

Children's recognition of alcohol marketing



Introduction

In the UK, the alcohol industry spends around £800 million annually marketing its products¹. There are concerns that the high volume of alcohol promotion in the UK may serve to normalise drinking, particularly amongst younger viewers. This study has sought to learn whether alcohol marketing messages are reaching primary school-aged children and to test marketing associations across different promotional channels.

Abstract

Children as young as 10 years old are highly familiar with alcohol brands and televised alcohol advertising. The study shows football clubs and tournaments are strongly associated with the beer brands that sponsor them, particularly by boys. Existing advertising codes for alcohol are designed to prevent targeting of under-18s, but children appear to be consuming high volumes of alcohol marketing nevertheless. More effective controls may be needed to ensure alcohol marketing messages only reach adult audiences.

Why is this important?

If young people see and hear repeated positive messages about drinking alcohol, then their expectations of alcohol may well begin to reflect the content of such messages. International evidence linking exposure of under-18s to alcohol marketing with drinking is widely acknowledged, including by Government². A systematic review of evidence concluded that exposure to alcohol marketing reduces the age at which young people start to drink, increases the likelihood that they will drink and increases the amount of alcohol they will consume once they have started to drink^{3 4}. Research has also shown that the earlier people become aware of brands, the greater the likelihood they will use them throughout their lives,⁵ suggesting that early alcohol brand recognition is advantageous to alcohol companies, as future consumers will choose their products over others as a result of pre-established brand loyalty.

The study

In September 2014, Alcohol Concern, Balance the North East alcohol office, Drink Wise and Alcohol Focus Scotland commissioned Cogent Research & Analysis Ltd, an independent market research consultancy, to conduct brand recognition research amongst 10 and 11 year-olds across England, the North East and North West regions, and Scotland. The objective was to identify the extent to which children were aware of alcohol brands and marketing. The questionnaire was piloted prior to commissioning and input into its development sought from the Institute for Social Marketing at Stirling University. The study builds on the results of a similar study in Wales commissioned by Alcohol Concern Cymru in 2011.

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The aim was to look at children's recognition of brand names and graphic identities (logos) and their familiarity with stills from recently aired TV adverts (shots in which the logo, branding or product was not visible). Children's understanding of links between alcohol brands, and the football teams and tournaments they sponsor, was also tested. The study concluded by examining children's own experiences of consuming alcohol, social media usage and TV viewing patterns.

Census data indicates a population size of approximately one million three hundred thousand 10 and 11 year-olds in the regions. The final sample size of 837 from 43 primary schools across the regions, means we can be sufficiently confident that the results are representative of 10 and 11 year-olds in England and Scotland.*

Key findings

- More than 9 in 10 children correctly identified the brand name 'Fosters' as an alcohol product. Further analysis revealed that awareness was higher amongst children who had sampled alcohol before and who used social media. Brand recognition and categorisation for 'Fosters' was higher than for other brands which could be said to be legitimately marketed (under current advertising codes of practice)** toward 10 and 11 year-olds such as 'McVitie's' biscuits, 'McCoy's' crisps and 'Ben & Jerry's' ice-cream.
- An image of characters 'Brad and Dan' from the Fosters TV adverts was correctly associated with an alcohol product by more than three in four children (77% average). Recall for 'Brad and Dan' was far higher than for Coca-Cola's Bobby the Dog TV advert (53%) and for Southern Comfort's Beach advert (34%). Although it was less well recognised than the Shreddies 'Knitting Granny' TV advert (84%), a product that is aimed at children.
- Children who had tried alcohol were more likely to correctly identify the 'Brad and Dan' characters compared with those who had never tried alcohol, and recall was higher amongst children who acknowledge watching TV compared with those who do not watch TV. Boys in particular recognised the 'Brad and Dan' characters with 83% of boys recalling the advertisement compared with 70% of girls, and children who use social media were more likely than those who do not to correctly recognise.
- In England almost half of the children surveyed (47%) correctly associated Carlsberg beer with the England national football team: Carlsberg is the 'Official beer of the England football team,' and a high profile sponsor. Children who watched TV were more than twice as likely to make the connection between Carlsberg and the England team, compared with those who did not (47% versus 20% respectively). Children who had experienced alcohol were also more likely to make the connection. However, children living in Scotland were less aware of the link, with 38% correctly making the association.

