

## **IMPACT OF ADVERTISING ON THE ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION PATTERN OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: THE CASE OF UNIVERSITY FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES, WA CAMPUS**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Objectives: Advertisement plays an important role in the marketing of products including alcohol. This paper is to establish whether advertisement of alcoholic products, especially the use of celebrities in those advertisements, had and impact of the alcohol consumption pattern of university students. Methods: A mixed method research was used. 200 students of the University for Development Studies, Wa campus were selected by means of a snowball sampling technique. Data was collected through the use of questionnaire. Findings: Advertisement of alcoholic products especially the use of celebrities in those adverts has an impact on the alcohol consumption pattern of university student. Practical implications: Considering the harm that alcohol causes to under aged drinkers, it is very important that the guidelines on advertisement of alcohol be strictly adhered to. It is also very important to emphasise the dangers involved in the consumption of alcohol during these advertisements.*

**KEYWORDS:** advertising, alcohol consumption, university students, Wa campus.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Alcohol is a drug that is mostly classified as a depressant that causes a slowing down of vital functions of the human body such as slurred speech, unsteady movement, and disturbed perception among others. The amount of alcohol consumed however determines the types of effect one gets. The consumption of alcohol has some effects on the human body especially the brain, heart, liver, pancreas and the immune system. The adverse effects of the consumption of alcohol affects all age groups but, the effects are more pronounced in children and adolescents than in adults (Silveri & Spear, 1998). There is also the fact that adolescents later becoming alcoholics during adulthood is strongly linked to age of onset of drinking, thus the earlier the age of onset of drinking, the more likely it is for a person to become an alcoholic (Grant, 1998; Jenkins et al., 2011). Lifetime alcohol dependence and abuse is also closely related to the age at which individuals start consuming alcohol as the earlier a person starts drinking, the more likely he/she is to becoming a lifetime dependent or abuser (Grant & Dawson, 1997). Alcohol is also known to cause memory and neurological problems in adolescents' than in adults as

the adolescents' brain is still undergoing some essential development (Brown, Tapert, Granholm, & Delis, 2000; Giancola & Mezzich, 2015; Squeglia, Spadoni, Infante, Myers, & Tapert, 2009).

Advertisements seek to increase the customer base of any product. Over the years, producers of alcoholic products have made use of several advertisement techniques, including the use of celebrities, to market their products. Advertisers of alcoholic products argue that the main aim of advertising is to increase their market share and not to encourage under aged drinkers to consume alcohol. There is, however, substantial evidence to prove that the advertisement of alcohol encourages the youth to drink especially when connected to attributes that are important to the youth (Grube & Wallack, 1994). The advertisement of alcoholic products has taken a different dimension by the use of cartoon characters (Lieber, 1996), themes of rebellion and youth humour (Collins, Ellickson, McCaffrey, & Hambarsoomians, 2007).

## **LITERATURE/THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING**

There is evidence to prove that there is a correlation between alcohol intake, crime and other high risk activities as according to Smith, Branas, & Miller, (1999) the Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) of  $\geq 100$  mg/dL was found to be highest among homicide cases (31.5%), followed by unintentional injury deaths (31.0%) and suicide cases (22.7%).

Adolescents are also more likely to engage in sexual intercourse on the first date if especially the male counterpart is under the influence of alcohol (Cooper & Orcutt, 1997) and in all homicide cases involving young people alcohol contributes to not less than 36% of the cases (Bonnie & O'Connell, 2004).

Advertising helps business market their products including alcohol. However, there seem to be a lot of contradiction as to whether alcohol advertisement has an impact on adolescents' drinking behaviour. While public health practitioners have insisted there is a link between advertisement and adolescent drinking behaviour, companies both in advertising and alcoholic production have rejected there a link between advertisement and adolescent drinking. These companies argue that they target adults in their advertisements and their intention is brand choice either than a decision to drink or not. But Atkin & Block, (1984) thinks that the sought of image advertisements portray about the characteristics of drinkers make the audience want to be like those who appear in these advertisements. So it is not necessarily about who is targeted but how drinkers are portrayed. And as adolescents wants to build their self-image they are very likely to copy what drinkers do in these advertisements. Saffer and Dave (2003) came into the argument by analysing underage alcohol intake and concluded that alcohol advertising "has a

positive effect” on youth (especially underage female drinkers) alcohol consumption as it determines whether they will drink at all and how much alcohol they will consume. One of the main purposes of advertisement is to serve as a reminder and in the case of adolescent drinking, it reminds them of their own reality and make them believe in their veracity thereby creating a positive association between alcohol advertisement and adolescent beer drinking. (Faria, Vendrame, Silva, & Pinsky, 2011). Alcohol advertisements also exposes young people to the different varieties of alcoholic beverages available and influences their consumption of alcohol (Moyo, 2014). According to Ross et al. (2015) young drinkers whose main aim of drinking is advertising of alcohol brands, are susceptible to consuming more alcohol and getting untoward effects from alcohol. There is therefore a strong association between the likeability of an advert and its influence on the youth to consume alcohol (Chen et al, 2005) and so the elimination of alcohol advertisement could reduce adolescent monthly drinking (Saffer and Dave (2003), (Faria et al., 2011).

