

### Media & Marketing – The marketing of alcohol

## Alcohol advertising in Australia

### Why does alcohol advertising matter?

Every day in Australia, young people are exposed to increasing levels of alcohol advertising and marketing. Alcohol advertising and promotion encourages positive associations with alcohol and links drinking alcohol with attractive symbols and role models.

For example, beer advertisements often suggest that the product can help the drinker to be more relaxed, happy and successful; and advertisements for “alcopops” (alcoholic lemonades) often link consumption of the product with social, sexual and business success.

### How much alcohol advertising is there in Australia?

Alcohol companies spend more than \$125 million per year on advertising in Australia, mainly on television, billboards and magazines.<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that this figure only includes advertising – it does not include sponsorship, point-of-sale, internet, or other marketing activities.

A recent study in the Sydney and Melbourne metropolitan areas found that 13-17 year olds see almost as much alcohol advertising on television as 18-29 year olds.<sup>2</sup>

### Do we have rules about alcohol advertising in Australia?

The Alcohol & Public Policy Group report that countries with greater restrictions on advertising have fewer alcohol-related problems. Further, they conclude that industry self-regulation tends to be largely ineffective, and that an effective system requires an independent body with the power to veto advertisements, rule on complaints and impose sanctions.<sup>3</sup>

Of 119 countries surveyed in 1996:

- 5 have a complete ban on alcohol advertising
- 45 restrict alcohol advertising by statutory legislation
- 21 combine statutory legislation with self-regulation
- 17 are solely self-regulated
- the remainder (primarily developing countries) have no or limited controls



Australia, along with the UK, is one of those which utilize only industry self-regulation.

In 2005 the Australian Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing conducted a survey on consumer perceptions of alcohol advertising and the ABAC (Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code) with a random sample of 1000 Australian adults.<sup>4</sup> Key findings included:

- 60% of people thought alcohol advertising should either be more restricted or prohibited
- 69% believed that alcohol advertising encourages underage people to drink alcohol and 52% that it encourages underage people to drink too much alcohol
- only 28% were aware of any restrictions or regulations regarding advertising of alcohol

### Does it matter if children and teenagers see alcohol advertising?

Alcohol advertising and promotion encourages positive associations with alcohol and links drinking alcohol with attractive symbols and role models. For example, beer advertisements often suggest that the product can help the drinker to be more relaxed, happy and successful. Advertisements for spirits, RTDs (Ready-to-Drink) alcoholic beverages and “alcopops” (alcoholic lemonades) often link consumption of the product with social, sexual and business success. We also know that exposure to alcohol advertising increases young people’s perceptions of drinking as a ‘normal’ behaviour.

Research conducted by the Centre for Health Initiatives with young Australians aged 15-24 years has also found that they believe that these advertisements tell them that drinking will help them have a great time, fit in, feel more confident, and be more attractive to the opposite sex.

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#### The Centre for Health Initiatives' advertising study – what do teenagers think? <sup>5</sup>

Previous research into messages in alcohol advertising has mainly examined 'expert' opinions. If we are going to improve the regulation of alcohol advertising, we need to understand young people's interpretations of the messages in Australian alcohol advertising.

Researchers selected twelve advertisements from a previous study which had found that 'experts' thought that alcohol advertisements contained messages that did not meet the advertising code (6 television and 6 print). They recruited 110 secondary school students aged 15-18 years (106 aged under 18); and 177 young people aged 18-24. Each of these 287 people viewed one TV ad and one magazine ad and answered questions about messages they perceived to be in the ads they viewed.

#### Across all 12 advertisements:

- 74% believed that the advertisement suggested the advertised product would make them more sociable and outgoing
- 90% that it would help them have a great time
- 70% that it would help them fit in
- 65% that it would help them feel more confident
- 59% that it would help them feel less nervous
- 47% it would help them succeed with the opposite sex
- 42% that it would make them feel more attractive

All of these messages are prohibited by the industry's own advertising code (see the Stage 4 Webquest).

