.028$) (see Table 1).

ABM ownership was significantly associated with believing that their friends would think it was a good idea for them to drink alcohol ($\chi^2 = 20.12$, $p = 0.003$) and, while not statistically significant, there was a trend towards also believing that if they drank some alcohol, their friends would think they were cool and that they would be more liked by kids they know, with a linear increase across the ABM ownership categories. There was no difference between the groups in believing that if they drank alcohol they would be more accepted or have more friends.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

ABM ownership was associated with four of the 15 alcohol expectancies, one negative

and three positive. Those who owned more items of ABM were more likely to believe that if they drank alcohol they would be more aggressive ($\chi^2 = 16.68$, $p = 0.011$); and also that they would find it easier to talk to people ($\chi^2 = 19.43$, $p = 0.003$), be more courageous ($\chi^2 = 14.78$, $p = 0.022$), and enjoy sex more ($\chi^2 = 23.84$, $p = 0.001$).

Study 2

Parents' awareness of ABM

Many of the alcohol branded items that people recognized, and that they reported having in their homes, were 'practical items' related to drinking, such as bottle openers and cooler bags. The other form of merchandise that was commonly reported (in terms of awareness and ownership) was alcohol branded clothing, such as hats and t-shirts.

The alcohol branding of food was the cause of some confusion and concern among participants. The confusion related to whether the products just carried an alcohol brand or actually contained alcohol. Participants also noted the visual similarity between the packaging of some of the alcohol-branded foods and their alcohol product counterparts.

"...sauces at the back when I walked in here. I didn't realize they were food. I thought you had a 3 pack of Jim Beam bottles" (father)

Is ABM 'advertising'?

There was clear agreement among the participants that alcohol-branded merchandise is a form of advertising; particularly alcohol branded clothing, which makes the purchaser a moving advertisement for the alcohol brand.

"There's no difference between the sign on the bus and the sign on the side of that cooler bag" (mother)

“I always think it is clever when that brand can not only get you to wear that brand, but also to get you to pay...because it’s a way of advertising” (mother)

Participants were of the view that this form of advertising is possibly exempt from the regulations that govern other forms of alcohol advertising and that – whether they are or are not – it would be a complex area to regulate. However, some participants expressed the view that this form of advertising should not be allowed (i.e., branded merchandise should not be sold) outside of outlets that are licensed to sell alcohol.

“In a place where you wouldn’t expect to find that product, you shouldn’t expect to see that branded merchandise” (mother)

“At least with the alcohol it comes with a warning.⁴ These things don’t come with any warning” (mother)⁴

Does ABM comply with the advertising code?

Under the version of the Alcohol Beverages Advertising (& Packaging) Code (ABAC) in place at the time of data collection, advertisements for alcohol beverages must:

- i) present a mature, balanced and responsible approach to the consumption of alcohol beverages,
- ii) not have a strong or evident appeal to children or adolescents,
- iii) not suggest that the consumption or presence of alcohol beverages may create or contribute to a significant change in mood or environment,
- iv) not depict any direct association between the consumption of alcohol beverages, other than low alcohol beverages, and the operation of a motor vehicle, boat or aircraft or the engagement in any sport (including swimming and water sports) or potentially hazardous

⁴ This was an interesting comment given that in Australia, unlike the US and several other countries, alcohol products do not currently carry warning labels

activity,

v) not challenge or dare people to drink or sample a particular alcohol beverage, other than low alcohol beverages, and must not contain any inducement to prefer an alcohol beverage because of its higher alcohol content, and

vi) comply with the Advertiser Code of Ethics adopted by the Australian Association of National Advertisers.

The focus group transcripts were analysed in the context of the six clauses of the ABAC Code and are presented in order of the clauses that were most evident in the participants' discussion.

