



YOUTH

**PERCEPTIONS OF
DRINKING AND
ALCOHOL
MARKETING**

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The authors are solely responsible for the content of the report.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



IMPACT OF ALCOHOL ON CANCER IN ENGLAND (2015-2035)

If current trends in alcohol consumption continue over the next 20 years, it is estimated it will cause...

Alcohol trends were modelled using a scenario that incorporates both the recent shifts in consumption alongside longer-term trends.

Source: Angus C, Holmes J, Pryce R, Meier P & Brennan A (2016) Alcohol and cancer trends: Intervention Studies University of Sheffield and Cancer Research UK.

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135,000
CANCER
DEATHS

£2BN
IN CANCER
COSTS TO
THE NHS

1.2M
HOSPITAL
ADMISSIONS



Alcohol consumption is linked to thousands of cancer cases annually in the UK(1) and to seven types of cancer. This includes two of the most common, female breast and bowel(2, 3). If current alcohol consumption trends continue, it will lead to an estimated 135,000 cancer deaths and £2bn in cancer costs to the NHS(4) by 2035.

Levels of alcohol consumption in the UK for 15 year olds remain amongst the highest in the Western World(5). Whilst the causes of under-age drinking in Britain are undoubtedly complex, the evidence suggests that marketing, price and product design are important factors driving and sustaining alcohol use amongst Children and Young People (CYPs)(6-9).

This study aimed to:

- Explore young people's views on alcohol consumption and engagement with alcohol marketing
- Identify issues relevant to young people to inform the focus of a nationwide survey exploring CYPs engagement with alcohol marketing and alcohol consumption behaviours.

Eight focus groups were conducted with 38 11-19 year olds across England, Wales and Scotland.

FINDINGS

- Familiarity with alcohol brands was an important factor in determining which alcohol brands young people in the focus groups found attractive. Marketing often underpinned this familiarity, particularly broadcast marketing.
- Product features, such as brightly coloured packaging and sweet tasting products were particularly appealing.
- Understanding of product labelling was low and social responsibility messages were viewed cynically. Young people wanted better information displayed on alcohol products.
- Product labels were regarded as underutilised and some argued there was a need to develop more hard-hitting messages.
- There was some indication that price and value were considered when deciding which alcoholic beverage to purchase, amongst some young people.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Marketing creates familiarity with products, which may in turn define young people's early experiences with alcohol. This was perceived by young people to be built by both broadcast and non-broadcast means.

The research team are aware of the risks of broadcast marketing and some have called for policies such as advertising restrictions on junk food marketing in the past. It may be that more, or more strictly enforced, alcohol advertising restrictions on broadcast and non-broadcast media would similarly reduce engagement with, and harm from, alcohol amongst this age group.

Recommendation 1: An evidence review should be conducted to explore young people's exposure to alcohol marketing and the impact this has on their alcohol consumption behaviours.

Should this be moderate or high, government restrictions should be considered to ensure an approach that is proportional to alcohol's health harms.

Recommendation 2a: A review should be conducted into whether current health labelling and social responsibility messages are working.

Young people perceived some non-broadcast advertising media as influential and called for harder hitting messages as a result.

Recommendation 2b: Legislators and regulators should further review current labelling standards and explore whether government legislation should be brought in to accentuate health messages and health information on alcohol packaging.

Further to this, bolder, more visible and harder hitting messages should be considered.

Recommendation 3: A minimum-unit price should be implemented on all alcoholic beverages. This would serve to addresses brands that offer disproportionately strong and cheap products and/or target vulnerable groups.

Though not the strongest feature of discussions, some young people did mention price and price promotions. Given that alcohol is age restricted, the fact that this theme came up in discussions is telling.

Previously Cancer Research UK and University of Sheffield research has called for a 50p minimum unit price (MUP) to protect the most vulnerable groups. It was estimated that over the next 20 years in England this would:

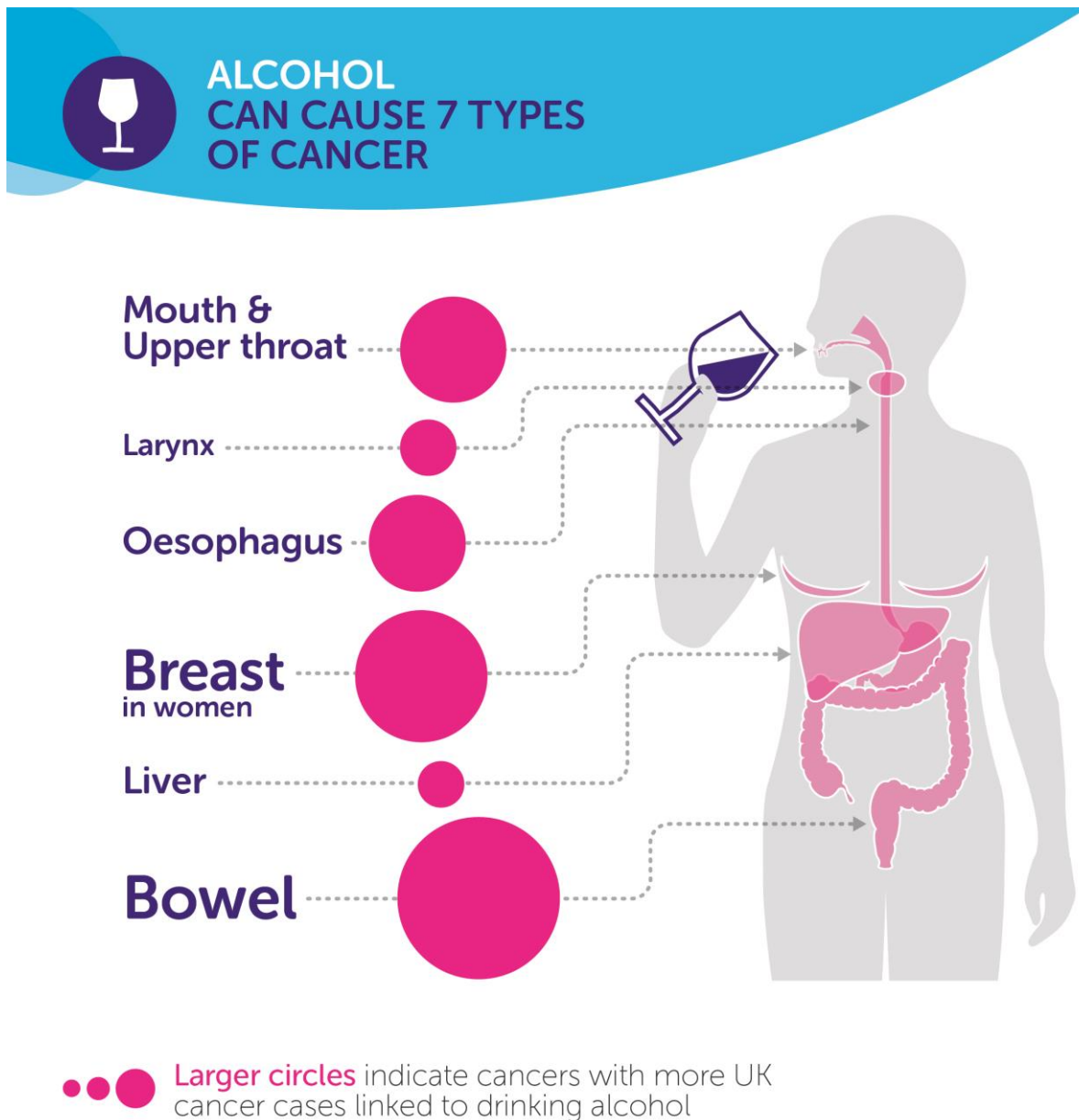
- Reduce all alcohol-attributable deaths by 7,200, including cancer deaths by 670
- Reduce all alcohol-attributable hospital admissions by 386,000, including 6,300 for cancer admissions
- Reduce healthcare costs by £1.3 billion.

This was implemented on 1st May 2018 in Scotland, following the Scottish government successfully defending challenges from the alcohol industry in the UK Supreme Court. MUP is awaiting implementation in Wales and if implemented across the UK, it would significantly reduce alcohol-related harm.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Alcohol is a significant contributor to the global burden of mortality and disease, accounting for 5.9% of deaths and 5.1% of disability-adjusted life years(10). It has been linked to over 200 health conditions, including heart disease, stroke, diabetes(11), and seven types of cancer(12) (Figure 1). If current alcohol consumption trends continue, it will lead to 135,000 cancer deaths in the UK over the next 20 years and £2bn in cancer costs to the NHS(4):



Overall, 5.5% of cancer cases and 5.8% of cancer deaths were attributable to alcohol worldwide in 2012(13). However, the number of cancers caused by alcohol varies both by cancer type and the amount of alcohol consumed(14). For example, while less than 10% of breast cancer cases are attributable to alcohol use, the risk of developing this cancer type among women increases even at low levels of alcohol use (≤ 12.5 g/day, or the equivalent of a glass of wine)(15).

