



Introduction

"...the drinks industry, supermarkets, pubs and clubs need to work with government so that responsible drinking becomes a reality and not just a slogan."

Prime Minister David Cameron<sup>1</sup>

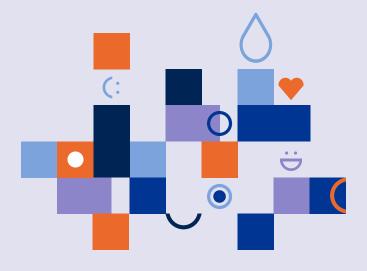
Alcohol is a major preventable cause of illness and premature death. Each year around one million hospital admissions are linked to alcohol in England alone<sup>2</sup> and, in 2013, more than 8,000 deaths in the UK were alcohol-related.<sup>3</sup> It is associated with more than 60 disease conditions, including liver disease and breast cancer, and is a factor in over half of all violent crimes.<sup>4</sup>

Despite being a toxic substance that can cause considerable harm, alcohol has become part of the social fabric, consumed by many of us on a weekly, sometimes daily basis; sold alongside grocery products such as bread and milk; and more familiar to many young children than brands of ice-cream and crisps. Few of us regard ourselves as big 'boozers' - a survey in north-east England, for example,

found the majority of at-risk drinkers regarded their consumption as 'moderate' - yet drinking and intoxication are typically considered an essential component of a good night out, a social lubricant and a means to celebrate, commiserate, relax and have fun.

These positive expectations about the effects of alcohol are in part driven by the way it is marketed, where drinking is often portrayed as exciting, glamorous or adventurous, and where the adverse consequences of, or alternatives to, alcohol consumption are never shown. The UK public agrees that current regulation is failing to protect it from such advertising,<sup>7</sup> and no wonder given there is evidence from internal industry documents that at least some alcohol companies actively seek to incorporate prohibited themes into their promotional activities.<sup>8</sup>

Advertising positions alcohol as an unproblematic and appealing part of everyday life, and younger members of society are particularly vulnerable, especially those who are already showing signs of alcohol-related problems. Such advertising shapes their attitudes, perceptions and expectancies about alcohol use, which then influence their decision to drink.<sup>9</sup>



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### **Responsible drinking**

In order to ease concerns about the role that advertising plays in shaping our attitudes to alcohol and drinking behaviour, the alcohol industry has been at pains to stress its commitment to tackling alcohol harms. Its approach has been to ignore evidence-based policies around price and availability however, choosing instead to promote education and personal responsibility as the solution to alcohol problems in society.

A review of drinks companies' corporate social responsibility statements, where they set out how they will engage and benefit their stakeholders, including customers and communities, shows how they place a particular emphasis on promoting the 'responsible' consumption of alcohol. 10 An example of this in practice is from Diageo, one of the world's biggest drinks companies, whose employees handed out bottles of water with responsible drinking labels at London Tube Stations to New Year's Eve party goers in 2011.11 Last year, Heineken even mobilized its employees worldwide to celebrate 4th September as "Enjoy Responsibly Day" and the company is reported to have made a commitment to spend at least 10 percent of its marketing budget on communicating this message of responsible consumption.12

One of the purported roles of the Portman Group, the responsibility body for, and funded by, leading drinks producers in the UK, is to challenge and encourage the industry to market its products responsibly.

Unsurprisingly, the group believe in an approach that focuses on education and prevention, measures which "target the minority who misuse alcohol rather than the majority who enjoy a drink responsibly". 
Specifically, its 'Code of Practice' sets out guidance for alcohol companies relating to alcohol marketing not already subject to regulation by the Advertising Standards Authority or Ofcom. Annex 1 of the Code outlines best practice guidelines which the Portman Group encourages its members to adopt to encourage responsible drinking, most notably the active promotion

of Drinkaware, created by Portman Group members to provide public education on alcohol issues, to direct consumers to "an authoritative source of advice and information on responsible drinking".

A further demonstration of the industry's keenness to promote this concept of responsible drinking can be found in the UK Government's Public Health Responsibility Deal, 15 where alcohol companies have signed up to a series of agreed pledges. One of the five core commitments of the Deal is to "foster a culture of responsible drinking, which will help people to drink within guidelines". 16 Further, one of the pledges relates to voluntarily providing health labelling on drinks products, including an optional responsibility statement such as "please drink responsibly".