One other influence of alcohol advertisement on adolescents that is worrying is celebrity endorsement of alcoholic products. The use of celebrity endorsements through explicit associations as a means of promoting products is not new and dates back to the seventeenth century with Pope Leo XIII's endorsement of the alcoholic beverage Vin Mariani in 1899 and Frank Sinatra's endorsement Jack Daniels (Inciardi 1992 cited by Garthwaite, 2014). According to Kurzman et al. (2007) celebrities enjoy a normative privilege which make people imitate the things that they do in public. Celebrities according to Kurzman et al. (2007) are seen by the public as having special features that make them different from the rest of the public. They are seen as being authorities in the fields that they portray in public. Celebrity endorsements have been seen to influence the decisions of people on many spheres of life including what they eat (Mooney, Farley, and Strugnell 2004), cancer screening (Larson et al. 2005) or even their appearance (Raviv et al. 1996).

The use of celebrities especially musicians therefore plays a major role in the selection and consumption of the brand of alcoholic beverages. This is because they are attracted by the personalities of these celebrities and get a sense of attachment to them (Amoateng and Poku, 2013).

In the light of the impact of advertisements on youth drinking behaviour, Ghana's national media commission put together an advertising standard to guide its members. Included in the standard are guidelines on the advertisement of alcohol states among others that:

- Advertising of alcoholic drinks should not be directed at persons under 18 years in contravention of the Liquor Licensing Act 1970 (Act 331). Presentation of advertisements on alcoholic drinks likely to be of particular appeal to children should be avoided.
- Children should not be seen or heard in an advertisement for alcoholic drinks.
- In advertisements for drinks containing alcohol anyone associated with drinking should be or appear to be at least 18 years old.
- Advertisements for alcoholic drinks should not feature any personality whose example persons under 18 years are likely to emulate or who has a particular appeal to under that age.

These standards are however, not being strictly adhered to as it had to take Ghana's Food and Drugs Authority to ban celebrities, with Kwame Dzokoto a popular TV star's name coming up strongly, from advertising alcoholic beverages. This ban came with a penalty of 25,000 cedis to defectors. Even though, there are regulations to protect the youth who are below the age of drinking from alcohol advertising, they are constantly being exposed to it (Winter, Donovan, & Fielder, 2008). The worrying part of alcohol advertising is that the youth and children are equally or even more exposed to alcohol advertising than young adults as most of these advertisement target the youth and children more than young adults (Austin & Hust, 2005; Winter et al., 2008)

#### Objective

The objective of this paper is to analyse the effects of advertising alcohol and the use of celebrities in advertising alcoholic beverages on university students.

## METHODOLOG

### Research Design

The study employed the mixed approach which involved the use of both quantitative and qualitative research designs. This approach affords researchers the chance to conduct exhaustive research, provides strengths that offset the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research and allow for a significant interpretation of data (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003).

### Sample and sampling technique

A sample of 200 students were selected for primary data collection in the Wa campus of the University for Development Studies. These students were sampled using the snowball

sampling technique which allowed for the identification of other students who have ever consumed alcohol. The use of this sampling technique was important because the study sought data that only those who have ever consumed alcohol could supply. One student who consumes alcohol was therefore identified and through him, the second student was identified which led to the identification of more students.

### **Data collection and analysis techniques**

Data for the study was collected using questionnaire which contained both closed ended and open ended questions to afford students to give explanations to some issues of concern. Data analysis was done with SPSS version 21.

## **RESULTS**

The respondents in the study were made up of 200 students of the University for Development Studies who consume alcohol or who have ever consumed alcohol. The sample was made up of 73% male students and 27% female students. Twenty percent (20%) were in their first year, 14% in their second year, 17% in their third year and 49% in their fourth year in the University.

### **Age of onset of alcohol consumption**

Table1: Age at which respondents started consuming alcohol.

| Age                  | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Below age 10         | 7         | 3.5        |
| 11 years to 17 years | 36        | 18.0       |
| 18 years to 25 years | 150       | 75.0       |
| 26 years to 33 years | 7         | 3.5        |
| Total                | 200       | 100        |

As shown in table 1, the age at which respondents started drinking alcohol ranged between 10 years and 33 years. 3.5% of the respondents started drinking alcohol below age 10, 18% stated they started drinking alcohol between the ages of 11 and 17 years, 75% between the ages of 18 and 25 years and 3.5% between the ages of 26 and 33 years.