There is also a clear association between seeing, and liking, alcohol advertisements and underage drinking.

#### The first South Dakota study <sup>6</sup>

Researchers in South Dakota (United States) surveyed more than 3000 year 7 students about their alcohol consumption and drinking intentions, as well as their exposure to alcohol advertising. They then surveyed the students again in Year 9.

They found that 48% of 7th grade non-drinkers were drinking by 9th grade. For those who were drinkers in year 7, exposure to alcohol advertising in magazines and to beer concession stands at sporting events predicted being a heavier drinker in year 9. For those who were non-drinkers in year 7, the main predictor of being a drinker in year 9 was exposure to beer displays in stores (it is important to remember that in the United States alcohol is sold in supermarkets and convenience stores).

They concluded that for non-drinkers "the likelihood of drinking during grade 9 increases with higher levels of exposure to in-store beer displays" but that for those who have already started drinking in year 7 "future drinking is more likely to be influenced by exposure to alcohol advertising in magazines and at sports and music event concession stands"



#### The second South Dakota study <sup>7</sup>

Researchers in South Dakota (United States) surveyed nearly 2000 year 5 students from 39 schools about their alcohol consumption and drinking intentions, as well as their exposure to alcohol advertising. They then surveyed the students again in Year 6 and Year 7.

They found that students who reported higher exposure to beer ads during televised sport, exposure to other beer ads on television, listening to the radio and ownership of alcohol promotional items (like hats and t-shirts with beer brands) were more likely to report drinking. They also found that students who reported higher exposure to beer ads on television, listening to the radio and ownership of alcohol promotional items were more likely to report intending to drink in the future.

They concluded that "Children at extremely high levels of overall advertising exposure were subsequently 50% more likely to drink and 36% more likely to intend to drink as those at low levels"

#### The US economic analysis study <sup>8</sup>

These researchers surveyed a random sample of people in the United States, aged 15-26 years. Each person was interviewed four times between April 1999 and Jan 2001 (over the telephone), and was asked about their drinking behaviours and how often they could remember seeing alcohol advertisements in the previous four weeks. They also collected objective information on the amount of money spent in each 'market' (geographic area) on alcohol advertising.

They found that people who saw 1 more advertisement than the average had 1% more alcoholic drinks per month. Importantly, they found that for every additional dollar per person the industry spent on advertising alcohol in a market, people living in that area drank 3% more alcoholic beverages per month.

They concluded that "Youth who lived in markets with more alcohol advertising drank more, increased their drinking levels more over time, and continued to increase drinking levels into their late 20s"

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### Class Activity

- As a class (or in small groups) discuss the findings from these studies.
- Why do you think alcohol advertising has such powerful effects?
- Why do you think that different types of advertising (e.g., magazine, television) have different levels of effects at different ages and between genders?
- Make a list of alcohol advertisements you can remember seeing.
- What did you like about these advertisements? What did you dislike? Why do you think you remember them?

### Assessment Task: What makes alcohol advertising appealing to children?

#### Alcohol Advertising and Children

Whether they are deliberately targeted or not, there is increasing evidence that young people see lots of alcohol advertisements, remember alcohol advertisements, and like alcohol advertisements. Research from the United States has identified specific characteristics of alcohol advertisements that appeal to children.

