

Working Group of the Science Group of
the European Commission's
Alcohol and Health Forum

Task request:

Scientific advice on the impact of marketing communication on the volume (and patterns) of consumption of alcoholic beverages, especially by young people.

Task request:

The working group will address broader marketing communications, including advertising, merchandising, media exposure, point of sale promotion etc

Task request:

The working group will discuss the position of marketing communication within broader alcohol policy issues, such as accessibility, price promotions etc

Members of the Working Group

Peter Anderson (chair)

David Foxcroft (corresponding member)

Eileen Kaner (corresponding member)

Marjana Martinic

Jacek Moskalewicz

Alojz Nociar

Timetable

- Present a proposal of the method of working to the meeting of the Science Group, 29th October 2008
- Complete the work by end of January 2009.
- Present a draft report to the Science Group at its meeting 23 February 2009
- Present the final report for the Science Group to report to the meeting of the Alcohol and Health Forum, March 2009

Methodology to be adopted

Question to be addressed: “Does marketing communication impact on the volume and patterns of consumption of alcoholic beverages, especially by young people”.

We considered possible methodologies to address question:

Expectancy studies:

Studies that investigate the relationship between exposure to portrayals of alcohol use in the mass media and drinking expectancies of children and adolescents.

These studies, however, do not establish whether alcohol advertising actually influences young people's drinking behaviour.

Further, there is increasing evidence that such pre-behaviour cognitions, e.g. expectancies and attitudes to drinking, are related to consumption in a more complex way. For example, it has been shown that, over time, behaviour can predict attitudes more strongly than attitudes can predict behaviour.

Econometric studies

Studies that investigate correlations between the amount of alcohol advertising and the amount of drinking taking place in a particular jurisdiction using econometric methods.

These studies have a number of problems:

First, measures of the amount of advertising, which typically use expenditure on advertising, vary in the accuracy and inclusiveness.

Second, analysis depends on the construction of a complex model that ascribes values for all the different variables – including price, drinking restrictions and disposable income – as well as advertising that might be implicated.

Econometric studies

Third, variations in the amount of advertising tend to be minor (few comprehensive bans have been introduced) so researchers are looking for potentially very small changes in drinking patterns.

Fourth, measures of the overall amount of advertising do not necessarily give an accurate picture of youth exposure.

Cross-sectional studies

Cross-sectional studies which take a snapshot of advertising exposure (awareness and/or appreciation) and levels of drinking, and look for correlations between the two.

However, because they cannot show whether exposure preceded drinking uptake, they leave open the possibility that any correlation is as likely to reflect drinking encouraging young people to take an interest in advertising, as vice versa.

Longitudinal studies

Longitudinal studies which measure exposure at time A, and how this relates to drinking at future time B.

Provided potential confounders (such as intentions to drink, peer and parental drinking) are controlled for, any correlation can be indicative of a causal relationship.

Impact depends on quality of content of marketing

Although not perfect, longitudinal studies provide the best indication currently available for cause-effect relationships

Case studies

Case studies, where changes in regional, national or international law that affect the volume or content of marketing communication have been studied and reported for their impact on changes in the use of alcoholic beverages.

But, if case studies show that restrictions in advertising are associated with reductions in alcohol use, does this mean that advertising affects consumption? Only if such restrictions take place in the absence of any other such interventions, but this is unlikely as alcohol policy changes at any one time tend to incorporate a range of measures

Identifying case studies will also be the work of the AMPHORA project, a FP7 co-financed comprehensive research project on alcohol policy with 30 institutional partners due to start at the beginning of 2009.

AMPHORA will also conduct longitudinal studies on commercial communications in six European countries.

Proposed structure of report and methods to be adopted

Conclusions

A half page summary of the conclusions

Introduction

A short paragraph describing the task request

Background

Positioning of marketing communication within broader alcohol policy issues and complexity of identifying isolated effects of one measure

Expectancy studies

Based on recent reviews (e.g., Jernigan 2006; Anderson 2007; updated with recent publications) half to one page summarizing the current understanding.

Econometric studies

Based on recent reviews (e.g., Jernigan 2006; Anderson 2007; updated with recent publications), half to one page summarizing the current understanding.

Cross-sectional studies

Based on recent reviews (e.g., Jernigan 2006; Anderson 2007; updated with recent publications), half to one page summarizing the current understanding.

Case studies

Describe potential value of case studies in contributing to overall findings

Methods

Up to one page describing the methods adopted to complete the task request

Longitudinal studies

Based on recent systematic reviews (e.g., Anderson et al 2008; Smith & Foxcroft 2008; Booth et al 2008), supplemented with literature searches undertaken by members of the working group, identify all published and in press longitudinal studies. Members of the working group will summarize all the individual studies, ranking them in terms of quality, including

- Selection of study sample
- Length of follow-up
- Attrition rate
- Measures of exposure and alcohol use
- Covariates and confounders controlled

Discussion

Methodologies of the papers, their strengths and weaknesses, overview of findings, and comments on future research issues

Next steps

- Divide 16 or so studies amongst members of working group to summarize by end of November
- First draft of report by end of November
- Comment and revision during December
- Complete the work by end of January 2009.
- Present a draft pre-circulated report to the Science Group at its meeting 23 February 2009
- Revise based on discussion
- Present the final report to the meeting of the Alcohol and Health Forum, March 2009

Questions/requests to science group

1. Are there any other methodologies that you think we could consider?

2. Please let us have any copies of papers/publications/case study reports/knowledge of major changes in advertising regulations that you are aware of, particularly, in non-English language

3. How do you think this process influences the science group's mandate for future requests?