Young people's consumption is also a problem. Alcohol use during teenage years is related to a wide range of health and social problems. For example, young people who begin drinking before the age of 15 are more likely to experience problems related to their alcohol use, including continued dependence of alcohol in adulthood (16). Young people also more frequently exhibit high-intensity drinking patterns that can lead to risk-taking behaviour (17-19).

Given this, it is concerning that decline in youth risk behaviours at the population level might have started plateauing in recent years (20), leaving the UK with the amongst the highest levels of underage drinking in the Western world(5). Over a quarter of 11-15 year olds obtain alcohol on a regular basis, whilst 40% had experienced 'drunkenness' two times or more (20, 21). A complacent approach to current alcohol consumption patterns would expose an unacceptable number of young people to health risks in the short and long term.

A range of marketing methods can be employed to influence population-level purchasing and consumption behaviours. These methods fall within what is known as a "marketing mix", which comprise of the "four Ps" - Product, Price, Place and Promotion(22). Such marketing methods have been implicated in alcohol consumption amongst children and young people (CYPs). Young men (16-25) who recalled more alcohol advertisements drank significantly more as adults in one study. Systematic reviews have found 'some' to 'compelling' evidence for the effect marketing, particularly television marketing, has on alcohol consumption among CYPs(23-25). Product design has a similarly strong evidence base linking it to CYP alcohol consumption (26-28). Price point, is a further marketing technique that has been shown to be influential in reviews including studies of both adults and youth demographics (29-32).

Policy and regulation have not kept pace with the weight of this evidence(33, 34). Alcohol marketing remains on programmes designed for young people and those which attract a large youth audience. Sports sponsorship and adverts on after-school, family TV are notable sources of exposure. Very limited policies regulate the labelling of alcoholic products, and there is no restriction on alcohol price in the UK. The role of the latter in alcohol consumption has been widely discussed elsewhere (30, 35-37).

This research is designed to work within this specific policy framework, providing an exploration of the drivers of consumption in the context of regulation. This give us an opportunity to put forward up-to-date policy recommendations about alcohol marketing, price and promotions based on our findings. This will include exploration of young people's perceptions of current alcohol regulations, and a preliminary look at the role price and price promotion plays. Secondly, it will show the themes important in CYP alcohol consumption. Using these, we will create a quantitative youth survey to further test our hypotheses and, if necessary, update our policy positions.

RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the research was to assist the development of a new youth survey designed to examine alcohol marketing and related regulation. In order to achieve this, the research was guided by four specific objectives:

- To explore young people's views on drinking, alcohol marketing and related policy issues
- To identify issues relevant to young people that could form the focus of a nationwide survey exploring young people's engagement with alcohol consumption and marketing
- To help establish the main questions for the alcohol survey and how these might be framed
- To make provisional policy recommendations to help the UK government reduce alcohol consumption levels amongst CYPs of 11-19 years old.

METHODS

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study was designed to learn more about young people's views and experiences of drinking alcohol, their awareness and perceptions of alcohol marketing and their response to related policy issues. A qualitative approach was adopted in order to provide detailed insight into these topics. Eight focus groups were conducted in England, Wales and Scotland with young people (11-19 year olds) over the period July to October 2016.

Once the sampling approach had been agreed with Cancer Research UK, the research team approached schools and youth organisations that corresponded with the sampling criteria. Approval was gained from both the head teacher and head of the youth organisations before staff contacts were fully briefed about the research.

RECRUITMENT

Multiple recruitment methods were used to recruit a sample of 38 young people aged 11-19 years from five sample points across England, Wales and Scotland. The focus groups typically comprised of 5-6 young people of similar ages

In England and Wales, six focus groups were recruited from four separate sample points with the support of two youth organisations (British Youth Council and the National Citizen Service) and a secondary school. A qualitative purposive sampling approach was taken in order to identify the school, youth organisations and in turn the participants to take part in the focus groups. Sampling characteristics of interest were;

- Schools/youth organisations;
- Demography (age, social grade, region);

- Young people of different ages (aged 11-19).

The researchers worked closely with the school and youth organisation contacts to recruit participants for these groups. These contacts were briefed and subsequently recruited small groups of young people who would be able to share their views in each other's company. They were asked not to over-prepare the participants to avoid socially desirable responses during discussions. Participants were informed that the group discussions would cover issues such as their views on alcohol marketing and drinking.

Prepared information sheets and opt-out forms were circulated to young peoples' parents or carers (if they were younger than 16). Information and consent sheets informed young people and their parents or carers about what participation in the research would involve and that participation was entirely voluntary. They were assured that the results would not include any identifiable information about the school, youth organisation or the participants.

In Scotland, two focus groups were recruited from a community in the west side of the Glasgow borough using quota sample techniques to represent different ages, genders and socio-economic groups. Recruitment was undertaken by professional research consultants by door knocking residential addresses in the study area. Where an individual met the sample criteria and expressed an interest in the study, they and their parent/guardian were left with a copy of the study information sheet and then re-contacted within 2-3 days to assess if they wished to take part and to address any questions. All participants were offered a £15 love2shop shopping voucher as an incentive for taking part.

FIELDWORK

The focus groups were conducted in different locations depending on recruitment method. In England and Wales, researchers were typically allowed between 40-60 minutes to complete an individual focus group. The focus groups in Wales were conducted on the school premises and in England the groups were conducted in either local colleges or a room in a local council office. In Scotland, both focus groups were conducted in a private meeting room in a local hotel and lasted between 75 and 90 minutes each.

A topic guide was developed to ensure the researchers covered all topics of relevance to the study (see Appendix 1). Non-directive questioning techniques were used to encourage participants to speak freely and to share their views with fellow participants. In addition, to help facilitate discussion around alcohol marketing, participants were shown a series of widely consumed alcohol products (see Appendix 2), and invited to map these on a continuum from those they liked to those they disliked (by lining up the bottles and cans in order from most to least liked). Each participant was then asked to discuss why they had chosen each of the products. This exercise was used to help identify factors that influenced brand choice and appeal, and to explore the types of marketing used to promote alcohol brands.

DATA ANALYSIS

With participants' prior consent, all discussions were recorded on digital voice-file and the files for each discussion were then fully transcribed, anonymised and coded using NVivo QSR software for thematic analysis. An initial coding framework was devised using the focus group

topic guide and then categories were refined following discussion between the researchers coding the data. This process facilitates systematic analysis of the range of experiences and views expressed, similarities and differences between and within groups, and emergent explanations for particular experiences or opinions. Two researchers coded the data, one of whom was involved in moderating the focus groups. Anonymised quotes drawn from the NVivo study database have been used to illustrate the findings described in this report.

ETHICS

Ethical scrutiny of the focus groups conducted in England and Wales was provided by NatCen's Research Ethics Committee, which includes senior NatCen staff, external research experts, and external professional experts, and is consistent with the requirements of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, 2005, updated 2015) and Government Social Research Unit (GSRU, 2005) frameworks.

Ethical approval for the focus groups conducted in Scotland was provided by The School of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the University of Stirling (see SREC14/15 – Paper No 58, Version 2). Ethical approval was granted in May 2016.

To enable the integration of datasets a data sharing agreement was granted by NatCen Social Research in September 2016 for researchers at the Institute for Social Marketing in the University of Stirling to undertake the analysis of focus group data collected in England and Wales.

RESULTS

A total of 38 participants from the ages of 11 to 19 took part in a series of eight focus group discussions. In most cases the discussion groups comprised either five or six participants, although in one case low turn-out resulted in a paired interview being conducted with just two participants. The composition also varied in terms of gender with five groups comprising a mix of female and male participants, while the remaining three were single sex groups, one female and two male groups. Due to the range of methods used to recruit participants it was not always possible to differentiate participants on the basis of socio-economic group, although the quota methods used in the recruitment of the two groups conducted in Scotland meant one group comprised participants from the higher income socio-economic categories A, B and C1 and the other from the lower income categories C2, D and E. A detailed description of the groups is provided in **Appendix 3**.