## Reasons for starting alcohol consumption

Table 2: Reasons why respondent started drinking alcohol

| Reason                                 | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Peer pressure                          | 49        | 24.5       |
| Influence of the media (advertisement) | 95        | 47.5       |
| Influence of an adult                  | 11        | 5.5        |
| Curiosity                              | 45        | 22.5       |

As for per the reason why they started drinking, 24.5% of respondents stated peer pressure as the reason why they started drinking alcohol, 47.5% indicated it was advertisements in the media that pushed them to drink, 5.5% said they were influenced by an adult whiles 22.5% said they were simply curios.

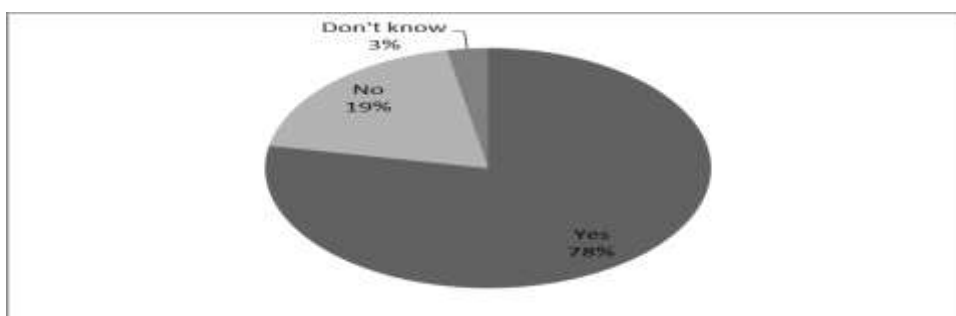


Figure 1: Influence of using celebrities in the choice of brand and drinking habit.

Asked whether the choice of alcoholic brand they consume was influenced by the use of celebrities in advertisements, 78% of respondents said yes, 19% said no and 3% did not know or were not sure. Majority (85%) of those whose choice of brand was influenced by celebrities in advertisement indicated musicians made the most impact in their choice of brand, the choice of brand for 10% was influenced by the use of comedians and actors while the choice of brand for 5% was influenced by other celebrities.

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### Influence of actors drinking alcohol during movies or films

| Response         | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------|-----------|------------|
| Very influential | 96        | 48         |
| Influential      | 47        | 23.5       |
| Neutral          | 32        | 16.0       |
| Not influential  | 25        | 12.5       |
| Total            | 200       | 100.0      |

As to whether the drinking of alcohol in movies by film/movie actors influences their alcohol consumption pattern, 96 respondents (48%) stated said it was very influential, 47 respondents (23.5) said it was influential, 32 respondents (16.5%) chose a neutral position while 25 respondents (12.5) said it was not influential in determining their alcohol consumption pattern.

## DISCUSSION

Even though there are other factors such as the influence of parents and peers (Franco Manuel Sancho, Maria Jose Miguel, & Joaquin Aldás, 2011; Granville-Garcia et al., 2014) that determine whether a person will consume alcohol or not, the influence of advertisement on the consumption of alcohol among university students cannot be over emphasised as advertising plays a significant role in determining whether young people will drink or not as confirmed by (Austin & Hust, 2005; Franco Manuel Sancho et al., 2011; L. A. Smith & Foxcroft, 2009) Advertising agencies and producers of alcoholic beverages may argue that they do not target the youth in their advertisements but these advertisements inadvertently encourage the youth to drink.

Another point of concern has to do with the use of celebrities in the advertisement of alcohol and as clearly shown in the results of the study, the use of celebrities influence the choice of alcoholic beverage university students will consume and also influence the alcohol consumption pattern of students as stated by Atkin & Block, 1984. Musicians are considered by respondents as the ones who have the most influence on their choice of brand and drinking habit.

Additionally, the consumption of alcoholic brands during movies or films is normally not classified as advertisements and are therefore not put under strict control but they have a great impact on the consumption of alcohol by the youth. As indicated in the results of the study, most respondents (48%) said the use of alcohol in movies has very influential



impact on their drinking pattern as indicated by Hanewinkel et al. and 2014; Koordeman, Anschutz, & Engels, 2015

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The consumption of alcohol has grave consequences on the development of adolescents and young adults as far as their total development is concerned. Even though many factors may be responsible for adolescents and young adults consuming alcohol, advertisements in the media and more importantly the use of celebrities in these advertisements and consumption of alcohol in movies have a great influence on the alcohol consumption pattern of university students.

It is recommended therefore that, warnings about the dangers of alcohol consumption to the youth especially those under 18 years of age should be emphasised during advertisements. These warnings may already be in place but they are not as explicit as those contained in the advertisements of tobacco products such as cigarettes. The same emphasis about the real dangers of alcohol consumption should be included in advertisements of alcohol.

Also, the use of celebrities in advertising alcohol should be stopped as stated in the law. Most times some celebrities are considered low profile celebrities and are therefore allowed to advertise alcohol but the fact remains every celebrity whether low profile or high profile have admirers who will copy what they do. So the ban should cut across all people engaged in the arts.

Film or movie makers should as part of their social responsibility limit the consumption of alcohol, especially, by heroes in movies or at least add a warning about the dangers of alcohol consumption by under aged drinkers.

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