

TELEVISION: ALCOHOL'S VAST ADLAND

Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth

Executive Summary

Concern about how much television alcohol advertising reaches underage youth and how the advertising influences their attitudes and decisions about alcohol use has been widespread for many years. Lacking in the policy debate has been solid, reliable information about the extent of youth exposure to television alcohol advertising. To address this critical gap, the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth commissioned Virtual Media Resources, a media planning and research firm in Natick, Massachusetts, to analyze television alcohol advertising in 2001, using the same data and methodology as professional media planners.

In auditing 208,909 alcohol ad placements on television in 2001, the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth finds the following:

- 1) The alcohol industry's voluntary guidelines for ad placements on television are so lax that they allow the substantial exposure of youth¹ to alcoholic beverage advertising, including advertising on programs with disproportionate numbers of young people in the viewing audience.
- 2) Even when adults were more likely to see television alcohol advertising than youth, in many instances youth saw almost as much television alcohol advertising as the adults.
- 3) Because of the placement of the commercials, almost a quarter of alcohol advertising on television in 2001 was more likely to be seen by youth than adults.

The Standard for Measuring Youth Exposure

Youth are only 15% of the national television viewing population (age 12 and over) and represent only 15.6% of the general U.S. population, age 12 and up.² When advertising is placed on programs where the youth viewing audience is more than 15%, young people are more likely to see that advertising than adults. In 1999, the Federal Trade Commission pointed out that a few alcohol companies restricted their television ad placements to programming where the youth audience was 30%, 25%, or less, and called these "best practices."³ Noting that "30 percent of the U.S. population is under the age of 21, and only ten percent is age 11 to 17," the FTC concluded that the

¹ For this report, unless otherwise noted, youth are defined as persons ages 12-20, and adults are defined as persons ages 21 and over.

² Youth 12-20 are 15% of the Nielsen age 12+ universe estimate for the 12-month period ending 9/26/01 (33,300,000 out of 221,930,000 persons age 12+), and 15% of the Nielsen age 12+ universe estimate for the 12-month period beginning 9/27/01 (34,340,000 out of 229,150,000 persons age 12+). According to the 2000 US Census, there are 36.4 million youth ages 12-20, or 15.6% of the total US population of 233.3 million persons age 12+.

³ Federal Trade Commission. (September 1999). *Self-Regulation in the Alcohol Industry: A Review of Industry Efforts to Avoid Promoting Alcohol to Underage Consumers*: 10.

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alcohol industry's voluntary guidelines providing for a 50% threshold for underage youth in the audience "permits placement of ads on programs where the underage audience far exceeds its representation in the population."⁴

The FTC's recommendations notwithstanding, the voluntary advertising codes of the Beer Institute and the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS) suggest that alcohol advertisers refrain from airing their commercials on programs where young people are the majority of the viewing audience. Using a base of viewers age 12 and older, only one percent of all network and cable television programs in 2001 (187 out of 14,359) had an underage audience that was more than 50%. Thus the brewers' and distillers' voluntary codes leave 99% of the television landscape permissible for alcohol advertising.

Youth Exposed to High Volume of Alcohol Advertising on Television

Even when alcohol advertising was placed on programming with 15% or less youth in the viewing audience, youth exposure to alcohol advertising on television in 2001 was substantial and significant. In 2001 youth saw two beer and ale ads for every three seen by an adult. Given the high volume of beer and ale advertising to adults, this ratio translates into a high volume of youth exposure, representing more than 200 commercial exposures for the average youth, and far more exposures for those youth who are frequent viewers of television. Beer and ale advertising is by far the dominant television alcohol

advertising. Of the \$811.2 million in television advertising (208,909 ads) analyzed in this study, beer and ale accounted for 86% of the ad spending.

Four beer and ale brands accounted for more than 50% of the total spending of television advertising analyzed: Coors Light, \$114 million; Budweiser, \$108 million; Miller Lite, \$95.8 million; and Bud Light, \$88.7 million.

- Youth saw more than two Coors Light ads for every three seen by an adult.
- Youth saw more than one Budweiser ad for every two seen by an adult.
- Youth saw almost three Miller Lite ads for every four seen by an adult.
- Youth saw more than one Bud Light ad for every two seen by an adult.