DRINKING EXPERIENCE AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS DRINKING

Drinking experience and levels of drinking appeared to vary in accordance with age and location. Younger participants tended to talk about tasting alcohol or trying an alcoholic drink under the supervision of a parent or other adult family member, typically at an adult social event such as a wedding or New Year party. Older participants' accounts of encounters with alcohol tended to be characterised by scenarios involving independent experimentation, most typically of young people in their teens drinking at weekend house parties. Some older participants also gave accounts of young people drinking outside, at local parks or in quiet street locations, although such descriptions were absent from the focus groups conducted in London.

In the groups conducted in Scotland and Newcastle, accounts of drinking to excess was a fairly common feature in the discussions, with some describing young people around them expressly buying or getting hold of alcohol with the aim of getting drunk. These norms were often reinforced through social media, with young people posting and sharing images of the drunken exploits of those around them. In these groups participants reported young people starting to drink in their early teens or when they first started secondary school.

In contrast, in the London groups independent experimentation appeared to start at an older age. In these groups drinking appeared to be a more peripheral social activity; something you got into as you got older, with some aspiring to or mimicking adult drinking styles, getting served in pubs and drinking to relax rather than to excess. There were fewer reports of people getting drunk, at least within their immediate peer group in these London groups, and excessive drinking could be the focus of some ridicule, sometimes being associated with younger, novice drinkers 'who don't know what they're doing'.

Accounts of drinking were much sparser in the groups conducted in North Wales, perhaps reflecting the younger average age of participants in these groups, some of whom were as young as eleven. In these discussions, experiences of drinking were largely confined to observations of their parents and other adult family members drinking, and accounts of

drunken behaviour were relatively rare. Similarly, knowledge and understanding of drinking and its effects could also be limited. For example, one young girl who had accidentally tried an alcoholic drink at a party thinking it was a cola drink, reported *'not getting addicted to it'*, while another described how alcohol could help you sleep and that this could be good thing if you had to work the next day.

Across the sample as a whole, drinking alcohol for most participants was perceived as a normal and acceptable behaviour and one in which many older participants also took part. Though the focus groups included younger participants with little or no experience of drinking or those that chose to avoid alcohol, these participants were fully aware of drinking amongst family members, peers and in their communities. Negative attitudes towards drinking were limited and tended to focus upon underage drinkers' drinking to excess. One girl who took part in one of the groups conducted in Scotland viewed underage drinking amongst her peers as symptomatic of a poor and difficult home life.

"It gives you a reputation of not being very – like having a little money, sometimes it makes you look poor, ... Alcohol can make you forget and feel different, so if you are going through a hard time at home, some people think that make you feel calm and make them feel as if everything is alright. It takes you mind off what is happening at home." (G1, Female, 13-14, West Glasgow)

Additional opinions towards alcohol included awareness of inconsistencies around the control of alcohol use compared to tobacco and cannabis. In one group participants perceived that alcohol use was as harmful as smoking yet they noted there were no bans on alcohol advertising, while in another group, a participant struggled to understand why alcohol is legally available and cannabis is not.

"...like why it's not allowed like if you drink alcohol and get that from the shop I think they should allow weed as well 'cause weed is the same thing as that basically. I think weed is better though." (G4, Mixed, 15-17, London)

AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF ALCOHOL MARKETING

Participants were asked about their awareness and views on marketing communications for alcohol products. The section below highlights their views regarding alcohol advertising including social media advertising, product promotions and sponsorship.

Advertising

Those focus group discussions that considered alcohol advertising revealed that this was one of the most prominent forms of marketing that the young people were exposed to. Participants were aware of alcohol advertising on television and social media, on billboards and posters including in shops and at bus stops. Awareness of alcohol advertising appeared to vary according to the age of the participants. Younger participants demonstrated less awareness of alcohol advertising, emphasised by their more limited ability to recall brands and associated adverts. One participant explained that exposure to alcohol adverts could be limited by the television programmes and channels that children usually watch.

"They're not actually advertised that much. Like, alcohol adverts are rare because like if you watch kids' channels then you're not going to find alcohol adverts. So if you do watch like adult programmes you do get the occasional advert, but there are not actually that many adverts about..." (G7, Mixed, 11-13, Wrexham)

In contrast, older participants demonstrated awareness of a wider range of alcohol brands and were more able to link brands with specific advertising campaigns.

"...sometimes like when I watch TV and I see an advert for like an alcohol bottle like, I don't know, maybe it will have like a catchy song or something that will stick to my mind and it will be in my head all day or like if I – if it constantly comes on, then I'll probably like might like, like it will always be on my mind. And if I say if I see the bottle in a shop, then I'll, okay, obviously I wouldn't drink it but I'd remember that advert straight away..." (G6, Mixed, 16-18, Slough)

Greatest exposure to alcohol advertising came from television adverts and from sponsorship of TV programmes.

"...like some, one channel I think is sponsored by like a make of wine or something." (G7, Mixed, 11-13, Wrexham)

Recall of television adverts centred on advertising of beer and cider, memorable for their use of comedy, music or interesting imagery.

"Yeah not like boring like old people drinking it and enjoying like that, kind of, that will just bore you, you just want to skip it, but like something that's really interesting like for example so like someone's on a run and then all of a sudden they've got a drink in their hand that makes it active. Stuff like that is more interesting you know what I'm saying, but yeah everything else is boring." (G4, Mixed, 15-17, London)

Participants perceived that alcohol advertising promoted the impression that drinking was normal, a route for socialising and having fun, and increased status in terms of looking cool.

"...normally when you see drinking ads – like drinks advertised on telly, it's normally they say, 'Oh, they're having a good time' sort of thing or stuff like that." (G5, Male, 17-19, Newcastle)

"...someone would be going off to a party and obviously there would be no life and it would be quiet, starts off quiet and then like once they – you know, once the drink is then showing the advert, the party starts to come to life and everything starts to get, you know, exciting. So, yeah, that obviously makes people think, 'Oh, I need it to have a good time' kind of thing." (G3, Mixed, 15-16, London)

"They just try to show it as something that is, is needed to make someone better." (G3, Mixed, 15-16, London)

Participants were under no illusion, however, that this was simply a device to sell the brand and not necessarily the reality of drinking.

"They make it look better than it is. They make it look as though – so people will buy

it.” (G1, Female, 13-14, West Glasgow)

“And then everyone’s going to go out and buy what they see on the TV. Well that’s what they want them to do anyway.” (G7, Mixed, 11-13, Wrexham)

In one group, participants were particularly critical of alcohol advertising on television, highlighting concerns about a possible negative influence on children.

“...everyone watches adverts and if you’re advertising alcohol, then it might influence kids into drinking and stuff like that, so I don’t think it’s something that needs to be advertised like that.” (G6, Mixed, 16-18, Slough)

“Some adverts you see ...like on TV when they have like alcohol and it gives it like a tag line and makes it seem okay, which is a bit – it’s a bit like, I don’t know, I think it might be a bit bad if like young children see that.” (G6, Mixed, 16-18, Slough)

Social media

Participants were aware of alcohol advertising on social media but this appeared to be less prominent than that viewed via other media, particularly television. Moreover, the only social platform identified as featuring alcohol advertising was Facebook where it was frequently noted. Alcohol adverts on Facebook were said to be featured in the sponsored adverts section and included those highlighting retailer price promotions seen to originate from alcohol manufacturers.

“It’s like, ‘Come to a certain shop’ and then you get, like, eight for like £6 or something and it’s just like ...really cheap so, like, it gets people interested and they wanna go buy it.” (G5, Male, 17-19, Newcastle)

Though young people’s exposure to overt alcohol advertising on social media appeared to be limited, it is important to note that there was greater recognition of various other forms of alcohol brand content. Most frequently this related to experience of other social media users sharing what they had been drinking or special price deals they had taken advantage of via online posts or images.

“They post on Snapchat and they put the heart images to make it look like they love doing this.” (G1, Female, 13-14, West Glasgow)

“It’s on, like, Facebook and that; people are like, ‘Go buy such-and-such’, like, it’s just like any random person on Facebook and they’ll just say like, ‘Go buy this ‘cause it’s cheap’.” (G5, Male, 17-19, Newcastle)

Additionally, a participant in her early teens noted seeing others ‘liking’ social media pages set up by alcohol manufacturers.

“Sometimes you’ve got a page on an actual drink – it’s them that’s made it, for people to like... People you know have liked the page. It says so and so liked this. Sometimes you see the pictures they put up and stuff.” (G1, Female, 13-14, West Glasgow)

Sponsorship

Awareness of alcohol sponsorship of events and activities was high, particularly the sponsorship of football. There were also regional variations with sponsorship of croquet mentioned in a London group and sponsorship of a major Scottish music festival mentioned in the Glasgow focus groups. Participants viewed sponsorship as projecting a positive image of drinking associating it with fun, fame and popularity. In one group, a participant noted that sponsorship of sporting events meant that alcohol was linked with good health and physical activity.