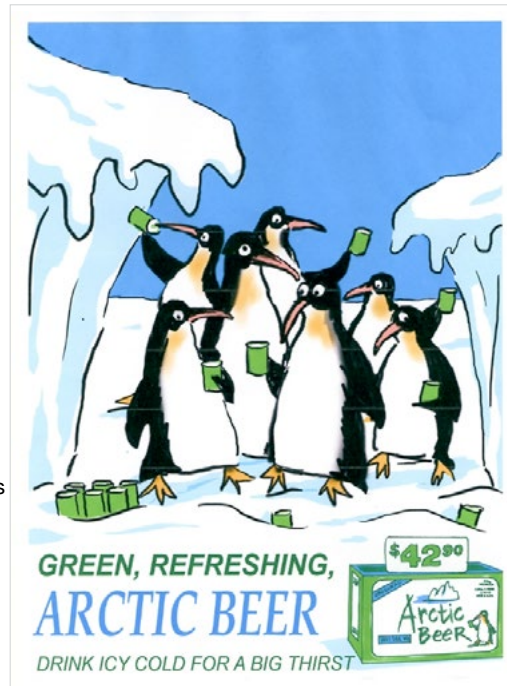
The features that are commonly identified as appealing to children are:

- Lively music
- Animation
- Special effects and sound effects
- Jingles
- Fantasy
- Rapid scene changes
- Humour
- Unusual or funny voices
- Adventure and action
- Catchphrases/slogans

Look at the advertisements printed on the next few pages. See if you can identify features in these advertisements that would be appealing to children. Note that many of the features in the list above are specific to television advertising – so you will have to think what features could be used in print advertising.

### Advertisement 1

Characteristics that might appeal to children



Why do you think advertisers use these images or messages?

Do you think they appeal to teenagers?

Do you think they appeal to adults?

Why or why not?

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### Advertisement 2

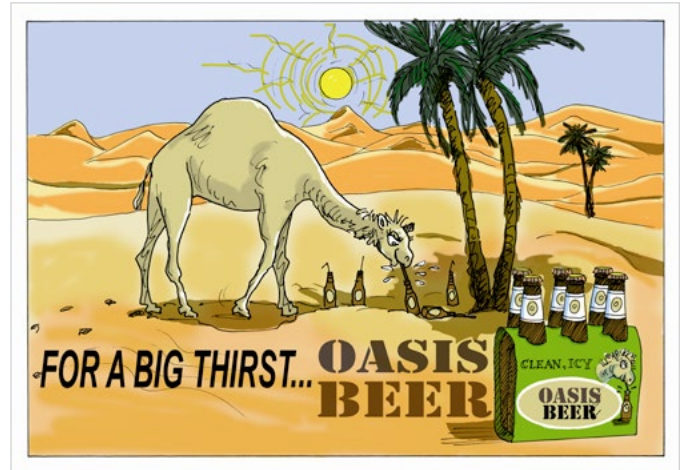
Characteristics that might appeal to children

Why do you think advertisers use these images or messages?

Do you think they appeal to teenagers?

Do you think they appeal to adults?

Why or why not?



### Advertisement 3

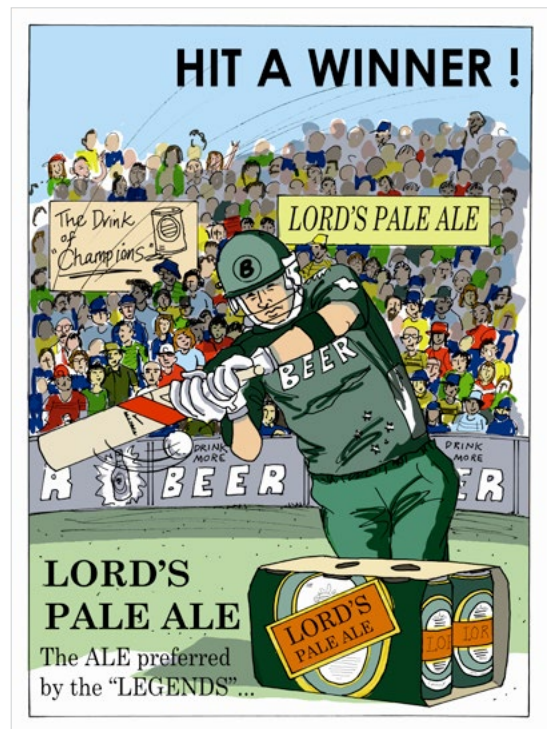
Characteristics that might appeal to children

Why do you think advertisers use these images or messages?