No strong or evident appeal to children or adolescents (clause b)

Participants reported owning many of these 'functional' and clothing items, but also recognized, and reported owning, various alcohol-branded toys and ornaments. Notably, when talking about the latter, participants often made reference to their (or other people's) children being attracted to these items. Participants also recognized that the use of celebrities and well-known cartoon characters added value and appeal to alcohol brands. This was particularly the case with the Simpsons, with parents spontaneously noting, and accepting, that there was a connection between the Simpsons and alcohol.

"And the talking bottle opener. I have two girls, but my nephew jokes when we're having a beer [and he asks] 'can I open it?'" (father)

"but see alcohol and Simpsons pretty well go hand in hand" (mother)

The branding of toys – or products that looked like toys – was of particular concern to parents, both in terms of the immediate appeal to children and the longer term impact.

"he thought it was just a funny talking toy, but as they get older..." (mother)

“I think toys, and the money box, if it was Homer Simpson, that’s fine, but it’s got beer, or Moe’s, and they recognize Duff beer⁵ and that’s what Homer has – I don’t think it has to be on a kid’s money box” (mother)

Some functional items were described as being multi-purpose, and becoming just a part of the normal household clutter with parents so used to seeing the branding that they did not consciously process it. This led to a clear potential for them to be used for, and shared with, children.

“...and it just becomes part of the background. You don’t really notice that it’s there or not there” (mother)

“I would be likely to pack the picnic lunch in the Bourbon (cooler bag) and pack my son’s scouts’ lunch in it when he’s going off for the weekend or something like that because it’s a refillable bag” (mother)

Participants also (in the main, uncritically) reported that children make the same connections between celebrities and alcohol that adults do.

“My little girl...she would think ‘Simpsons, I love the Simpsons, dad loves beer, I’ll get that’ so already the connection’s made. Not for her necessarily wanting beer but because she knowsthat would be a great gift” (mother)

Participants perceived that alcohol-branded merchandise, therefore, enables alcohol brands to ‘communicate’ with young people in a way that avoids the restrictions on the sale and promotion of alcohol to people under the age of 18. Participants reported that this was often an unfortunate consequence of alcohol-branded merchandise targeted at adults but appealing to children [such as liqueur chocolates which they saw as targeted to adult women, and barbecue products which they thought were targeted to adult men]. However, they also

⁵ This relationship, however, is different to other brand-celebrity relationships, as the fictitious Duff beer on the Simpsons predated the actual Duff beer

identified examples of branded products – such as food and toys – which they felt were directly targeted towards children or young people.

“I can see my kids, with the age they’re at, which is 15 and 19, wanting the Jim Beam bottles and food, just because it’s got that branding on it” (mother)

“It seems like a toy – they’re using the innocence of kids, they think ‘oh, it’s a toy’ but then they’re branding the alcohol with it” (mother)

Several participants noted that this exposure to, and ownership of, alcohol-branded merchandise resulted in children developing a familiarity with brand names. They felt that this has the potential to impact on their future drinking decisions – including, but not limited to, brand preferences and product choices.

“And I think that sort of target then – there’s that ingraining it into their brain that buying those sorts of things is cool” (father)

“They’ve seen this from a really early age and it’s that subtle thing that’s in advertising that when they get to drinking age, well, that’s familiar and they buy it” (mother)

However, a minority of participants in the focus groups suggested alcohol branding (and alcohol advertising) was not of concern since the role of parents is to ensure that their children were not influenced by advertising, or that the behavior of family members was a more important influence.

“I might be the odd one out, but a brand on its own doesn’t concern me because I always talk to my girl about, to get educated about it” (mother)

“But as a child they can’t make those decisions...that comes from our end about educating your child and saying ‘you don’t need to buy your dad Jim Beam fudge to make him feel special on Fathers Day” (mother)

A small number of parents seemed to be either unaware or, unconcerned about, the impact of alcohol-branded merchandise; seeing this as something innocuous or even as a treat.