"I think they just make it look – I don't know, by sponsoring it in sports, just, just gives it a different image 'cause like sports is a good healthy, physical thing." (G3, Mixed, 15-16, London)

Participants were also aware that there was some controversy surrounding alcohol brands sponsoring sporting events and knew of specific restrictions to limit the influence of this marketing. Boys participating in one of the focus groups conducted in Glasgow, highlighted that replica football strips on sale in children's sizes were prohibited from showing alcohol sponsorship.

"You're not allowed to advertise – the sponsors.... football clubs are not allowed to have that on the kids' sizes..." (G2, Male, 15-16, West Glasgow)

Other participants were aware that alcohol sponsorship of sport was not allowed in other countries.

"... they didn't let them have the sponsor when they went to France because they didn't want to advertise drinking." (G7, Mixed, 11-13, Wrexham)

Such knowledge appeared to provide grounds for several participants to suggest that alcohol sponsorship of sport and music events was irresponsible given children's and young peoples' interest in these.

"Bad idea [sponsorship] because you've got really young audience watching football as well so they might think, 'Oh, that's nice, that looks all right, I might buy it'." (G5, Male, 17-19, Newcastle)

BRAND APPEAL AND ASSOCIATIONS

Taste, flavour and colour

Taste or flavour of products appeared to be very important with participants across the groups attracted to, or preferring products and brands that they perceived or had experienced as tasting 'good' or otherwise known to be sweet, with fruit flavoured drinks being particularly popular. As such, products not thought or known to have the desired taste or flavour did not appeal. One girl noted a trade-off between wanting to drink alcohol and the taste of alcoholic drinks.

"...why does alcohol have that weird disgusting taste? ... Why can't it just taste good

like normal drinks and then have a little bit of alcohol taste in it but not too much...I don't understand why it does taste so disgusting." (G4, Mixed, 15-17, London)

Brightly coloured products were appealing to participants, especially younger teenagers, as they were seen to be exciting but also accessible and refreshing because of their apparent similarity in appearance to fruit and carbonated juices.

"...they do make them look like really colourful juices." (G7, Mixed, 11-13, Wrexham)

Older participants corroborated this view, reflecting that those younger or just starting to drink would opt for brands that reminded them of soft drinks. There was also a suggestion that brightly coloured drinks were more likely to be of lower alcohol strength which was also thought to appeal to younger or inexperienced drinkers.

"I think this would appeal to people maybe who haven't drunk alcohol before because it looks refreshing like it looks like a normal juice drink but it's clearly labelled to show there's alcohol in it." (G6, Mixed, 16-18, Slough)

"I reckon kids, young, young kids tend to look at that as like fizzy pop 'cause it does look like fizzy pop, you know? Like a bubblegum drink, that, so they probably think it's like – and then that's how they probably start drinking." (G5, Mixed, 17-19, Newcastle)

The colour of the product was also considered important in gauging the taste of the drink with coloured products deemed to have more flavour or to taste 'nice'.

"...if I've never drunk yeah and if I went into like a store and I saw the alcohol drinks and everything, if I see those colourful ones I would pick them because I think it probably might be sweet yeah type thing. It might taste nice." (G4, Mixed, 15-17, London)

The converse of this was that colour could also be used to identify drinks that were unattractive with clear liquids perceived to be 'boring' and dark liquids perceived to be too 'strong' or somehow suspicious.

"...that is like pure brown. It doesn't look very pure. It looks sturdy. This looks very dangerous. This one looks like a more mature drink. It's a wine. ... But this one has 15% volume so they are both really strong." (G1, Female, 13-14, West Glasgow)

One younger girl highlighted the colourful appeal of an alcopop brand over the plainness of vodka;

"...they are all bright colours, like artificial. It makes it look fun. Vodka is just plain and doesn't really stand out." (G1, Female, 13-14, West Glasgow)

Others dismissed whisky on the grounds of its brown colour with one participant likening it to urine.

"...it looks a bit like – it looks a bit disgusting colour to start with." (G6, Mixed, 16-18, Slough)

"The colour looks gross..." (G3, Mixed, 15-16, London)

Packaging and product format

The colours used in product packaging as well as the format of the container and any memorable images were also attractive to participants. The colours and formats used could be deemed attractive, again, because of their similarity to soft drinks packaging but also because of other favourable associations.

"It's like cans of Irn Bru – it's the size of that and it's all colourful." (G2, Male, 15-16, West Glasgow)

The use of a palm tree image by one popular brand was suggestive of summer and holidays across most groups.

"...this one is like you have palm trees on the logo and everything suggests it's quite summery." (G4, Mixed, 15-17, London)

"That looks like you'd drink it in a nice place that families use. ... you'd drink it on holiday or something." (G1, Female, 13-14, West Glasgow)

In contrast, packaging that did not employ attractive colours, formats and imagery did not hold the same appeal for participants with younger and inexperienced drinkers again appearing to be most sensitive to these features. One older participant referred to the black and white packaging of a beer brand as 'too bland' to appeal to anyone in their teens.

"Well, it's, it's too bland. Like when you look at it, it's just – obviously it is a black-and-white can... that doesn't look very advertising to people, especially young, young ages." (G5, Mixed, 17-19, Newcastle)

The colour or transparency of containers and whether or not the product and its colour could be seen through the container was also important to some participants who were discouraged by the product being obscured, raising some suspicion.

"...like wine and beer and stuff are all in like green bottles. So you can't actually see what colour it is inside. Like it could be any colour." (G7, Mixed, 11-13, Wrexham)

Similarly, one brand that employed a dark, angular, bottle reminded participants of a medicine bottle.

"You can tell by the way it's packaged. That looks like medicine." (G2, Male, 15-16, West Glasgow)

"I thought this one looked like a medicine bottle... So that's why I thought it didn't look that, like too appealing." (G4, Mixed, 15-17, London)

Finally, product format and its convenience or ease of use also appealed to participants. In the focus group of 15- and 16-year old boys held in Scotland, participants indicated that they drink outdoors and because of this preferred products that were ready-made or did not require mixer drinks. This contrasted with a propensity, highlighted in a couple of the groups conducted in

England, to drink spirits mixed with soft drinks.

*"...so it's like they mix it with something like fruit juice or something to make it nicer."
(G4, Mixed, 15-16, London)*

Strength

Discussions highlighted that the strength, or alcohol by volume (ABV) measure, contributes to the appeal of products because of young people's interest in drinking to get drunk. Participants with experience of drinking alcohol, particularly those in their mid to late teens, discussed how they and others might choose products based on the volume of alcohol they contained. Boys in their mid-teens participating in one of the groups conducted in Scotland freely acknowledged a desire to get drunk when drinking and distinguishing between products based on alcohol strength. Below, a participant notes that though he likes the taste of a drink it would not get someone drunk.

"... 'cos it tastes really good, but it doesn't get you drunk." (G2, Male, 15-16, West Glasgow)

Other participants, especially those attending the focus groups conducted in England who were experienced in drinking, were inclined to promote a more reserved image of their drinking behaviour. These participants indicated a desire to achieve a low level of drunkenness and to choose drinks that would allow them to achieve this.

*"I don't really drink so I would pick this one because just to like feel a little bit, yeah."
(G4, Mixed, 15-17, London)*

"...that's something you would go out, you know, just sit in the house and drink with your friends and chat, just have fun." (G5, Mixed, 17-19, Newcastle)

Across the groups, however, participants were clear that some young people select products solely to get drunk, though younger/less experienced drinkers were perceived to only require lower strength products to achieve this.

"In our school, just anyone drinks it. Younger people in school drink usually, because you don't need to drink so much of it to get drunk. That is what I've heard." (G1, Female, 13-14, West Glasgow)

Additionally, some products were perceived as suitable for those who 'can't handle their drink'.

"It's not summat I'd drink – it's class- I reckon it's classed as like, you know, someone who's like a starter who... I reckon if you're seen with that, you're labelled that you can't handle your drink." (G5, Male, 17-19, Newcastle)

Familiarity and imagery

A strong theme that emerged was the impact that familiarity with the products had to the participants. Though the individual features discussed previously contributed to the appeal of products and brands, at least as important and for some, possibly more important, to their appeal was the extent to which participants found them familiar. Products and brands seen to

be used by family members, friends, peers and communities could be very influential. When asked why he liked a particular brand, one male participant responded that this was something he had seen his grandparents buy.