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- In Scotland almost half of all children (47%), and 60% of boys correctly associated Carling beer with the Scottish national football team: Carling sponsored the Scottish Football Association until 2014. 11 year-olds and children who watch TV beyond the 9pm watershed were more likely to correctly make the association between the product and the team. In contrast only 16% of English children made the association between Carling with the Scottish national team, reflecting low familiarity with Scottish football south of the border.
- 45% of children correctly associated the Chang brand with Everton Football Club: Chang beer is the club's main shirt sponsor. Boys (57%) were more likely than girls (31%) to correctly make the association and children in England more likely to make the association than those in Scotland. Those children who watched TV after 10pm, and stopped watching before 11pm were also significantly more likely to recognise the link between Chang beer and Everton (63%, compared with 45% of the overall sample).
- Children who used Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and MySpace were more likely to have experienced alcohol, and those who had experienced alcohol often had greater recognition of alcohol brands.

Discussion

The study supports existing evidence that children as young as 10 years-old are familiar with and can readily identify alcohol brands, logos, and characters from alcohol advertising on TV. In many instances this recognition was greater than for non-alcoholic products with known appeal to children. The study also provides new evidence that many children are familiar with the link between alcohol brands and the sports teams and tournaments that they sponsor. Boys in particular are aware from a young age of the association between football and beer brands, created by sponsorship. The volume of marketing promoting positive associations between alcohol and sport is such that by adulthood the associations are likely to have become automatic, formed in the cognitive structures of their memory.

Whether findings from this study indicate that alcohol industry marketing targets younger people or not, it is clearly making an impression on children. The high number of children that correctly recognise alcohol marketing across different promotional channels, including TV and sports sponsorship, suggests that the existing regulatory framework is insufficiently protecting younger people from exposure. Sport in particular should inspire good health and active participation, and not greater consumption of alcohol. More effective controls are needed to ensure alcohol marketing messages only reach adult audiences and are not attractive to children.



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Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Alcohol advertising content should be restricted to promoting just factual information about the product such as origin, composition and means of production. Removing lifestyle images of drinkers, characters, celebrities and drinking atmospheres is likely to reduce the appeal of content for younger audiences. Without a total ban on advertising it will be impossible to entirely prevent children and young people's exposure to alcohol advertising - therefore it is important that the content of advertising be of limited appeal to this age group. Focusing on product provenance allows alcohol companies to continue to promote their brand identities, and to differentiate themselves from competitors. This is a measure, with precedence, that balances commercial and public health interests.

Recommendation 2

As a first step, alcohol advertising on television should be allowed only after the 9pm watershed to reduce the number of children in the viewing audience. This measure should be reviewed to assess its efficacy as viewing trends evolve.

Recommendation 3

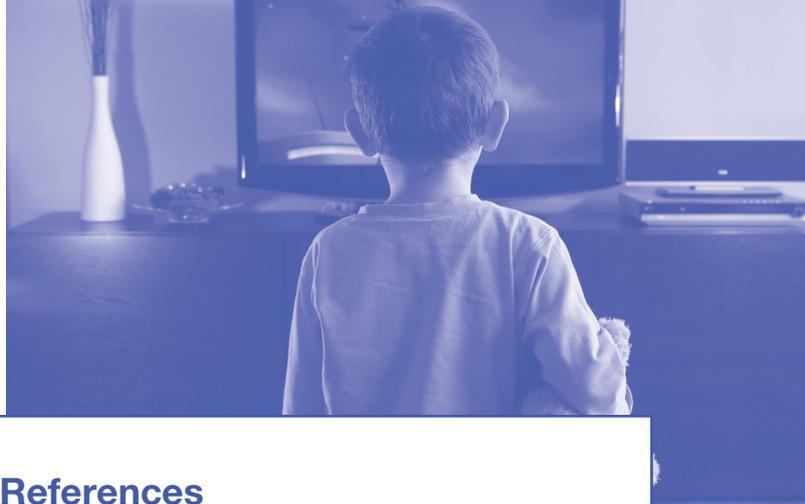
Alcohol advertising at cinemas should be prohibited for all films without an 18 classification. Whilst not all adult films have the highest certificate, this is the only way to ensure that children are not part of the audience.

Recommendation 4

Introduce a phased ban on alcohol sponsorship of professional sports, music and cultural events and branded merchandise. Sponsorship, like other advertising, gives companies a platform to develop positive associations with their products. Alcohol sponsorship of sport in particular sends contradictory messages about the health benefits of participation. The phased removal of tobacco sponsorship from Formula One motor racing demonstrates these measures can be successfully implemented and governing bodies should be assisted to source alternative funding.

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* The survey produces a 3.9% confidence interval (also called margin of error) at the 95% confidence level (which tells you how sure you can be) meaning that statistically we can be sufficiently confident that the results are representative of 10 and 11 year-olds in England and Scotland.

** Advertising is regulated by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). According to ASA codes, adverts for alcoholic drinks should not be targeted at people under 18 years-old. Rules differ for different product types.