### The study purpose and methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine print alcohol advertising appearing in leading supermarket magazines, analysing the presence and nature of drink responsibly messages found within them.

Following a similar approach adopted by Clegg Smith and colleagues<sup>17</sup> in their study of 'drink responsibly' messages appearing in adverts found in US national newsstand magazines, it aimed to: examine supermarket lifestyle magazines to ascertain the volume of alcohol advertising within them; examine the frequency, location and content of responsible drinking messages within the identified advertising; and to discuss the likely effectiveness of alcohol industry responsible drinking messages and explore possible alternatives to them.

Supermarket lifestyle magazines were chosen as a popular medium, providing a means to examine a broadly representative sample of alcohol adverts. With a huge increase in home drinking in recent years, supermarkets now represent an increasingly attractive outlet for alcohol companies to promote and sell their products, and it was therefore anticipated that their magazine publications were

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likely a useful place to find and examine a variety of alcohol adverts. Moreover, the general content of such magazines is aimed broadly at families, meaning that the alcohol adverts within are likely to have been viewed by a wide cross-section of society.

Our sample consisted of all alcohol brand advertisements appearing in 18 issues in total of 5 leading supermarket lifestyle magazines between July and December 2014, namely 'Asda magazine', 'Morrisons magazine', 'Sainsbury's magazine', 'Tesco: Food Family Living' and 'Waitrose Kitchen'. The magazines from Asda, Morrsions and Tesco are offered free to customers, and were collected for free from their Cardiff-based stores; the Sainsbury's and Waitrose magazines are sold, and were purchased from their Cardiff-based stores.

All 'drink responsibly' (or equivalent) messages appearing in alcohol adverts found in the magazines were listed against the particular magazine in which they appeared, along with the brand name, advert tagline, the location of the message within the advert, and the presence of the Drinkaware logo/ website. Alcohol adverts without a responsible drinking message were also recorded. Only those adverts comprising at least 50% of one magazine page were included. The total number of eligible alcohol adverts in each magazine was recorded, as was the number of remaining non-alcohol adverts. A similar process was undertaken for alcohol advertorials, that is, advertisements giving information about a product in the style of an editorial or objective journalistic article.

#### **Results**

As anticipated, the supermarket magazines sampled contained a high volume of alcohol adverts (N = 68) and advertorials (N = 36), although this varied between months and magazines. 5 of the same adverts appeared in more than one publication. The highest number of alcohol adverts (N = 14) appeared in Morrison's November/December edition and

the highest proportion of the total adverts that were for alcoholic products was 40% (N = 10 out of 25 adverts) in Morrison's July/August edition. The highest number of alcohol advertorials in a magazine (N = 5) was found in the November edition of Waitrose Kitchen magazine and the December edition of Asda magazine. Conversely, in the October editions of Asda magazine and Sainsbury's magazine there were no alcohol adverts, and in the October edition of Tesco magazine there were no alcohol advertorials identified. Every edition of each magazine in the sample had either at least one alcohol advert or one alcohol advertorial present.

A drink responsibly message was present in a total of 48.5% of alcohol adverts analysed (N = 33 out of 68). Again, this varied between each magazine: in one example (Morrisons Jul/Aug edition), only 30% (N = 3 out of 10) of the alcohol adverts found had a drink responsibly or equivalent message present; in others, 100% of the advert(s) included the message. The Drinkaware website address was provided in a total of 94% of alcohol adverts analysed (N = 64 out of 68). Those adverts where a Drinkaware reference was not included were for the following brands: Lambrini, Villa Maria, and Martin Miller's (twice). Strangely, reference to Drinkaware and a drink responsibly message was absent in one of two otherwise identical adverts (Lambrini) appearing in different editions of Morrison's magazine (although a 'wine guide' on the adjacent page did reference Drinkaware).

Of the 36 alcohol advertorials, only 4 contained a specific drink responsibly message (11%). Conversely, the Drinkaware website address appeared in 30 of the 36 advertorials (83%). Those 6 without the Drinkaware website address appeared in the 'Waitrose Kitchen' magazines. Of these, each of the 5 that appeared in the November edition of the magazine, as part of the section of the magazine entitled "How to host the ultimate cocktail party", included details instead of thebar.com website. This website describes itself



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as the place to "get inspiration about making great drinks" and states "whatever the occasion, whoever you're with, there's a drink to match, and you'll find it right here on thebar.com." The Drinkaware website address is included on the website.