"Just because when I was smaller my grandparents used to buy it a lot so I would always look at it and like I wonder what that tastes like." (G4, Mixed, 15-16, London)

According to a female participant in another London group, the familiarity of a vodka brand amongst her peers took priority over the individual appeal of the product.

"I don't think like people our like our age or people who drink that don't actually care about the taste... it's all about having it with Coca-Cola, having a bit of banter." (G3, Mixed, 15-16, London)

Additionally, familiarity with products and brands appears to be supported by the visibility of brands in advertising and merchandising. Participants perceived that brands with a major marketing presence were more familiar and trusted brands.

"I don't know if anyone else has noticed it but that is a brand that is everywhere like I've seen it on people's tops and stuff,... so that's another reason why it would be ... quite high up on how appealing it is to people." (G6, Mixed, 16-18, Slough)

"I think it's through growing up; they tend to see people – they've, like, they tend to see that at a young age advertised on TV." (G5, Male, 17-19, Newcastle)

Interestingly, however, participants in the groups conducted in Scotland noted popular alcohol brands that had little or no advertising supporting them. These were typically grape wine brands notoriously associated with underage and problem drinking in the local area.

"They've got a bad reputation. ... They don't advertise them..." (G2, Male, 15-16, West Glasgow)

Discussions also highlighted that certain products held particular associations for participants. A common feature was to associate products or brands with a particular gender. Wines and selected spirits, for example, peach schnapps, were associated more with women, while beer was viewed as masculine and therefore most associated with men.

"... it just looks like, it just looks like something you'd have at a football game, which looks masculine and just like you're with your mates and stuff." (G3, Mixed, 15-16, London)

In one group, participants made the association between certain products (cheaper white wine and a well known lager brand) and the stereotype of the 'chav', perceived to be someone who is unemployed and on a low income.

"'Cause you tend to see like chavvers drink that; that's, like, probably all they can afford 'cause they obviously don't work..." (G5, Male, 17-19, Newcastle)

Brands and products were also associated with particular age groups with adults and particularly older adults more likely to drink products and brands with higher alcohol volume

such as spirits including gin, whisky and brandy as well as wine.

“...you imagine whisky as like something that old men drink, like 60 years old. That's what I think of that as.” (G3, Mixed, 15-16, London)

Interestingly there was also some geographic variation with regard to perceptions of a particular bourbon whiskey brand. Participants who took part in the groups conducted in Scotland perceived that this brand was a product that only adults including ‘granddads’ would drink, whereas in a couple of the groups conducted in England this brand was thought to be attractive to young people i.e. teenagers.

PRICE AND PRICE PROMOTIONS

Price

The price or cost of alcohol products was an important factor guiding the appeal of products for some participants but not a strong feature of discussions more generally. Most of those that expressed an interest in the cost of products tended to be older and have more experience of drinking. For example, as noted previously, males in their late teens participating in the Newcastle group, reported attempting to or taking advantage of alcohol promotions, while boys participating in the all-male Glasgow group talked at length about choosing between products based on their price.

“...bottles of wine are expensive. They are too dear for our age group.” (G2, Male, 15-16, West Glasgow)

Interestingly, a girl from the all-female Glasgow group of 13- and 14-year olds mentioned weighing up the cost of a product in relation to its strength, and a willingness to pay more for alcohol products with a higher volume of alcohol.

“It would need to be big if it was going to be dear. A small bottle can't be dear, 'cos you are not getting a lot out of it. But you can get a lot out of it if it is small and has a high volume.... if you were wanting to get drunk.” (G1, Female, 13-14, West Glasgow)

Though some participants did not appear to be concerned by cost, they were of the opinion that those younger than them and with less experience of drinking would opt for products that they found affordable.

“...in younger years like you just realise, yeah, all they care about is getting absolutely drunk and then even if it's like the crappiest, cheapest but it's always the crappiest, cheapest thing that they can find.” (G3, Mixed, 15-16, London)

Price Promotions

Participants in all groups displayed an awareness of alcohol price promotions, indicating that they had seen these in supermarkets and smaller convenience stores, on social media and in television advertising.

“...they're always like, 'Oh, we've got, like, this big sale on such-and-such alcohol'. Normally it's just alcohol as one advert, as one entity ... Stuff like that that you tend to

see on telly.” (G5, Male, 17-19, Newcastle)

A couple of older participants also mentioned seeing alcohol promoted via ‘happy hours’ in local bars with these highlighted by unsolicited leaflets posted to their home address. Participants were aware of particular types of promotions including ‘buy one get one free’, ‘three for two’ and discounts on larger amounts including crates of beer or lager.

“They show all the different flavours. ‘Buy One Get One Free’ or something.”
(G1, Female, 13-14, West Glasgow)

Additionally, participants perceived that wine and beer were more likely to be promoted in supermarkets and spirits more likely to be on promotion in smaller, convenience stores.

However, despite this awareness, the age-restrictions on alcohol limited the relevance of promotions for most participants with only a couple of young people in their late teens (and in the same group) saying that they attempted to or had taken advantage of alcohol promotions.

“I try but I can’t – didn’t get served so I just, I just ask my mum to get it for us.”
(G5, Male, 17-19, Newcastle)

Moreover, 15- and 16-year old boys in one of the focus groups conducted in Scotland indicated that the products they were interested in buying and drinking were not generally on promotion. Despite discussion of the impact of alcohol price promotions being limited, there was still a sense that such marketing could encourage and even increase drinking.

“Sometimes you see like buy one and get one free and it encourages people to get more.” (G7, Mixed, 11-13, Wrexham)

This view was strongest amongst older participants with more experience of their own and others’ drinking.

“Like for people that can handle their drink, that’s good, you know? It’s cheap for them because they can handle their drink without spending loads. But on the other hand, people that just can’t handle their drink whatsoever they think, ‘Oh that’s great, I’ll just get so many of this’. And then they end up just basically paralysed by the end of the night.” (G5, Male, 17-19, Newcastle)

KNOWLEDGE OF RISKS AND HARMS ASSOCIATED WITH ALCOHOL USE

Exploration of the negative consequences or downsides of drinking alcohol revealed two distinct but complementary narratives amongst the focus group participants. The first related to the long-term health consequences of heavy alcohol use and the second to the negative outcomes associated with binge drinking and loss of control.

The longer term risks to health or cumulative impact of heavy drinking was typically expressed in terms of its impact on physical health and ultimately to premature death. In these narratives, damage to the internal organs or ‘insides’, and in particular to the liver emerged as a common

theme, although some also made reference to alcohol contributing to specific health conditions such as heart disease and diabetes.

"Like basically, for the long run, like when you're getting older; like, damage your insides, all that type of stuff." (G5, Male, 17-19, Newcastle)

These narratives were also characterised by images of addiction, and in some cases were associated with mental health problems or people who were 'drinking to forget stuff':

"Like if you get addicted to it then it can cause like serious long-term health issues." (G7, Mixed, 11-13, Wrexham)

"Like people sometimes – alcoholics, they drink because they're depressed and stuff.... drink my sorrows away sort of thing." (G8, Mixed, 11-12, Wrexham)

Significantly, only three participants made any direct or spontaneous connection between drinking and cancer as part of these narratives. One participant also made reference to drinking 'damaging the windpipe' but not specifically to cancer of the oesophagus or throat. The following quotes typify the types of responses when questioned on the relationship between alcohol and cancer:

"I didn't know you could get cancer (from drinking alcohol)." (G2, Male, 15-16, West Glasgow)

"It's damaging to your liver. That's all I, that's all I know." (G3, Mixed, 15-16, London)

"There's more of a focus on smoking and cancer, people aren't even aware of like the cancer that's linked with alcohol..." (G3, Mixed, 15-16, London)

"You immediately think of lung cancer, do you know what I mean?" (G3, Mixed, 15-16, London)

"No, never seen anything." (G5, Male, 17-19, Newcastle)

This line of questioning led some to examine why links with cancer did not appear to be widely publicised, often drawing comparisons with the messaging surrounding smoking and cancer, and to argue that there was perhaps a need to improve public knowledge and raise awareness of the links between drinking and cancer.