References

1. Prime Minister's Strategy Unit. (2003). Interim analytical report. London: The Stationery Office.
2. HM Government, The Government's Alcohol Strategy, March 2012
3. Anderson, P. de Bruijn, A. Angus, K. Gordon, R. and Hastings, G. (2009) *Impact of Alcohol Advertising and Media Exposure on Adolescent Alcohol Use: A Systematic Review of Longitudinal Studies*, Alcohol and Alcoholism, 44 (3) pp.229-243
4. Anderson, P. Foxcroft, D. and Kaner, E. et al (2009) *Does Marketing Communication Impact on the Volume and Patterns of Consumption of Alcohol Beverages, Especially by Young People? – a Review of Longitudinal Studies*, Scientific Opinion of the Science Group of the European Alcohol and Health Forum
5. Ellis, A. W., Holmes, S. J. And Wright R. L. (2010) *Age of acquisition and the recognition of brand names: On the importance of being early*, Journal of Consumer Psychology, 20(1), pp43-52



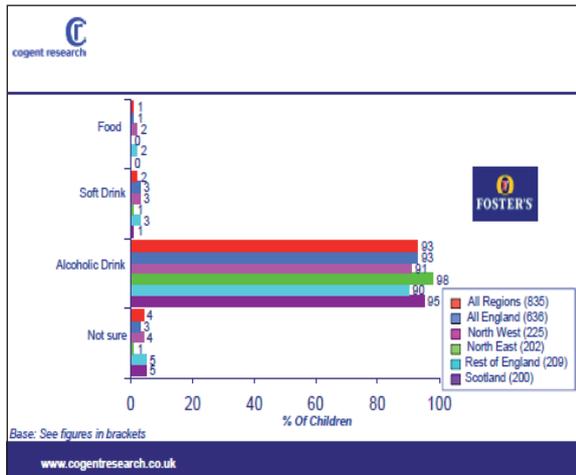
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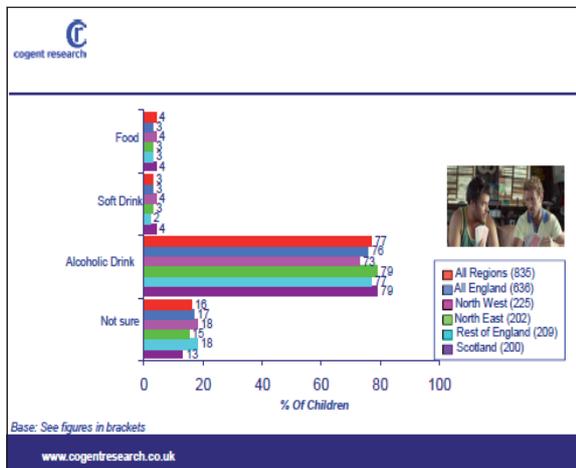
APPENDIX: A

Survey results selected questions

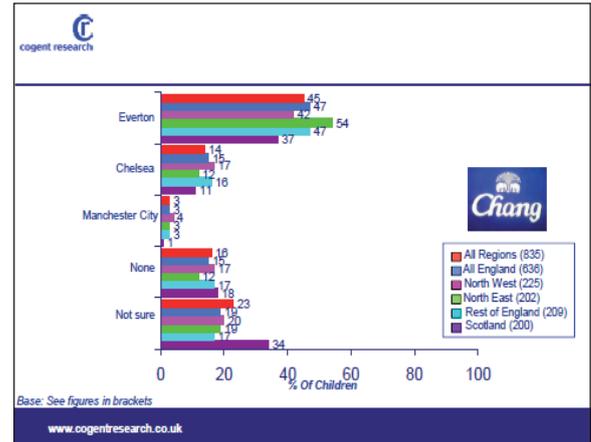
'Foster's' brand name/logo recognition



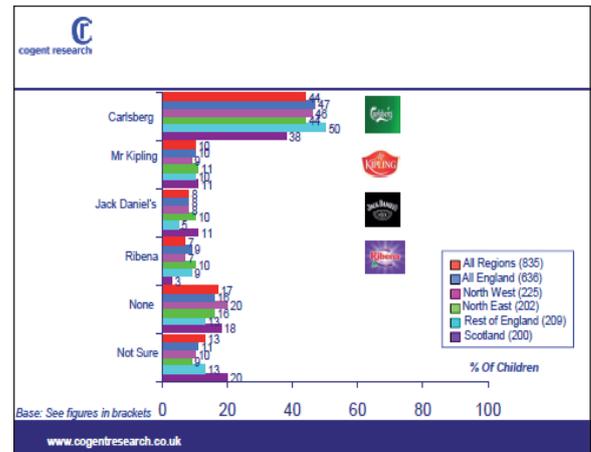
'Foster's' Brad and Dan TV Commercial recognition