Do you think they appeal to teenagers?

Do you think they appeal to adults?

Why or why not?



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#### Teacher note

If you have access to You Tube in the classroom, you may prefer to use television advertisements for this activity.

#### Extension Activity

Design an advertisement for alcohol that would appeal to adults but not appeal to children or teenagers.

Assessment Task (stage 5): Should the government regulate alcohol advertising?

The only aspect of alcohol advertising that is currently regulated by the government is the times that alcohol advertising can appear on television (under the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice). This clause, designed to protect young people from exposure to alcohol advertising, states that alcohol advertising can be broadcast:

- During M, MA and AV programming (8.30pm to 5.00am weekdays and weekends, and 12.00noon to 3.00pm school days)
- During the live broadcast of a sporting event on weekends and public holidays

Other than this one regulation, in Australia alcohol advertising is covered by industry self-regulation. This means that the industry develops, implements, and monitors the rules around the types of messages that can be included in alcohol advertisements.

Surveys in Australia and the United States show that the majority of adults support further reductions, or even bans, on alcohol advertising.<sup>9,10</sup>

A study conducted in 2005, with a sample of 1,000 Australian adults, found that: only 28% were aware of there being any restrictions or regulations regarding the advertising of alcohol and only 2% aware of any restrictions in relation to Internet advertising of alcohol.<sup>17</sup>

Using the information you have studied in class, and other available resources, develop a questionnaire that assesses:

- awareness of the rules and codes for alcohol advertising
- attitudes to alcohol advertising (including what types of messages should or should not be allowed)
- attitudes to alcohol advertising regulations or bans

Survey at least 20 people and collate the results in a report.

Try to survey a mix of people (e.g., males and females, or people of different ages)

Use your findings to write a submission to government about whether we should have more (or less) regulation of alcohol advertising, and what should be covered in the regulations.

#### WEBQUEST: Alcohol Advertising Regulation in Australia

**Are there rules about alcohol advertising in Australia?**

Advertising in Australia (including alcohol advertising) is covered by industry self-regulation. This means that the industry develops, implements, and monitors the rules around the types of messages that can be included in alcohol advertisements.



There are two separate codes that apply to alcohol advertisements. The Advertiser Code of Ethics, developed by the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA), applies to all forms of advertising and covers issues such as taste and decency. The Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC) and Complaints Management System is the self-regulatory advertising scheme that specifically covers alcohol advertising.

#### Resources

- Section 2 of the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) Advertiser Code of Ethics [[http://www.aana.com.au/advertiser\\_ethics\\_code.html](http://www.aana.com.au/advertiser_ethics_code.html)]
- The Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code [<http://www.afa.org.au/public/content/ViewCategory.aspx?id=644>]
- Information on how to complain to the Advertising Standards Board [<http://www.adstandards.com.au/pages/page38.asp>]
- Research on alcohol advertising regulation conducted by the Centre for Health Initiatives [Research paper]

#### Activity

Find a current alcohol advertisement that you think contravenes one of the codes. This can be a television advertisement, or from a magazine, newspaper, radio, or outdoor poster or billboard (make sure you include a copy of the advertisement). Write a letter of complaint to the Advertising Standards Board about this advertisement.

#### Extension Activity

Locate copies of alcohol advertising codes from the US and UK. Compare the way that the regulatory systems work between the three countries (What type of regulatory system do they have? Who makes the decisions? Are there penalties for breaking the rules?); and between the issues covered in the codes (Are there similarities? Are there differences? Why do you think this is?)

#### Teacher Notes

If you are covering this topic as part of a larger theme on alcohol (or on media) you might consider submitting some of the students' complaint letters to the Advertising Standards Board. The class could then see how the process works, and discuss how they feel about the decisions of the Board.