In total, 36% of alcohol adverts and advertorials included a specific drink responsibly message (N = 37 out of 104) and 90% included the Drinkaware website address (N = 94 out of 104). Textual analysis of the adverts and advertorials shows in only in a minority of cases (N = 17) were the drink responsibly messages kept simple, namely either "Please Enjoy Responsibly", "Please Drink Responsibly", "Enjoy Responsibly" or "Drink Responsibly".

Aside from a message to "Never Drink and Drive", the other drink responsibly messages incorporated either one or more of the following approaches. The first was use the responsible drinking message to suggest how the beverage should be consumed: thus the Macallan Gold whisky advert invited consumers to "Please Savour Responsibly", whilst Grey Goose vodka instructed people to "Sip Responsibly". The second, more common approach was to include either or both the brand name or the type of beverage in the wording of the message: for example, Martini asked consumers to "Enjoy Martini Responsibly", Aberfeldy whisky "Please Enjoy Our Single Malt Responsibly" and Nyetimber "Please Enjoy Nyetimber English Sparking Wine Responsibly".

The third approach was to either change the command verb in the message or include an additional command verb: for example, Bacardi Rum asked consumers to "Live Passionately, Drink Responsibly" and a collection of Diageo adverts said to "Celebrate Life Responsibly". A list of examples of this approach is provided in the table below.

Alcohol brand	Drink responsibly message
Bacardi	Live Passionately, Drink Responsibly
Diageo	Celebrate Life Responsibly
el Jimador	Be real. Drink Responsibly
Grey Goose	Sip Passionately, Drink Responsibly
Jack Daniels	Your friends at Jack Daniels remind you to Drink Responsibly. Play with your Heart. Drink with Care. Live Freely. Drink Responsibly
Jack Daniels	Make This Season a Winter to Remember. Drink Responsibly.

Finally, it was noted that the size of the text of the drink responsibly messages and Drinkaware website address, despite sometimes appearing in capital letters, always appeared in smaller font than the tagline of the adverts or the advertorial headline. Likewise, the drink responsibly messages and/or Drinkaware website appeared in either the top or bottom of the advert (or picture within the advert) or advertorial. In one advert for Nyetimber wine, found in the December edition of 'Waitrose Kitchen', the wording appeared in the left margin. This was only visible by physically folding back the page of the magazine. Some examples of the above are shown in the pictures at the end of this report.

#### **Discussion & recommendations**

Given the alcohol industry's keenness to promote the concept of responsible drinking as described above, it is perhaps surprising that less than half (48.5%) of the alcohol adverts, and only 1 in 10

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(11%) of the alcohol advertorials reviewed, contained a specific drink responsibly message. This contrasts with Clegg Smith and colleagues' American study<sup>19</sup> which found that almost 9 in 10 alcohol adverts included some form of responsibility message.

In light of the high number of alcohol adverts and advertorials found in the sample of supermarket lifestyle magazines, and which will likely have been seen by a range of audiences including young people, one would expect to regularly find at least some message to consume the products advertised in moderation, but more often than not such a message was absent. This was particularly noticeable in the case of advertorials: thus readers were told to "impress your guests" with whisky, to "dig out the cocktail shaker" and to "make sure your drinks cabinet is well-stocked", 22 without any specific message about consuming alcohol responsibly.

It may be that the inclusion of the Drinkaware website address, recommended as best practice by the Portman Group and which was present in 90% of the total alcohol adverts and advertorials analysed, is viewed by alcohol companies as sufficient to fulfil their voluntary obligations to promote responsible consumption. However, one can argue that referencing an educational website hardly constitutes pulling out all the stops to make, as one leading drinks company ABInBev puts it, responsible drinking "a fundamental part of our dream to be the Best Beer Company bringing people together for a Better World."23 Moreover, in some cases, the Drinkaware website address was either secondary to or replaced by the brand website or other promotional website address, thereby undermining efforts to direct consumers to alcohol educational information.

As has been found elsewhere,<sup>24</sup> the text size and placement of the drink responsibly messages within the alcohol adverts reviewed were also problematic.

