

Making an impression



Recognition of alcohol brands by primary school children

Introduction

In the UK, the alcohol industry spends around £800 million each year marketing its products,¹ through advertising, branding and sponsorships. The effect of such marketing on the drinking behaviour of children and young people has been a matter of much debate.² Representatives of the alcohol industry claim that it does not target its marketing at anyone under the age of 18,³ despite an analysis of internal marketing documents which concluded that young people are a “key target” for alcohol advertisers.⁴

Whether children are specifically targeted or not, Alcohol Concern was keen to learn whether, and to what extent, the drinks industry’s marketing messages are reaching children, and what the potential implications of this might be. This briefing paper considers the findings of a brand and logo recognition study conducted amongst primary school children across Wales.

The study

In late 2011, Alcohol Concern Cymru commissioned Cogent Research & Analysis Ltd, an independent market research consultancy, to conduct a brand recognition exercise amongst 10 and 11 year old children across Wales. The objective of the study was to identify the extent to which children of this age were aware of alcohol branding and advertising.

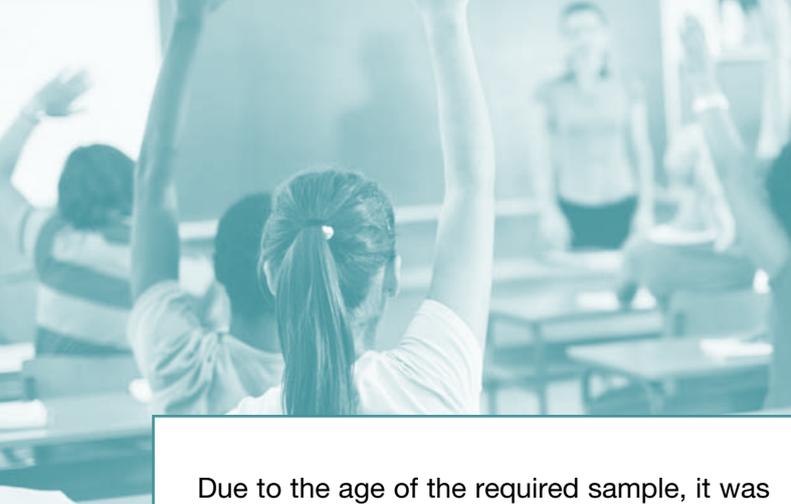
The first part of the study considered recognition of alcohol brand names and commercial logos, and the second examined recognition of screen shots from recently aired television advertisements for alcoholic drinks. The names, logos and images were shown to children along with those for non-alcoholic products, such as soft drinks and breakfast cereals. The children were asked to select which brand names, logos and advertisements belonged to which category, namely “food”, “soft drink” or “alcoholic drink”. The children were able to record any responses where they were unsure as “don’t know”. Note that the screenshots for the alcohol brand advertisements included in the study did not show an image of the alcoholic product itself. The children were also asked about their television and internet use, and how often (if at all) they had drunk alcohol.



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Making Sense of Alcohol



Making an impression

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Due to the age of the required sample, it was decided to request the assistance of primary schools across Wales. The most appropriate methodology for the research process was deemed to be a teacher-supervised self-completion approach using paper based questionnaires. The schools approached were chosen to ensure a good mix by pupil numbers, Welsh and English medium, location – both geographically and in terms of a rural or urban catchment area – and whether they were state or privately funded.

By the end of the fieldwork phase, a total of 401 pupils had participated in the study, from 23 schools from across Wales. Based on a population size of approximately 78,000 children aged 10 and 11 in Wales, the final sample size gives a margin of error of plus or minus 5%, meaning we can be sufficiently confident that the results are representative of 10 and 11 year old primary school children in Wales.

The key findings

- Over three fifths (62%) correctly identified the brand name ‘Magners’ as an alcohol brand. Further analysis revealed that awareness was higher amongst those children who said they had tried alcohol “a few times” with accurate association of the brand name rising to 77% amongst this group. Recall of the brand was also significantly higher amongst boys (71%) compared with girls (55%). Awareness was significantly higher in south Wales (69%) and west Wales (67%) than north Wales (56%). This, coupled with the higher recall amongst boys, may suggest that Magners rugby sponsorship has helped embed the brand amongst this young audience.
- Nearly four fifths of pupils (79%) were aware Carlsberg is an alcoholic drink. This was higher than recognition of Ben and Jerry’s ice cream (74%) and Mr Kipling cakes (41%) as types of food. Greater awareness of the Carlsberg brand was displayed by those pupils who watched television later into the evening, with recall rising to 89% amongst children viewing television up to 9.30pm at night. This contrasts with 74% recall for Carlsberg amongst those who ceased watching television by 6.30pm.
- The Fosters and Stella Artois logos were recognised as being for alcoholic drinks by a large majority of the children consulted (95%). Recognition of the Fosters logo was slightly higher amongst children who claimed to have tried alcohol (96%) compared with those who had not (91%). Similar results were recorded for Stella Artois (99% versus 93% respectively). Recognition for the Fosters logo was also slightly higher amongst children who said they watched television after the 9pm watershed (97%) compared to those who stopped watching TV by 9pm (93%). Significantly more girls (98%) recognised the Stella logo than boys (93%).
- Four fifths of children (80%) correctly identified the WKD logo as being for an alcoholic drink. This figure rose to 86% for 11 year olds. Awareness of the brand was significantly higher amongst those children who had tried alcohol (84%) versus those who had not consumed alcohol (73%). Similarly, those pupils who said they had tried alcohol on a few or lots of occasions demonstrated a greater awareness of the Bacardi brand (76%) than those who had never tried alcohol (70%).