"There's so much marketing on like the risk of smoking, the effects of it, I think with alcohol,... like people just aren't as aware, maybe because (of) the marketing.... there's just a massively different amount of emphasis placed on it." (G3, Mixed, 15-16, London)

"That should be put out more than it is. It's not made aware of enough. Maybe if people talked about that more – on cigarettes they have a little picture and it shows you what it can do to you, but on alcohol it doesn't have that. Some people don't know that can happen to you. It should be made more aware that it can harm you and it can kill you." (G1, Female, 13-14, West Glasgow)

In contrast to the longer-term health impacts of drinking, narratives relating to the more immediate consequences of drinking and in particular to events associated with binge drinking, were much richer and more extensive. These narratives typically focussed around the consequences of intoxication and loss of control, and embraced a large number of issues: ranging from the relatively trivial, such as social embarrassment and making a fool of yourself in front of peers; to more serious consequences, getting involved in fights and accidents, resulting in hospital admission and involvement with the police and courts; right through to extreme consequences and ultimately accidental death caused by choking and severe alcohol poisoning.

"Our friend drank too much, he was in the hospital... ..passed out and ended up in the medical tent at T in the Park. He went back in after and kept drinking though."

(G2, Male, 15-16, West Glasgow)

"Females normally tend to get themselves in bad situations with alcohol, you know, doing the wrong kind of stuff, getting with the wrong type of people, that kind of thing.... Obviously there's police [chuckles] if they get caught; and if they keep getting caught then that's bad for them in the future; they don't want a record and all that."

(G5, Male, 17-19, Newcastle)

These discussions also focused around the theme of vulnerability with some young people considered to be more at risk of alcohol related harms and consequences than others. The following quotes illustrate how gender and life stage were considered as important factors predicting vulnerability.

Q: "Do you think there are certain groups that are more at risk?"

A: "(Getting) taken advantage of ... a fourteen year old girl if she is clearly drunk and she's on her own, then she's very vulnerable. I wouldn't want my sister walking down the road if she was drunk." (G2, Male, 15-16, West Glasgow)

"I think the way in regards to like fresher's week and being like living by yourself and stuff and like all this, you know, having the ability to go out and drink with no control or anything, that can be detrimental." (G3, Mixed, 15-16, London)

PRODUCT INFORMATION AND LABELLING

While most participants were able to identify alcohol brands through their distinctive packaging, understanding and awareness of product information on package labels was limited. Most participants claimed 'people don't really read what's on the packaging', only taking the time to examine information where it could help with product choice. Many also reported that the small typeface and images discouraged people from reading this type of information, with some suggesting that it needed to be made bigger or bolder if it were to catch people's attention.

"Most people don't read it all. I think it should be bigger. More bold."

(G1, Female, 13-14, West Glasgow)

Two particular aspects of product information were examined: information about alcohol content and strength; and awareness and understanding of corporate messages on alcohol packaging.

Alcohol strength

Alcohol strength was a familiar concept. However, interest in it was largely limited to existing drinkers, some of whom reported reading alcohol by volume (ABV) or 'alcohol percentage' values to assess the relative strength and in some cases the economic value of different alcohol products. While some participants did note and make reference to alcohol units or more typically the 'little bottle' symbol on alcohol products, there was much uncertainty about what the related figure denoted. Those more engaged in drinking, most notably in the Scotland groups, argued that percentage volume was more useful and relevant than unit figures, as it provided a more straightforward means of assessing alcohol strength, although some used the terms percentage and units interchangeably:

"I think the percentage makes more sense because ... you can visualise how much alcohol is in the bottle. 40% you know it's just below half." (G2, Male, 15-16, West Glasgow)

"It's just one sticker on the front (of the bottle) and it tells you ... 75cl and 70%. That is far better 'cos it's all easier for you to see – how much you are drinking and how many units it is." (G2, Male, 15-16, West Glasgow)

The research did not examine response to specific alcohol guidelines regarding unit content, although awareness of recommended guidelines was evidently very limited. For many the idea of guidelines for drinking was more relevant to an adult audience than to under-age drinkers: *They don't really tell us (at school) how much we should be drinking!* In this sense school education appeared to be focussed on messages promoting abstinence, for example, it's not safe to drink while the body is still growing and developing. However, some older participants who were approaching legal drinking age were able to articulate a more coherent and in many cases adult view about the value of alcohol guidelines:

"I'm for and against it (having drinking guidelines)... for it: well obviously some people know their limits, they know how much units you're meant to take each day so obviously, like, for safer reasons. But against it: some people can handle it better than others, you know, like some, some, someone can have like one can Foster's – like Foster's and get mortal whereas someone else could have, like, a crate and still be, you know? So it varies between certain people."
(G5, Male, 17-19, Newcastle)

"I think people just, people just, well, people generally drink just to get drunk, so they don't really think about the effect it has on them, yeah..... But I still think it might be useful information to just have there just say that like, okay, it's like somebody, one person could like stop from like having a serious health issue."
(G6, Mixed, 16-18, Slough)

Corporate social responsibility messages

Many participants appeared to be aware of corporate messages on alcohol products with some referring to the Drinkaware website URL or 'the drink aware thing' as a common feature on alcohol packaging.

"They always have the like drink aware, like the website thing, but it's always in like really small font, even like on bus adverts. It's like really small."
(G4, Mixed, 15-17, London)

There was a degree of cynicism surrounding corporate campaigns such as Drinkaware, with questions emerging regarding their credibility and intent. In this sense, some suggested that their primary purpose was to protect the alcohol manufacturer rather than to necessarily inform the consumer.

"It will have like at the bottom, like a little sort of disclaimer, you know, drink safely or wisely or something." (G6, Mixed, 16-18, Slough)

"They don't want to be held responsible." (G1, Female, 13-14, West Glasgow)

"It just tells them to be sensible and don't drink it too fast." (G5, Male, 17-19, Newcastle)

"... they say like don't drink when you're pregnant, but it's not a very clear picture. It just like, it just looks a really fat woman drinking, with a line through it."
(G7, Mixed, 11-13, Wrexham)

Other participants appeared to express doubt as to the drivers underlying these campaigns, with some speculating that alcohol manufacturers were perhaps required to include this type of message in much the same way that tobacco manufacturers were required to include health warnings on their packaging:

"They might not have a choice about that being on it." (G1, Female, 13-14, West Glasgow)

Comments such as these formed part of a broader narrative identifying perceived shortcomings with existing messages on alcohol products and with alcohol education more generally, which in some cases drew direct comparisons with the more graphic and hard-hitting messages found on tobacco packaging.

"I think it should be like, you know when you get cigarettes, the smoking kills, that kind of stuff? I think they should put you off drinking, like smoking, like smoking does. I reckon you should have that same kind of labelling, like labelling on, on the alcohol bottle." (G5, Male, 17-19, Newcastle)

"You know, on like, on like smoking packets and stuff, there's always so much like smoking is so harmful and like a load of photos and that sort of thing and (you) never get the same thing with alcohol really at all." (G3, Mixed, 15-16, London)

"I feel like for alcohol, there's not enough of, you know, the risk and the hazards of

drinking alcohol, so for like that it should be there – those ugly pictures – because, you know, at my school, we don't really talk about alcohol. We talk about smoking, so, so generally I don't know enough information about alcohol.”
(G3, Mixed, 15-16, London)

In one discussion, these differences were attributed to different beliefs and norms seen to surround smoking and drinking, with the former often seen in absolutist terms as being bad for health, and the latter as something that could be consumed relatively safely within certain defined parameters.

“With alcohol, it's like if you're like limiting your own drinking like you're being safe. There's more on like don't drink loads like you know ... your like tolerance and stuff whereas smoking is like however much you smoke... this is what could happen to you.”
(G3, Mixed, 15-16, London)

DISCUSSION

DRINKING EXPERIENCE

Whilst the research was not specifically designed to examine drinking behaviour, during the focus group discussions, various differences regarding drinking behaviour and exposure to drinking emerged between the different groups. Participants in the south east of England reported starting to experiment with alcohol in their mid to late teens, with reports of drunken behaviour relatively rare within their immediate peer group. In contrast, in the north of England and Scotland youth drinking appeared to start at a younger age and was characterised by higher levels of consumption and intoxication, with some describing getting drunk as a shared goal. Drinking outdoors also emerged as a more common feature of youth drinking in the north of England and Scotland.

ROLE OF MARKETING AND BRAND APPEAL

Marketing communications for alcohol products including advertising, price promotions and sponsorship were familiar to young people in all focus groups, with awareness of products and brands appearing to increase with age and drinking experience. Despite this recognition, the young people portrayed themselves as largely immune to the power of alcohol marketing, highlighting insight into the motives of marketers and suggesting only limited impact on their drinking behaviour. Marketing was found to have a role to play, however, in influencing the appeal of products and brands.