In every alcohol advert which included a responsible drinking message, this message was located at the edge, and typically constituted the smallest element, of the advert. In one instance, the magazine pages had to be physically pulled back in order to read the message, in tiny type (known as 'mouseprint'), along the left margin of the advert. Clearly, this increases the difficulty for readers to locate and attend to the message, rendering its presence almost meaningless. Also significant is how the messages contrast with the much larger, colourful images of drinks and drinkers present in the adverts, as previous research has shown that images require far less cognitive effort to process than text.<sup>25</sup>

In some cases, the responsible drinking message seemed to contradict the main emphasis of the advert. For example, Echo Falls told potential consumers in its tagline that "Life's great when things just happen", 26 whilst an advert for Carlos III brandy invited the reader to "Join the Carlos Party," accompanied by a large image of an overflowing glass of the product. 27 As has been highlighted elsewhere, 28 young people in particular are susceptible to the emotional appeals of advertising and, consequently, messages to "make your party special" accompanied by rows of drinks 29 are likely to be given greater attention than to sensible drinking messages found in the small print.

When launching proposals to introduce a minimum unit price for alcohol in England and Wales in 2012 (subsequently abandoned), Prime Minister David Cameron spoke about the need for responsible drinking to become "a reality and not just a slogan". 30 Our research suggests that the drink responsibly message is not only just a slogan for the alcohol industry to hide behind, but actually a further opportunity for it to promote its brands. Thus frequently alcohol brand names, like Martell and Grey Goose, were inserted into the wording of the drink responsibly message, serving to promote the brand and the product advertised.



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On other occasions, the message was adapted to fit the wider theme of the advert or the product being advertised, again limiting its potential effectiveness in encouraging moderation. To illustrate, an advert for Jack Daniels 'Winter Jack' whisky stated "Make this winter a season to remember. Drink responsibly"<sup>31</sup> and Bacardi, which has a global advertising campaign celebrating "150 years of uncompromised passion triumphing against extraordinary odds"<sup>32</sup> advises consumers to "Live passionately. Drink responsibly".<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, some alcohol companies have been quite open about using drink responsibly messages for their own marketing purposes. A responsible drinking campaign in 2012 from Stella Artois used the strapline "Like all works of art, one must take time to appreciate it. Please drink responsibly", in keeping with the brand's "She is a Thing of Beauty" advertising creative, and Marketing Manager for Stella Artois Western Europe commented around the time of its launch, "This campaign aims to deliver a very important message, whilst keeping with the same style and tone of advertisements that Stella Artois consumers know and enjoy".<sup>34</sup>

Even on its own, of course, the message to drink responsibly has no clear definition and will consequently mean different things to different people. Just what is responsible drinking? One drink, a couple of drinks, or more? If it's sticking to current government-endorsed recommended limits, then why does this advice not appear in a single alcohol advert or advertorial captured in this study? According to a survey of drinkers in Wales, respondents thought they'd had enough to drink when they lost control or felt unwell: "when the room starts to spin" or "when I have to be put in a taxi".35

"There is no such thing as a problem product.

But there are problem drinkers and our job is put in place measures that create a responsible drinking environment, to help them make the right decisions and drink more responsibly..."

Bruce Ray, Carlsberg UK<sup>36</sup>

The message also puts the onus very much on the individual consumer, reinforcing the idea that if problems result from alcohol consumption, it is the fault of the drinker rather than the product or the alcohol producer(s). This has long been the approach of the alcohol industry, namely to blame what the Wine and Spirit Trade Association has labelled a "mindless minority" who do "not understand how to drink properly", whilst at the same time championing the freedom of a "silent majority" to be allowed to drink as they see fit.<sup>37</sup>

"Wallack has summarised this approach as "it is the beautiful people who have fun, but the failures who have all the problems. It is the people who can't handle it... who are not really like 'us' who have the problem".

Lawrence Wallack, University of California<sup>38</sup>

This also completely contradicts the widely supported view in public health that illness and social problems are best tackled by making the environment less pro-alcohol through measures such as minimum pricing, controlling the availability of products, and implementing tougher advertising rules, rather than blaming individuals for being 'bad' drinkers.

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"Unlike terms like 'moderate' or 'reduced' drinking, 'responsible drinking' does not necessarily imply anyone should be drinking less alcohol – simply that they should drink properly."