“But it’s not alcohol is it, it’s just branded, so, late teens or whatever, if they’re going to buy a gift it makes it cooler” (mother)

“I think I’d buy the Jim Beam chocolates [for my children].....if they asked for it and it was Christmas.....as a special treat” (mother)

Not depict direct association between consumption of alcohol and operation of a vehicle or engagement in sport (clause d. Participants recognized, but were resigned to, the nexus between alcohol and sport. While some perceived that there were (or must be) some restrictions around alcohol branding on sporting equipment, most reported that this was common practice. Despite the known association between alcohol and sport, most participants were opposed to the use of alcohol branding on sporting equipment.

“I don’t like the association with good health and sport and alcohol. It’s a contradiction to me. I do wonder how they get away with it” (mother)

“I wouldn’t say I’ve seen a soccer ball with alcohol advertising on it and I don’t think I’d be particularly happy about that but everything else I’ve seen” (mother)⁶

Focus groups participants also raised questions about alcohol branded merchandise linking alcohol with driving (such as a car racing cap and a mug packaged to look like a speedometer). When asked by the facilitator how they felt about this ABM, participants seemed perplexed, even suspicious.

“A [Jim Beam] speedometer...so you’d attach it to the car?” (father)

⁶ The authors conducted a quick search on eBay and found soccer balls branded with: Tiger Beer, Budweiser, Guinness; and other soccer-related items from Miller Lite, Carlsberg, Corona, and several European beer brands

“I want to know what are their intentions? Why are they doing these, what is the purpose of it? Are they actually targeting teenagers in this way?” (mother)

Comply with the Advertiser Code of Ethics (clause f). The Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) Advertiser Code of Ethics (AANA, 2012) covers issues such as discrimination and vilification; violence; sex, sexuality and nudity; obscene language; and health and safety.

The AANA Code specifically states that “Advertisements shall treat sex, sexuality and nudity with sensitivity to the relevant audience, and where appropriate, the relevant programme time zone”. Focus groups participants expressed particular concerns about ABM products that appeared to associate alcohol with sex (such as alcohol branded condoms and underwear).

“The g-string is vodka and that is probably a preferred teenager, female drink, you know the vodka based drinks that are pretty – it’s the linking, you know, it’s just the linking of it”. (mother)

“ It’s particularly alarming to see the g-string there” (mother)

Not suggest significant change in mood or environment (clause c). The discussions did not directly link ABM to change in mood or environment, which is not surprising given the static nature of ABM and the limited messaging associated with this marketing vehicle (which is primarily promoting the brand per se). However, they did discuss the link between ABM and self-identity and gender role identification.

Alcohol-branded clothing was seen as a way of communicating an individual’s identification with a brand; and, more generally, with the ‘cool factor’ of being a drinker. There was also a link between specific alcohol brands and/or product types and gender roles,

with alcohol-branded merchandise seen as a fallback gift (much in the way people used to purchase handkerchiefs and socks for men). The abundance of alcohol-related merchandise that is marketed around annual celebrations (such as Christmas) facilitates this automated approach to gift selection.

With adults, there was a clear link made between drinking the product and owning the merchandise, although it was evident that (at this stage of life) in most cases the desire to own the products was the result of, rather than the reason for, drinking the alcohol product. However, there was also an acknowledgement that in some instances this effect is reversed – with purchasing/consuming the alcohol resulting from purchasing the merchandise. Linking the ‘functional’ product to the purchase of alcohol provides the consumer with a justification for purchasing (and, one assumes, consuming) the alcohol.

“Our friend broke his thongs and he went and bought a case of beer so he could get the thongs” (mother)

Mature, balanced and responsible approach to consumption (and) not challenge or dare people to drink...(clauses a and e)

Given the nature of ABM (compared to the richness of communication in print and broadcast advertising) the discussion did not identify links between ABM and encouragement to consume (irresponsible levels) of alcohol. However, this is an area worthy of ongoing research as ABM becomes more sophisticated. For example, one of the ‘toys’ referred to by our participants was a battery operated caricature of a famous cricket player which, when activated, calls out things such as “Time for a spell, hand me a VB” and “ Yep, I’ll drink to that!”