Participants revealed that multiple factors are influential in determining what products and brands they find attractive. Key among these was familiarity, or which products and brands they see their family, friends, peers and people in their communities consuming. Marketing was found to contribute to this by building familiarity through conventional advertising channels as well as through exposure to alcohol branding on clothing or other household items, or through peers highlighting brands on social media. Other factors that were important related to product and brand features, with young people generally attracted to brightly coloured drinks, similar in flavour to fruit juices or fizzy drinks, contained in colourful and memorable packaging and available at an affordable price. These features also represent a form of marketing by presenting alcohol in a format that is attractive to children and young people. Thus despite young people's assessment of marketing around alcohol not affecting their own behaviour and choices, there was still broader recognition of the opportunities for alcohol marketing to have stronger influences on young people and this should be considered when addressing underage and youth drinking.

KNOWLEDGE OF RISKS AND HARMS

Risks and harms associated with drinking alcohol revealed two distinct narratives. The first related to the longer-term risks of heavy drinking to physical health, understanding of which was largely limited to images of addiction or 'alcoholism' and beliefs about long term damage to the liver. The second set of narratives related to the more immediate negative consequences of drunken behaviour and encounters with authority, particularly police and medical services.

Importantly the short-term consequences of drinking to excess were of greater relevance to young people with drinking and the exploits that stemmed from it forming an important part of their social reality and wider youth culture. Consequently, these experiences provide a rich source of material for developing culturally specific and relevant public health campaign messages.

As previously indicated, knowledge of the longer-term health effects of drinking alcohol appeared limited with any references to links between drinking and cancer rare. More detailed discussion revealed significant gaps in young people's knowledge in this area, with some young people expressing a genuine interest in learning more. These findings suggest there is scope for challenging prevailing beliefs and norms surrounding the idea of safe drinking levels and alcohol consumption being considered a relatively safe behaviour. Participant narratives suggest that drawing direct comparisons with tobacco use and its relationship with cancer could provide a vehicle for challenging such beliefs.

PRODUCT INFORMATION AND LABELLING

Whilst recognition of widely consumed alcohol products was high, participants' awareness and understanding of product information on alcohol packaging was low. This type of information was only consulted when it was found to be useful, most notably in helping to judge the strength and value for money of different alcohol products. ABV values on packaging were considered particularly useful in this respect. In contrast, awareness of alcohol unit values and related drinking guidelines was low amongst young people, with many indicating that in their age group most educational messages advocated abstinence, not moderation. It was suggested that moderation messages promoted the idea that drinking was a relatively safe activity and appeared (at face value) to be inconsistent with information indicating alcohol could be linked with life threatening health conditions such as cancer. These apparently contradictory messages were difficult for many to reconcile, resulting in much discussion and debate.

Finally, there was also fairly wide awareness of corporate social responsibility campaigns and messages on alcohol packaging, most notably Drinkaware. There was a high level of cynicism surrounding these messages, with many questioning their value and intent. As such, product labels were regarded as an underutilised medium and would appear to offer scope for developing messages and material designed to actively engage and catch consumers' attention. Some argued there was a need to develop more graphic and hard-hitting health information. However, more committed drinkers were less likely to take such a position.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The main finding of this paper is that familiarity is a key mechanism behind alcohol's appeal to young people. Marketing can help alcohol corporations achieve that familiarity, making it a potentially substantial factor in young people's drinking. This might be by presenting alcohol drinking as a norm – which young people felt it was – or by presenting alcohol in an unrealistically positive light, detached from its negative impact on health. Marketing restrictions have been promoted as key to reducing young people's consumption of 'junk foods'(38-41) and, though more quantitative research into exposure rates of alcohol marketing are needed, a similar measure could prove effective here.

Recommendation 1: An evidence review should be conducted to explore young people's exposure to alcohol marketing and the impact this has on their alcohol consumption behaviours. Should this be moderate or high, government restrictions should be considered to ensure an approach that is proportional to alcohol's health harms.

Other factors that contributed to the appeal of alcohol amongst young people centred on product design. Young people were attracted to bright, fruity drinks. Yet, health warnings and social responsibility messages were not well known or widely acknowledged – despite appearing on the packaging and on most alcohol adverts. There was some support for embedded health warnings.

Recommendation 2: Legislators and regulators should review current labelling standards and explore whether government legislation should be brought in to accentuate health messages and health information on alcohol packaging. Bolder, more visible and harder hitting messages should be considered.

There was some indication that price and price promotion were influential. Price, particularly, was enabling dangerous drinking behaviour. Price promotion was, by contrast, only highlighted by a minority, perhaps because of the age restricted nature of alcohol, and promotions were felt to be something that was more important to older drinkers who purchased alcohol more regularly. This may mean promotions lay the ground work of familiarity for future appeal (at age 18 onwards, for example). There was also evidence that participants had to work within very limited budgets when buying alcohol and that some used alcohol strength to help assess the value of specific products when making purchasing decisions. This would suggest that MUP could prove effective at nudging young drinkers away from dangerous drinking behaviour.

In particular, the finding on price aligns to other research. Frank Chaloupka's (2004) review of the evidence on the role of price in alcohol showed 'risk populations, such as youth and young adults, college students' were influenced by price in both quantitative and qualitative studies. High strength drinks, such as spirits, were found to have the most elastic demand in relation to price (30). A meta-analysis of 112 studies showed the same pattern, though this did not have a focus on young people or young adults(31). Most recently, a summary of economic research on the effect of alcohol price policy on youth found a negative correlation between price and alcohol consumption(35). This report builds on this evidence by demonstrating it within a UK-specific and current policy context.

Recommendation 3: A minimum-unit price should be implemented on all alcoholic beverages. This would serve to address brands that offer disproportionately strong and cheap products and/or target vulnerable groups.

Previously Cancer Research UK and University of Sheffield research has called for a 50p minimum unit price (MUP) to protect the most vulnerable groups(4). It was estimated that over the next 20 years in England this would reduce all alcohol-attributable deaths by 7,200, including cancer deaths by 670; reduce all alcohol-attributable hospital admissions by 386,000, including 6,300 for cancer admissions; reduce healthcare costs by £1.3 billion.

This was implemented on 1st May 2018 in Scotland, following the Scottish government successfully defending challenges from the alcohol industry in the UK Supreme Court. MUP is awaiting implementation in Wales and if implemented across the UK, it would significantly reduce alcohol-related harm.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

The research was specifically designed to provide a young person's perspective on the attractions and challenges associated with drinking and as such illuminate issues for quantification as part of a national youth survey. In particular the qualitative approach provided participants with a safe environment in which they could share their views and experiences and a means of expressing themselves in their own terms. This latter strength is vital to identifying the type of language needed to frame survey questions. In addition, the use of enabling techniques such as the alcohol mapping exercise provided participants with the necessary stimulus for opening up discussion around what is a subtle and complex topic, and a means of identifying and exploring new themes and issues.

Limitations of the study relate to issues of external validity and ability of using small samples to represent the study group of interest. In addition, the need to rely on different recruitment methods in each study area restricted the ability of the research to make comparisons between different sub-groups. For example, some groups were mixed gender while others were single sex groups, making it difficult to identify gender differences, while the divergent age profiles of each group made it difficult to draw comparisons based on age. Similarly, the socio-economic profile of participants in some groups being absent also acted as a constraint.

FURTHER WORK

The findings from this study will be used to inform the development of a national youth survey designed to examine alcohol marketing and related regulation. More specifically, it will assist in both the identification of topics for inclusion in the survey, as well as guide the use of language to help frame survey questions.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: TOPIC GUIDE

Focus Group Research into Young People's Opinions of Marketing and Alcohol

Topic Guide

Version 2.0 27.06.2016

Rationale

The focus groups have three main objectives:

1. To ascertain young people's views regarding the marketing of alcohol and its perceived health and social impacts.
2. To explore young people's views of legislation aimed at addressing alcohol and related issues, and how this needs to evolve in the future.
3. To identify issues which young people believe merit particular attention as part of a new national survey.

Key research questions include:

- What role does alcohol (and alcohol brands) play in the social lives of young people?
- How do young people perceive and engage with alcohol products and associated marketing activity?
- What alcohol brands do young people find most appealing and what factors differentiate brands with lower and higher levels of appeal?
- What impact is alcohol marketing perceived to have on consumption styles, levels and behaviour?
- What risks, harms and problems (if any) do young people associate with alcohol and how do these relate to youth culture and differing consumption styles and products?
- What role is industry perceived to have in promoting risks, harms and problems associated with alcohol consumption and what actions (if any) are required to address these?
- What issues and areas (if any) do people see as requiring particular attention with specific regard to the regulation of alcohol marketing?

Moderators are encouraged to use a non-directive approach to exploring issues of interest and to identify themes for further analysis in future surveys.

