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LOVE THE ADS - LOVE THE BEER:
YOUNG PEOPLE'S RESPONSES TO TELEVISIONED ALCOHOL ADVERTISING

Allan James Wyllie

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Auckland, 1997
ABSTRACT

This research was undertaken approximately 20 months after the introduction of alcohol brand advertising on New Zealand television, which resulted in a fourfold increase in televised alcohol advertising and a 42% increase in overall alcohol advertising.

The primary aim of the research was to examine the nature of the relationships between young people's responses to televised alcohol advertising and drinking-related behaviours.

The research was based on two surveys, one with 10 to 17 year olds and one with 18 to 29 year olds. The 10 to 17 survey involved 500 randomly selected face-to-face interviews in New Zealand's three largest urban areas. The 18 to 29 survey involved 1012 interviews. Respondents were randomly selected from throughout New Zealand and interviewed using a computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) system.

Both surveys asked about responses to specific alcohol advertisements, which were ones these age groups had been more exposed to. One of the two key response measures identified how frequently they recalled having seen the advertisement; this was labelled recalled exposure. Positive response to the advertising was measured by liking of the advertisement.

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used for the analyses, but this was preceded by correlation and regression analyses. On the basis of factor analyses that preceded the structural equation modelling, most of the modelling was based on the responses to the three beer advertisements in each study.

10 to 17 year old survey

The findings from the structural equation modelling were consistent with the hypothesis that positive responses to beer advertising (as measured by liking) were contributing to an increase in expected frequency of future drinking. The data were also consistent with the beer advertising contributing to an increased frequency of current drinking, although the relationship was just under the 0.05 level of significance.
There was some limited evidence that recalled exposure may be associated with the drinking status of 10 to 13 year olds but, because of the small number of drinkers in this age group, this result needs to be interpreted with caution. The regression analyses indicated that recalled exposure was a predictor of 10 to 17 year olds’ perceptions of how often their age/gender group drank and how accepting their friends were of drinking and occasional drunkenness.

Other survey responses were also indicative of an influence of alcohol advertising on young people. Alcohol advertising was an important source of information about drinking, particularly for the 10 to 13 year old males. Almost half of these younger males accepted the portrayals in alcohol advertising as realistic and almost two thirds of them felt that alcohol advertising does encourage teenagers to drink.

18 to 29 year old survey

This study provided support for the hypothesis that more positive responses to televised beer advertisements resulted in larger quantities of alcohol being consumed on typical drinking occasions by 18 to 29 year old New Zealanders. It did not provide support for the hypothesis that drinking larger quantities of alcohol led to more positive responses to beer advertisements. The model showed that positive responses to beer advertisements had both a direct influence on quantity and an indirect influence, via its influence on positive beliefs. This study also provided support for the hypothesis that more positive responses to beer advertising were associated with increased alcohol-related problems.

As with the 10 to 17 year olds, recalled exposure was related to perceptions of peer influence and behaviour. It was a significant predictor for female perceptions of peer quantities consumed and male and female perceptions relating to peer approval of drunkenness.

The regression analyses also identified that recalled exposure was a predictor of males saying they were drinking more than the year before, however a SEM that specified reciprocal paths between these two variables found neither path to be significant.
Discussion and implications

This research has identified the importance of examining positive responses to alcohol advertisements. This acknowledges the active recipient of advertising who responds positively to advertising that offers valued outcomes. It also emphasises the importance of considering emotional/affective responses to advertising. However, the study also indicates that the weight of advertising is important, as reflected in the cognitive measure of recalled exposure. This appears to be having most influence on perceptions of what is normative behaviour.

The results of the SEMs must be viewed as tentative, given the exploratory nature of the analyses and the limitations of cross-sectional surveys. However, as for all the previous studies, relationships have been identified between measures relating to alcohol advertising and those relating to alcohol consumption. While it is not possible to make definitive statements about directions of influence between these variables, these studies have all provided data that are consistent with the theory-based hypothesis that alcohol advertising does have an influence on alcohol consumption by young people.
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