

Fact sheet:

The impact of online marketing and youth alcohol consumption

December 2012



Background

The impact of alcohol marketing in digital media on subsequent youth alcohol consumption was studied amongst 6,651 students with a mean age of 14 years from Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Poland in a longitudinal setting. The study is important because the internet is the leading medium with adolescents, who spend more time on the internet than they do watching television. For this reason, the alcohol industry utilizes the internet as an important marketing tool, especially via the producers' websites, by banners in other websites, and on social networking sites. It is thought that part of the impact of marketing on drinking behaviour is due to marketing influencing adolescents' attitudes of how drinking will affect them in a positive way, which in turn predicts actual drinking behaviour.

The study

The students were first studied between November 2010 and February 2011 (Time 1), when their alcohol use and their exposure to digital advertising, controlling for their internet use, was measured. They were studied again 14-15 months later (Time 2), when their attitudes to alcohol and alcohol use were measured. The relationship between their exposures to digital advertising at Time 1 on their alcohol use at Time 2 was analysed.

The results at Time 1

More than 9 out of 10 students regularly used the internet during school days, with nearly two fifths of all students using the internet for more than two hours each day. Nearly one third of students reported using a social media site which contained alcohol advertisements, and two thirds reported noticing alcohol advertisements on an internet page. Over half the 14 year old students had used alcohol, and one quarter of all students reported drinking five or more drinks on at least one occasion during the previous 30 days.

The impact of marketing at Time 1 on students' alcohol use at Time 2, 14-15 months later

Controlling for the students' sex, age, level of education, whether or not they smoked, how much they used the internet, and in which country they lived, the use of alcohol during the previous 30 days and exposure to digital marketing at Time 1 both independently predicted the use of alcohol during the previous 30 days at the follow-up time, Time 2, 14-15 months later. Thus, students who had used alcohol during the previous 30 days at Time 1 were more likely to use alcohol during the previous 30 days at Time 2 ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$). The greater the exposure to digital alcohol marketing at Time 1, the more likely students were to use alcohol during the

previous 30 days at Time 2 ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < 0.001$). That part of the effect of online marketing was due to its impact on attitudes is shown by the associations becoming less strong, when taking into account the students attitudes at Time 2. The coefficient, β , which measures the strength of the association dropped from 0.12 for the impact of online marketing at Time 1 to 0.08 when the impact of attitudes at Time 2 was taken into account. The association was still highly significant ($p < 0.001$).

Take home messages

1. European youngsters from various countries are highly aware of alcohol marketing on the internet.
2. European youngsters report high exposure to online alcohol marketing.
3. These longitudinal findings indicate that higher exposure to online alcohol marketing is associated with students more likely to be using alcohol during the previous 30 days, 14-15 months later.
4. The findings indicate a dose-response effect: the association with using alcohol becomes stronger with high levels of exposure to online alcohol marketing. This effect seems robust and consistent in various national contexts.
5. Results of the analysis give reason to support a ban on online alcohol marketing to protect youngsters from the harmful effects of exposure to commercial communications, and more specifically online alcohol marketing.

This fact sheet was based information in the [AMPHORA ebook](#) produced as part of the AMPHORA project (www.amphoraproject.net), funded by the European Commission under the 7th Framework Programme for research. Grant Agreement No. 223059