DISCUSSION

Adolescents' ownership of ABM

We found that ownership of ABM was widespread among our sample of Australian adolescents, replicating findings in international studies with similar aged students (Gordon et al., 2011; Lin et al., 2012). Consistent with US studies, we found that ownership of ABM was associated with drinking initiation (McClure et al., 2006) and with known predictors such as receptivity to alcohol (Henriksen et al., 2008) and drinking intentions (Collins et al., 2007). Those who owned ABM, and particularly those who owned multiple forms of ABM, were more likely to have initiated drinking, to perceive that their peers drank, to perceive that their friends would approve of them drinking, and to have positive alcohol expectancies.

Parents' attitudes towards ABM

Focus group participants (parents) were aware of ABM but many of them had not previously engaged with the issue of the role or potential impact of these products. It was only as the discussions progressed that participants began to talk about the ubiquitous nature of these promotional items and to engage with the potential issues that this may raise. Participants had some strong, and largely consistent views, about the places such items should be sold, items that should not be branded due to their problematic association with alcohol, and product categories that should not be branded with alcohol logos.

Although some parents discussed their thoughts and concerns around the influence of ABM on children and teenagers, their knowledge of these effects was limited. None of the parents explicitly stated that they were concerned before participating in the group; and a minority thought ABM was probably harmless. This is particularly concerning since US research found that young people who were given ABM clothing by their parents were more likely to perceive that their parents approved of them drinking (Workman, 2003).

Potential impacts of ABM

The issue of children's repeated exposure to alcohol brands via ABM is an important one. The mere exposure effect (Zajonc, 1968) suggests that simply exposing people to a stimulus (such as a word, a picture, or a brand) leads them to rate it more positively, and that this effect exists even without conscious cognition (Zajonc, 1980). A study with 3,425 10-17 year olds found that there was a direct linear association between frequency of exposure to a Marlboro (tobacco) advertisement and liking that advertisement (Morgenstern et al., 2013). The concerns raised by some participants in relation to alcohol-branded food products, which focused on the clear appeal of the food items to children and teens (such as alcohol-branded potato chips and ice-creams) are consistent with the literature on susceptibility to drinking initiation.

Consumers form relationships with brands and use these relationships and associations in constructing their own identity. This is particularly the case with young people; since they are developing their self-concepts during adolescence, the role of brands in communicating self-image and group membership becomes increasingly important (Chaplin and John, 2005). For example, the use and salience of brands has been noted as a principal factor in the adoption of fashion product and trends, particularly the importance of purchasing and wearing brands that are perceived by peers to be 'cool' (Grant and Stephen, 2005). Beaudoin et al. (2003) found that "brand sensitivity is an increasing function of fashion 'adoptiveness' among adolescents" (p.23). Other studies have reported that this fashion/brand sensitivity is particularly evident among teenage girls with girls perceiving inherent 'risks' associated with making an incorrect fashion purchase decision (Taylor and Cosenza, 2002). Alcohol marketers have tapped into this tendency for (young) people to perceive brands as indicative of status, as evidenced by the recent focus on 'premiumisation' whereby alcohol companies are producing higher priced variants which are marketed as 'luxury' products for mass

consumers (Booth et al., 2008); driven by what industry describes as three key psychological factors (ego gratification, pleasurable experience, and educated choice) (Pastre and Band, 2010).

Whilst many of these premium products are targeted at adults, given their high price, similar 'brand attributes' (emphasizing exclusivity, endorsement by role models, and self-expression) are evident across target age and income groups (Pastre and Band, 2010). Alcohol marketers are also drawing explicit links between alcohol and fashion, such as in recent advertising campaigns in Australia for a brand of pre-mixed alcohol which ran as a four page fashion spread showing the alcohol product accessorized with clothes.