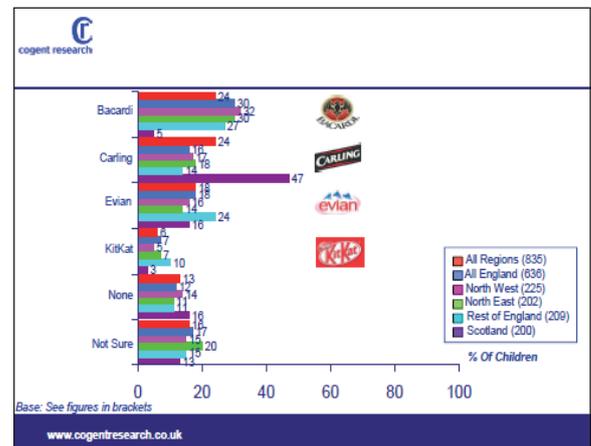
Brand Association 'Chang'



Brand Association 'England Football Team'



Brand Association 'Scotland Football Team'



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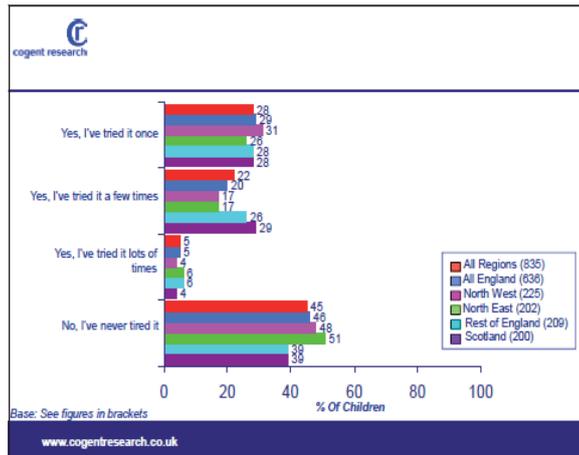
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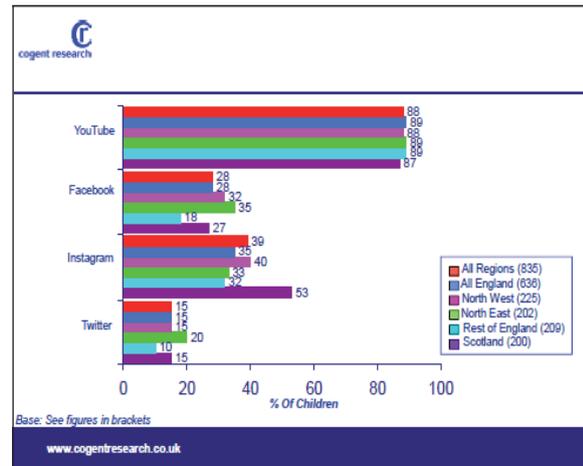
APPENDIX: B

Participant determinants

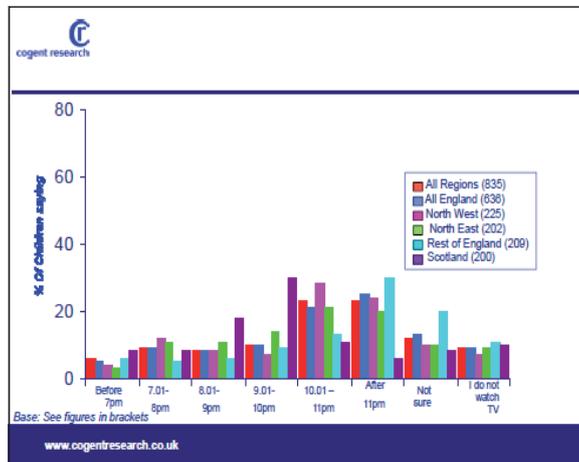
Experience Of Alcohol



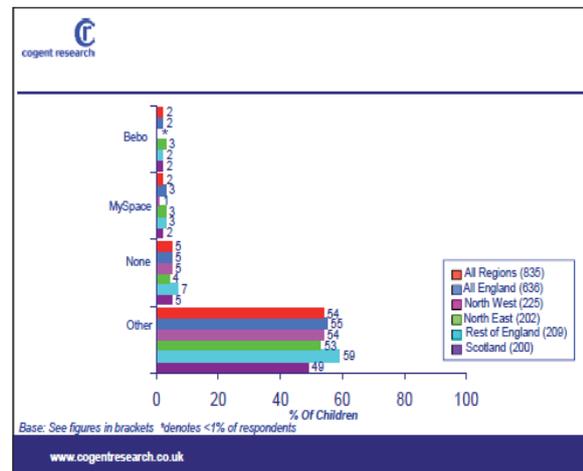
Website Usage (1 of 2)



Time Children Stop Watching Evening TV



Website Usage (2 of 2)



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