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- Nearly four fifths (79%) of children could identify the Smirnoff logo as being for an alcohol brand. Greater numbers of children who continued watching television beyond the 9pm watershed recognised this logo than those who stopped watching television before 9pm (86% versus 76%).
- An image of the characters Brad and Dan from a Fosters television advertisement was correctly associated with alcohol by three quarters (75%) of the children consulted. This was lower than the number correctly identifying Évian's roller-skating babies advertisement as a being for a soft drink (83%), but much higher than the number who recognised screenshots from the Walkers Extra Crunchy advertisement (58%) and the Cadbury drumming gorilla advertisement (42%) as being for foods.

Discussion

This study provides new evidence that children as young as 10 are familiar with, and can readily identify alcohol company brands and logos, as well as characters from alcohol television adverts. The number of children in the study who were able to identify alcohol branding is comparable to, and in some cases greater than those who recognised branding for products known to appeal to children, such as ice cream and cake.

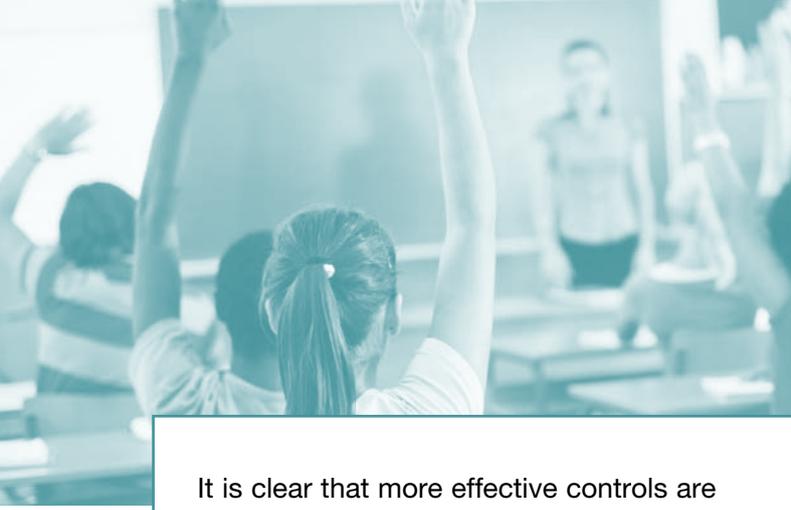
The study also found that children who watched television later in the evening, when more alcohol adverts are aired, had greater recall of alcohol brands than those who stopped watching earlier. Moreover, children who had already tried alcohol at least a few times had higher recognition of alcohol brands than those

who had not drunk. These findings do not explain, however, whether children who drink are more likely to recognise alcohol brands; or conversely, whether children who have greater exposure to alcohol marketing are more likely to begin drinking.

It has always been difficult to determine whether alcohol marketing specifically causes individuals to drink. This is because there is a complex combination of factors – for example: upbringing, the drinking behaviour of parents and peers, and issues around price and availability – that all have the potential, in varying degrees, to instigate or discourage drinking. Nevertheless, a growing number of systematic reviews have concluded that exposure to alcohol advertising and promotion does increase the likelihood that children and young people will start to use alcohol, and will drink more if they are already using it.^{5, 6, 7} Research has also shown that the earlier people become aware of brands, the greater the likelihood they will use them throughout their lives,⁸ suggesting that early alcohol brand recognition is advantageous to alcohol companies in that future drinkers will choose their products over others as a result of this pre-established brand loyalty

Conclusions and recommendations

The findings from this study indicate that, whether targeted by the alcohol industry or not, alcohol marketing is clearly making an impression on children. If children repeatedly see and hear positive messages about drinking alcohol, then their expectations of alcohol are likely to reflect the content of such messages.



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It is clear that more effective controls are needed to ensure alcohol marketing messages only reach adult audiences, and are not attractive to children. Particular attention needs to be given to the advertising media and contexts most likely to be accessed by, and appeal, to children. The Loi Évin legislation⁹ in force in France since the early 1990s may provide an appropriate model for this. This places substantial restrictions on broadcast alcohol advertising, as well as banning alcohol industry sponsorship of cultural and sporting events, which often have a particular appeal to young people. Where alcohol advertising is permitted in France, it must be strictly factual and refer only to the characteristics of the products, such as strength, place of origin, ingredients, and method of production, and must include a clear health warning. Alcohol Concern believes that a similar system of regulation should be considered for the UK.

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Alcohol Concern is the national charity on alcohol misuse campaigning for effective alcohol policy and improved services for people whose lives are affected by alcohol-related problems. We are a membership body working at a national level to influence alcohol policy and champion best practice locally. We support professionals and organisations by providing expertise, information and guidance. We are a challenging voice to the drinks industry and promote public awareness of alcohol issues.

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