Alcohol Concern<sup>39</sup>

Further, current government advice is that consumers should have at least two days a week alcohol-free, yet, aside from one warning against drinking and driving, none of the adverts reviewed promoted a message that short or longer-term abstinence is a socially acceptable or healthy alternative to drinking. Again this chimes with alcohol industry-sponsored campaigns: Mark Baird, Head of Industry Affairs and Alcohol Policy at Diageo, said of its poster campaign launched in December 2013 that aimed to promote responsible drinking during the New Year celebrations, that he hoped it would "...remind people that they will have a much better time if they drink sensibly".40 The idea that people might have an equally enjoyable or better time consuming non-alcoholic drinks was conspicuous by its absence.

Rather than promote moderation, then, it is argued that responsible drinking messages in alcohol advertising are used by the industry for three main purposes: a means to frame the debate around alcohol-related problems, an opportunity to promote their brands, and a chance to create a socially responsible image. The latter tactic, researchers have concluded, "is not to enhance public health but to influence decision makers and government policy while promoting ineffective interventions".<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, there is some evidence that industry-led attempts to promote moderation may not only be ineffective but actually counterproductive. This has been previously highlighted in the tobacco field where, for example, young people exposed

to the campaign message, "Think. Don't Smoke", developed more favourable attitudes to the tobacco industry and were more likely to be open to the idea of smoking.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, an examination of the alcohol-industry endorsed "Why let good times go bad?" campaign found that those exposed to the responsibility-based messages drank more and were more likely to consider drinking heavily than those compared to positive health messages instead.<sup>43</sup>

If we accept that advertising of potentially harmful products needs to be tempered with warnings or consumer advice, but that current drink responsibly messages are inadequate, what form should this take? One approach would be replacing such messages with details of government-endorsed recommended guidelines, namely that women should not regularly consume more than 2-3 units a day and men should not regularly consume more than 3-4 units a day, and that both women and men should have at least two alcohol-free days a week.

A more targeted approach would be to replace responsible drinking messages with factual health warnings appropriate to the main audience for the product being advertised and/or the publication or platform in which it will most frequently appear. For example, alcohol adverts/advertorials appearing in football magazines, which are purchased most frequently by males, could include a health warning like "Alcohol consumption is associated with increased risk of colon and rectal cancer" or a message about how alcohol can impact on sports performance, for example "Drinking alcohol can leave you dehydrated, tired and performing below your best". Similarly, warnings concerning alcohol and sexual health placed on alcohol adverts appearing in so-called 'lad's mags' would also be appropriate.

Many of the adverts reviewed in this study clearly targeted particular demographics: Lambrini's advert with its tagline "Shoes off, rom-com on..." is obviously aimed primarily at women; a warning



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such as "Drinking alcohol increases a woman's risk of developing breast cancer" would likely be paid more attention than a vague message about drinking responsibly – particularly important given that the majority of women in the UK remain oblivious to the link between alcohol and breast cancer. Likewise, Bailey's "Indulge in Real Belgian Chocolate..." tagline could be accompanied with a message around alcohol and calorie intake.

In order to hold the reader's attention and thereby maximize their effectiveness, the revised messages must appear in larger type and in a more central position than those found in the alcohol adverts and advertorials reviewed in this study. Moreover, the presence of these revised messages should be mandatory, determined by government and/ or public health, with meaningful sanctions for non-compliance. The alcohol industry has a poor track record when it comes to self-regulation – for example, 1 in 5 alcoholic beverages overall in the UK still do not have unit information, Chief Medical Officer guidance or a pregnancy warning on their labels, and only around half of wine (51%) labels have this information,<sup>45</sup> despite the UK being the 6th biggest wine drinking country in the world. 46

However, changes to the wording of messages to encourage moderation are insufficient: in addition, there must be a more fundamental shift in how alcohol is advertised. Current regulatory controls have been shown to be inadequate in preventing young people in particular from being regularly exposed to alcohol advertising that draws on themes including humour, success, adventure and physical attractiveness.47 There is consequently a danger that, however well-targeted and well-worded advice about moderating consumption, this will ultimately be undermined by advertising content that positions alcohol as a normal and central part of a full and successful life. Alcohol Concern recommends that, where alcohol advertising is permitted, images should refer only to the characteristics of the

product's strength, origin, composition and means of production; promotion of 'lifestyle' images of drinkers should be prohibited.