Another way to assess the volume of alcohol advertising seen by youth is to compare it to product categories often considered youth-oriented. In this light, youth saw more beer and ale ads on television in 2001 than they saw ads for other product categories such as fruit juices and fruit-flavored drinks; or gum; or skin care products; or cookies and crackers; or chips, nuts, popcorn and pretzels; or sneakers; or non-carbonated soft drinks; or sportswear jeans.

Overall in 2001, alcohol advertising reached 89% of the youth audience, who on average saw 245 alcohol ads.⁵ But the 30% of youth who were most likely to see alcohol advertising on TV saw at least 780 ads.⁶

Youth Overexposed to Television Alcohol Advertising

Almost a quarter of the television alcohol advertising in 2001 – 51,084 ads – was delivered more effectively to youth than to adults.⁷ This means the advertising was placed on programs where the youth audience was higher than the percentage of youth in the television viewing population. That percentage is 15% nationally and varies slightly from market to market. By placing advertising on programs where the composition of the youth audience is higher than average, the youth audience is in effect "overexposed" to the advertising and is more likely to have seen it than the adult audience.

The alcohol industry placed these 51,084 ads on television in 2001 at a cost of \$119 million. Ten beer and "malternative" (also known as "low alcohol refresher") brands accounted for \$92 million of this spending:

- Miller Lite, \$18.5 million
- Heineken, \$16.2 million
- Coors Light, \$13.6 million
- Miller Genuine Draft, \$10.5 million
- Budweiser, \$8.4 million
- Bud Light, \$7.3 million
- Corona Extra, \$5.6 million
- Smirnoff Ice, \$4.8 million
- Foster's, \$3.8 million
- Mike's Hard Lemonade, \$3.5 million

The ads were broadcast on shows ranging from sports programs like *SportsCenter* and the NBA and Stanley Cup playoffs, to drama programs like *Dark Angel* and *X-Files*, variety programs like *MADtv* and *Saturday Night Live*, situation comedies like *That '70s*

⁴ Ibid.: 9.

⁵ Reach/Frequency sources and data are described in the Methodology section below.

⁶ Ibid.

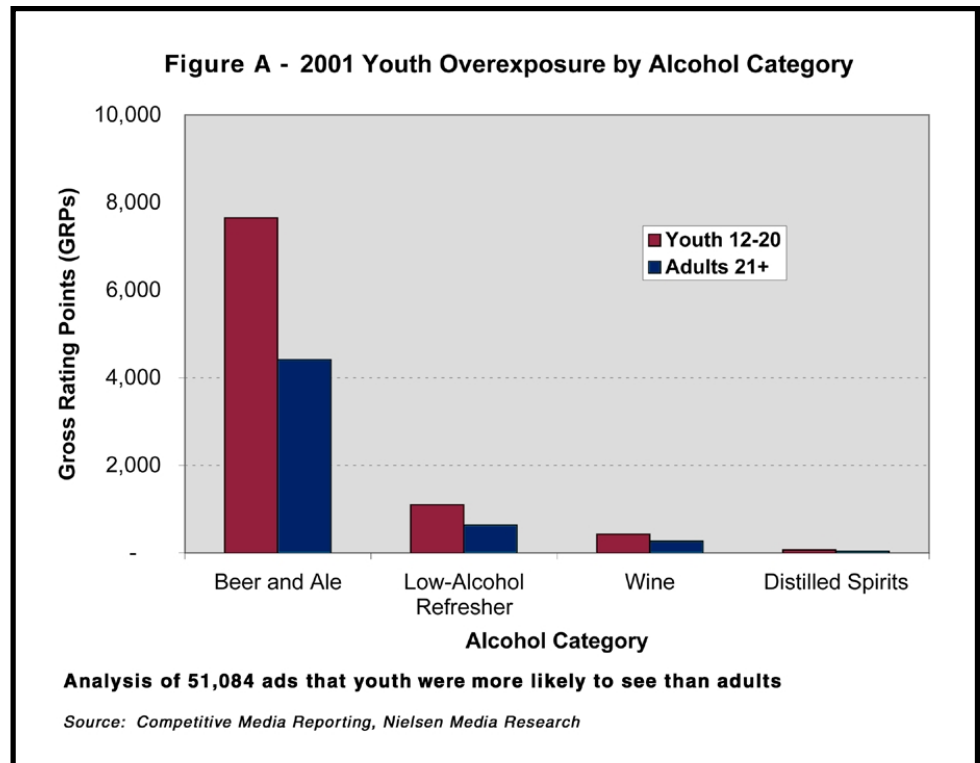
⁷ The 51,084 alcohol product ads were placed in programs for which the rating for youth ages 12-20 was greater than the rating for adults age 21 and over. (A rating is a percentage of the population that views a particular program or time period.) Ratings were the program quarter-hour ratings for program and time period in which the ad appeared.