Introduction

Use the initial introduction to set an appropriate tone for open discussion and for sharing views and experiences.

- Explain the research approach and purpose.
- Confirm the moderators role in this (non-judgmental, not a marketing practitioner / policy maker).
- Explain the purpose of digital recording and how data will be used.
- Offer reassurance about confidentiality.
- Provide opportunity to ask questions.

Warm-up (5-10 mins)

Use the warm-up discussion to develop an understanding of drinking norms, attitudes and behaviours: where relevant, pick up on any personal/youth references made to drinking.

The research is looking specifically at alcohol products and marketing; but just to give a bit of context before we talk about that can we kick off by telling me a bit about your experiences of what you see of drinking in area you live. Possible probes could include (ensure all have an opportunity to voice their views):

- *Do you ever see people drinking around here / what kind of people / where about...* (obtain a sense of any perceived demographic differences).
- *What about younger people / people in your age group / people you hang about with / where do you come across drinking in your social group...*
- *What about the people you live with (mum/dad/brothers/sisters) / what are their views on drinking / do they have particular rules about drinking / do they ever allow you to try a drink / provide you with alcohol on some occasions...*

Alcohol preferences and relationships with marketing (unprompted) 5-10 minutes

We've talked a bit about where you see people drinking and what you and those around you think of drinking, can we move it on and talk about specific things that people drink and how it is marketed. Possible starter points for this discussion could include:

- *Can you tell me a bit about different types of alcoholic drinks and products you have come across / are there particular products that are popular around here / popular with different types of drinker ...* (obtain a sense of the range of products participants are aware of, and their depth of understanding and how the market for alcohol is constructed).
- *What about young people; are there particular products that appeal to younger drinkers / people in your age group / drinkers who are just starting out ...*
- *What is it about these / that product(s) that makes it appealing to that group / young people... Are there products that young people wouldn't drink / wouldn't be seen with...* (use specific alcohol products and categories volunteered to examine how they appeal to the different demographics).
- *Does the way that / these product(s) is/are marketed have a role to play in determining who it/they appeal(s) to – how / can you give me some (more) examples?* (again, use

specific alcohol products and categories volunteered to examine how the associated marketing is seen to appeal to the different demographics).

- *How much alcohol marketing do you come across... where / when / what about social media* (probe for use of co- and self-created images of drinking on social media).
- *Can you tell me about any marketing campaigns you've come across recently which stick in your mind / you find appealing or interesting / what is it about the campaign that works for you / what do you think about the ways that the alcohol industry use marketing to sell their products...* (use this as prompt to explore the types of advertising message that appeals to the participants' age group, gender, culture etc and to probe for any concerns about the perceived uses of alcohol marketing).

Product mapping exercise (top UK brands by category & local niche brands) 20-25mins

What I'd like to do now is look at some specific alcohol products; I'd like you to do is have a look at them and then chose two products, one you find appealing and one you think doesn't have anything good to say about it. (Encourage participants to stand up and take a close look at the brands before making a choice and then work your way around the group asking each person to explain their choice, and encouraging others as you go to share their own views and experiences of the two products (approx. 5 mins on each). Use each product pair as a stimulus to explore in more detail the issues discussed as part of the unprompted discussion re. 'alcohol preferences and marketing' above. Possible prompts include:

- *Can you tell, why did you chose these two alcohol brands ...*
- *What makes this product particularly appealing / unappealing...*
- *Have you seen any marketing or advertising for this product / what / where / what do you think of it...*
- *Who would you imagine would drink this product / why / in what context...*
- *How'd young people like yourself would feel about being seen with this product...*
- *Where on the continuum would you place each product* (consult with the group as a whole and try to reach a consensus on where the product should be positioned in relation to two opposing points ('There are some things I like about this brand' Vs 'There is nothing I like about this brand') and to others products, using disagreements as further stimulus to explore perceptions of the product).

Overview

Once you have been round the group and placed all of the products, focus the groups' attention on the continuum and invite them to consider: a) if there are any common patterns emerging as to why certain types of product are liked/disliked; and b) if there are any products that merit particular attention by regulators and industry

- *Are there any obvious patterns emerging which might help to explain why some products have appeal and others don't...*
- *Are there any products that are especially problematic / how / what kind of attention / actions should be considered...*

- *Thinking about the different marketing channels and techniques used to promote alcohol brands are there any areas that you feel are a source of concern / require closer scrutiny by industry and the authorities.*

Response to measures effecting how products are marketed and sold (10-15 mins)

Moving on, I'd like to get your thoughts and views on some measures that can be used to regulate how alcohol manufacturers market and sell their products, some you may have heard of or come across before others you may not have

- *Price: Have you come across any measures designed to make alcohol more expensive / what about minimum unit pricing (explore awareness, understanding and relevance to young people) / And what about banning alcohol promotions (explore awareness and feelings about banning promotions which encourage consumption, eg. 3 for the price of 2, happy hours)*
- *Marketing: How do you feel about regulations which restrict how alcohol products are marketed / what kind of restrictions would you like to see / do you think are needed / how do you feel about banning alcohol advertising (probe for different media) / what about banning different kinds of sponsorship (probe for different forms – sport, music)*
- *Retail: Another way of influencing how alcohol is sold is by regulating shop keepers and what they can and cannot do, how do you feel about restricting the hours when shopkeepers can sell alcohol / restricting the number of shopkeepers who are allowed or licensed to sell / fining shopkeepers who sell to adults who are buying alcohol for people under age / restricting who shopkeepers can sell too by increasing the age at which young people are permitted to buy alcohol*
- *Product labelling: And finally, how do you feel about regulating the information that alcohol manufacturers have to include on their product labels (probe unit content, calorie content, responsibility messages, health warnings – harmful to foetus, cancer risk)*

Health knowledge and risks associated with alcohol consumption (5-10mins)

Finally, can I just briefly ask you...

- *What do you see as the downsides and negative consequences of drinking*
- *What about health, does it affect health in anyway (probe for links with cancer, including types of cancer, if not raised spontaneously)*
- *What are the risks associated with drinking (probe for risks by specific products and drinking styles eg. binge drinking, habitual drinking) and demographic groups (eg. young/inexperienced drinkers, female drinkers)*
- *Have you heard about / how do you feel about the idea of giving people information about how much and how often people should drink alcohol? Finally before we finish up is there anything else you'd like to say that we haven't talked about...*
- *Before we finish up is there anything else you'd like to say that we haven't talked about...*

Thank participants and bring discussion to a close – underline the purpose of the research and

remind participants that if they want to find out more about the effects of alcohol and sources of support to consult the web-based resources detailed in the information sheet.

Take a photographic record of the mapped products before getting ready for the next group.

APPENDIX 2: ALCOHOL PROMPTS

Alcohol Brands Included in the Mapping Exercise

Lager/beer:

- Stella Artois can & bottle
- Foster's can
- Carling can
- Tennent's can (SCOTLAND ONLY)
- Budweiser can

Spirits:

- Smirnoff vodka quarter bottle
- Famous Grouse whisky half bottle
- Jack Daniel's whiskey half bottle
- Gordon's gin full bottle

Cider/perry:

- Strongbow 2lt bottle
- Kopparberg pear flavoured bottle
- Bulmers bottle
- Thatchers bottle (ENGLAND & WALES ONLY)
- Natch bottle (ENGLAND & WALES ONLY)

Wine:

- Blossom Hill white full bottle
- Echo Falls rosé full bottle

Pre-mixed spirits

- WKD Blue bottle
- Smirnoff Ice white bottle
- Jack Daniel's and Cola can
- Bacardi Breezer orange bottle
- Sourz Fusionz green bottle
- MD 20/20 ('Mad Dog') bottle (SCOTLAND ONLY)

Other

- Buckfast Tonic Wine half bottle (SCOTLAND ONLY)
- Dragon Soop can (SCOTLAND ONLY)
- Jägermeister bottle
- Malibu rum bottle

APPENDIX 3: GROUP COMPOSITIONS

Group no.	Gender	Age range	Location	No. participants	of SEG
G1	Female	13-14	West Glasgow, Scotland	6	ABC1
G2	Male	15-16	West Glasgow, Scotland	6	C2DE
G3	Mixed	15-16	London, South East England	5	na
G4	Mixed	15-17	London, South East England	4	na
G5	Male	17-19	Newcastle, North England	2	na
G6	Mixed	16-18	Slough, South East England	5	na
G7	Mixed	11-13	Wrexham, Wales	5	na
G8	Mixed	11-12	Wrexham, Wales	5	na

SEG: socio-economic group; na: not available.