This image role is consistent with our finding that most ABM owned by respondents was for a small number of brands with distinct brand identities: notably VB, Tooheys and XXXX beer (which are advertised with strong links to sport and 'larrikin' behaviours); and Jack Daniels and Jim Beam (with strong links to motor racing, machismo and positioning as 'premium' brands).

Qualitative research from New Zealand indicates that teenagers readily discuss alcohol advertising messages, have sophisticated views on their target audiences, and actively engage with alcohol marketing (McCreanor et al., 2005). Further, these researchers found that this level of engagement and identification "enable(s) the personification of branded products and the uptake of such alcohol identities" (p.587). Young people identify with particular alcohol brands and incorporate them into their self-identity; they perceive themselves as 'a person who drinks x' and believe that this endows on them positive characteristics and attributes in the eyes of their peers. Thus, marketing tools (such as ABM) that encourage young people to identify with a brand even before they begin drinking may have the potential to facilitate drinking initiation. This view is supported by UK research which found that adolescents associated desirable characteristics (such as humor and 'coolness') with specific alcohol

brands; and identified desirable brands which had a good fit with their self-image and the image they wanted to portray to peers (Gordon et al., 2010).

The integration of alcohol brands into adolescents' self-identity is likely to become even more problematic as marketers find new ways to engage with young people and the lines between 'marketing' and social communication become increasingly blurred. Young people's engagement on online social networks means they now act as co-creators of alcohol marketing, with recent research finding that young people perceive that it is socially desirable to portray themselves as a drinker on their social network profiles (Ridout et al., 2012).

ABM as 'advertising' and the role of regulation

Participants clearly identified ABM as advertising. This is consistent with formal definitions of advertising; for example, in Australia the industry body defines advertising as: "... any material which is published or broadcast using any medium or any activity which is undertaken by, or on behalf of an advertiser or marketer, and over which the advertiser or marketer has a reasonable degree of control, and that draws the attention of the public in a manner calculated to promote or oppose directly or indirectly a product, service, person, organization or line of conduct..."⁷ (AANA, 2012). While it does not define advertising per se, the Australian alcohol industry's 'Responsible Alcohol Marketing Code' defines marketing communications as "communications in Australia generated by or within the reasonable control of a Marketer, including but not limited to brand advertising (including trade advertising), competitions, digital communications (including in mobile and social media), product names and packaging, advertorials, alcohol brand extensions to non-alcohol

⁷ 'Excluded' items include product labels or packaging and public relations communications and related activities

beverage products, point of sale materials, retailer advertising and Marketing Collateral’ (ABAC, 2014).

This suggests that there is a need for regulatory authorities to monitor the extent to which ABM complies with the Codes of Practice and to take steps to ensure that ABM which contravenes these Codes is withdrawn from distribution. Our findings suggest that many current items of ABM contravene the letter and/or the spirit of the Code. We would argue, for example, that ABM which takes the form of a toy, or is perceived by consumers as a toy, breaches the clause which states that alcohol advertising must ‘not have strong or evident appeal to minors.’

However, any steps to regulate ABM need to be considered in the context of the extensive body of research into the (in)effectiveness of current alcohol advertising regulation regimes. Australia currently has limited restrictions on the placement of alcohol advertising on television and outdoor media; and the content of alcohol advertising is subject to self-regulatory codes developed and implemented by the industry (see Jones and Gordon (2013) for a comprehensive review of alcohol advertising regulation in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UK). However, numerous studies have demonstrated that the messages in Australian print and broadcast advertising are often inconsistent with both the spirit and the letter of the self-regulatory advertising code; and that the decisions of the self-regulatory authority do not reflect expert or lay person interpretations of the messages in these advertisements (Jones and Donovan 2001; Jones and Donovan 2002; Donovan et al. 2007; Jones et al. 2008; Jones et al. 2009). Other identified weaknesses with the current system include the dependence on complaints from the public and lack of a formal monitoring system; the voluntary nature of the code (alcohol companies choose whether to participate); the singular focus on the content of advertisements (and of single advertisements, rather than

on campaigns); the lack of enforcement power and sanctions (Dobson, 2012; Jones and Munro 2008).