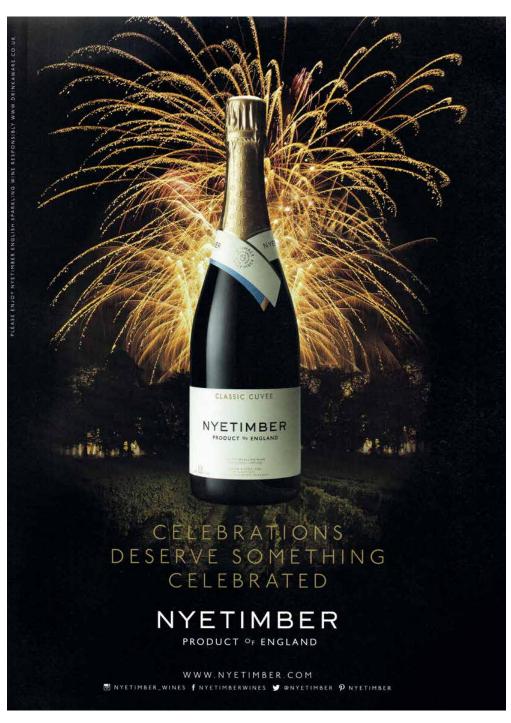
#### **Recommendations:**

- Current "drink responsibly" messages found in alcohol advertising should be replaced with factual health warnings appropriate to the product being advertised and/or the publication or platform in which it will most frequently appear
- These health warnings must appear in larger type and be placed in a more central position than the drink responsibly messages found in the alcohol advertising reviewed in this study
- There needs to be a fundamental shift in how alcohol is advertised, whereby images appearing in alcohol advertising should refer only to the characteristics of the product's strength, origin, composition and means of production; promotion of 'lifestyle' images of drinkers should be prohibited

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### **Appendix:**



The brand website at the bottom of the advert is much more prominent than the Drinkaware website included in the margin text.

(Source: Waitrose Kitchen, December 2014)



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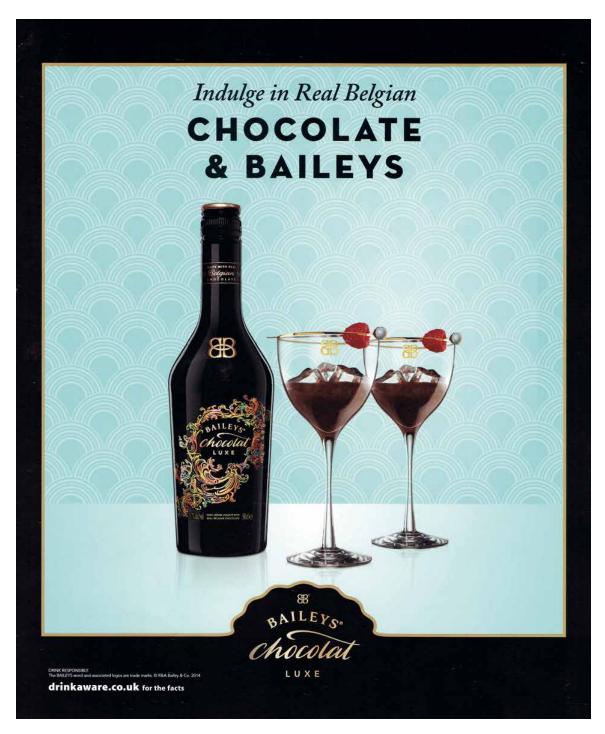


The Tagline seems to send out a contradictory message to the drink responsibly message.

(Source: Tesco Food Family Living magazine, July/August 2014)

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The drink responsibly message is so small as to be almost ineligible.

(Source: Morrisons magazine, November/December 2014)



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Note the absence of drink responsibly message and Drinkaware website. Reformed Spirits Co has subsequently withdrawn the ad due to a breach of the Committee of Advertising Practice code that states alcohol must not be linked to seduction or sexual success.

(Source: Waitrose Kitchen magazines, November 2014 and December 2014)

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Example of an alcohol advertorial.

(Source: Morrisons magazine, September/October 2014)



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#### **Alcohol Concern**

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 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.

### **Alcohol Concern Cymru Briefing**

Published by Alcohol Concern, on behalf of Alcohol Concern Cymru, 8 Museum Place, Cardiff, CF10 3BG

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