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#### WEBQUEST: Alcohol Advertising Regulation in Australia – long term effects of exposure

Are there rules about alcohol advertising in Australia?

Advertising in Australia (including alcohol advertising) is covered by industry self-regulation. This means that the industry develops, implements, and monitors the rules around the types of messages that can be included in alcohol advertisements.

There are two separate codes that apply to alcohol advertisements. The Advertiser Code of Ethics, developed by the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA), applies to all forms of advertising and covers issues such as taste and decency. The Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC) and Complaints Management System is the self-regulatory advertising scheme that specifically covers alcohol advertising.

However, one of the complaints that is often raised about the system is that it only considers individual advertisements and their literal compliance with the letter of the codes, not the long-term effect of exposure to a large number of alcohol advertisements that communicate a subtle message about the role of alcohol in our lives, or about gender roles and stereotypes.

#### Resources

- Section 2 of the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) Advertiser Code of Ethics [[http://www.aana.com.au/advertiser\\_ethics\\_code.html](http://www.aana.com.au/advertiser_ethics_code.html)]
- The Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code [<http://www.afa.org.au/public/content/ViewCategory.aspx?id=644>]
- Research on sexuality and stereotypes in alcohol advertising conducted by the Centre for Health Initiatives [Research paper]

#### Activity

Find five-six current or recent alcohol advertisements that you think convey a message that has the potential to impact on people's perceptions of social norms or stereotypes. Possible issues are gender roles, alcohol and sex, racism, cultural or religious stereotypes.

Write an essay in which you present evidence of the underlying messages in these advertisements, and discuss the potential effects of long-term exposure to these types of messages. You may wish to argue for (or against) changes to the regulatory code to address the issues you raise.



#### REFERENCES

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### What kinds of critical questions can we ask of texts?

These questions can be asked of most spoken, written, visual, multimedia and performance texts. They encourage students to question beliefs that are often taken for granted.

### Critical Literacy Questions

#### Textual purpose(s)

- What is this text about? How do we know?
- Who would be most likely to read and/or view this text and why?
- Why are we reading and/or viewing this text?
- What does the composer of the text want us to know?

#### Textual structures and features

- What are the structures and features of the text?
- What sort of genre does the text belong to?
- What do the images suggest?
- What do the words suggest?
- What kind of language is used in the text?

#### Construction of characters

- How are children, teenagers or young adults constructed in this text?
- How are adults constructed in this text?
- Why has the composer of the text represented the characters in a particular way?
- Are the same messages being given to males and females? Why or why not?

#### Gaps and silences

- Are there 'gaps' and 'silences' in the text? If so, what?
- Who is missing from the text?
- What has been left out of the text?
- What questions about itself does the text not raise?

### Power and interest

- In whose interest is the text?
- Who benefits from the text?
- Is the text fair?
- What knowledge does the reader/viewer need to bring to this text in order to understand it?
- Which positions, voices and interests are at play in the text?
- How is the reader or viewer positioned in relation to the composer of the text?
- How does the text depict age, gender and/or cultural groups?
- Whose views are excluded or privileged in the text?
- Who is allowed to speak? Who is quoted?
- Why is the text written the way it is?

### Whose view: whose reality?

- What view of the world is the text presenting?
- What kinds of social realities does the text portray?
- How does the text construct a version of reality?
- What is real in the text?
- How would the text be different if it were told in another time, place or culture?

### Interrogating the composer

- What kind of person, and with what interests and values, composed the text?
- What view of the world and values does the composer of the text assume that the reader/viewer holds? How do we know?

### Multiple meanings

- What different interpretations of the text are possible?
- How do contextual factors influence how the text is interpreted?
- How does the text mean?
- How else could the text have been written?
- How does the text rely on inter-textuality to create its meaning?

Sourced from Tasmanian Curriculum : Critical Literacy

<http://www.education.tas.gov.au/curriculum/standards/english/english/teachers/critlit#whatkinds>