This evident ineffectiveness of current regulatory systems to protect (young) people from inappropriate messages about alcohol is also evident in many other countries (see Jones and Gordon (2013) for a review of studies into the effectiveness of alcohol advertising regulation in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UK). Thus, the priority for policy reform is to reduce young people's exposure to all forms of alcohol advertising, and particularly to alcohol advertising that is integrated into young people's lives and identities. This includes advertising in mainstream media, in outdoor media, online and via sponsorship of sporting and cultural events.

Limitations

Respondents were not asked where they obtained their ABM (e.g., purchased it, came with parent or other adults' alcohol purchase, received as a gift); future research should include these data as it could have important implications for regulation of ABM. As this was a small-scale pilot study, we did not control for variables such as socioeconomic status, parent drinking, personality factors, exposure to other forms of alcohol marketing; future research with larger samples could explore these associations. Further, given the small number of participants who owned three or more items of ABM (n=34), the linear relationship between ABM ownership and drinking initiation should be interpreted with caution, and future research should explore this relationship with a larger sample. The participants in the school survey were drawn from the five schools that agreed to participate; whilst the reasons for non-participation of the other schools were primarily due to time-tabling and involvement in other research studies, we cannot exclude the possibility that these schools (and students) differed from other schools in the region, or in other regions.

CONCLUSION

ABM is a form of advertising that appears to fly under the radar of regulators, despite the fact that it clearly meets the alcohol industry definition of ‘marketing communications’ (which explicitly includes “alcohol brand extensions to non-alcohol beverage products”; ABAC, 2014) in the jurisdiction in which the study was conducted; and is recognized by consumers as such. ABM ownership was high among our sample of adolescents; and was associated with drinking initiation and known risk factors for drinking. Prior to participating in the study, the parents in our focus groups were largely disengaged or unconcerned about ABM, which suggests there is a need for awareness-raising among parents. If parents consciously process the fact that ABM is a form of alcohol advertising, and thus has potential to influence their child at least as much as other forms of advertising, they are likely to be more circumspect in providing, or allowing others to provide, ABM to their children. There is also a need for the groups that are responsible for regulating alcohol advertising to ensure advertisers are aware that ABM is subject to the same rules as other forms of advertising, to monitor and regulate ABM, and to reform the regulation of all forms of alcohol advertising to reduce youth exposure.

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| | No ABM (n=86) | 1-2 types of ABM (n=90) | 3+ types of ABM (n=34) | χ^2 | P |
|--|------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------|-------|
| Lifetime alcohol use | 57.6% | 68.9% | 82.3% | 7.06 | 0.029 |
| Last 12 months alcohol use | 47.0% | 46.0% | 56.7% | 0.996 | 0.608 |
| Last month alcohol use | 17.6% | 15.9% | 30.0% | 2.752 | 0.253 |
| Perceived peer frequency (2-3 times/month or more) | 10.7% | 18.0% | 38.2% | 15.60 | 0.004 |
| Perceived peer quantity (3-4 standard drinks or more) | 11.9% | 13.5% | 41.2% | 10.88 | 0.028 |
| (if drank) be more accepted ¹ | 36.9% | 31.5% | 38.2% | 4.97 | 0.548 |
| (if drank) be more liked ¹ | 23.8% | 26.1% | 47.0% | 11.61 | 0.07 |
| (if drank) friends think you are cool ¹ | 19.0% | 29.5% | 35.3% | 12.10 | 0.06 |
| (if drank) would have more friends ¹ | 20.3% | 24.7% | 45.4% | 8.75 | 0.188 |
| (if drank) friends would think it is a good idea ¹ | 19.0% | 37.1% | 50.0% | 20.12 | 0.003 |

¹ % reporting 'yes, for sure' or 'yes, probably'