Show and *Titus*, and talk shows like *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* and *The Daily Show*. (See Appendix A)

Five networks—WB, UPN, Comedy Central, BET and VH-1—routinely overexposed youth to alcohol advertising in 2001. Two types of programming—variety shows like *MADtv* on Fox and *Insomniac Music Theater* on VH-1, and music, video and entertainment shows like *Midnight Love* on BET and *Top 10 Countdown* on VH-1—also overexposed youth to alcohol advertising in 2001. For instance, youth had 110% greater exposure to alcohol advertising on Comedy Central than did legal-age adults. On variety shows, youth had 26% greater exposure to alcohol advertising than did legal-age adults.

Why the Concern about Alcohol Advertising

Underage drinking in the United States is marked by abuse. For 15- to 17-year-olds, 25% report being current drinkers, and 65% of those current drinkers report having had five or more drinks on at least one occasion.⁸ By the time they are 18 to 20 years old, 48% report being current drinkers, and 71% of those drinkers report having had five or more drinks on at least one occasion.⁹ The vast majority of the alcohol consumed by young people is for the purposes of intoxication: 92% of the alcohol drunk by 12- to 14-year-olds and 96% of the consumption by 15- to



17-year-olds and 18- to 20-year-olds is done when drinkers are having five or more drinks at one time.¹⁰ More than a thousand young drivers died in crashes after drinking in 2001.¹¹ While the total number of young drivers dying in motor vehicle crashes fell from 1999 to 2001, alcohol-related fatalities in this group are rising.¹²

In 2002, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University surveyed youth about drinking and risky sexual behavior. Among 15- to 17-year-olds, 29% of the respondents said alcohol or drugs had influenced their decision to engage in sexual activity. Almost a quarter of

the 15- to 17-year-olds reported that they had done more sexually than planned because of alcohol or drug use. Slightly more than a quarter of this age group reported they were concerned about sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancy because of their alcohol or drug use.¹³

The voluntary advertising guidelines of the alcohol industry explicitly recognize the dangers of advertising that glamorizes or portrays abusive drinking behavior or sexual themes. For instance, the Beer Industry's voluntary code states: "Beer advertising and marketing materials should not depict situations where beer is being consumed excessively, in an irresponsible way, or in any way ille-

⁸ U.S. Department of Justice. (2002). *Drinking in America: Myths, Realities, and Prevention Policy*. Calverton: Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. *Traffic Safety Facts 2001: Young Drivers*. Washington D.C.: National Center for Statistics and Analysis.

¹² Ibid. and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Notice to Readers: Alcohol Involvement in Fatal Motor-Vehicle Crashes—United States, 1999-2000." *MMWR Weekly*. 30 Nov 2001. <<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5047a8.htm>>. (19 Nov 2002).

¹³ The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University. "Substance Abuse and Risky Behavior: Attitudes and Practices Among Adolescents and Young Adults." *Survey Snapshot*. 6 February 2002. <<http://www.kff.org/content/2002/3215/CASASurveySnapshot.pdf>>. (19 Nov 2002).

gally.”¹⁴ It goes on to state: “Beer advertising and marketing materials should not portray sexual passion, promiscuity or any other amorous activities as a result of consuming beer.” The DISCUS advertising guidelines contain similar admonitions to its members. For instance, “Distilled spirits advertising and marketing should portray distilled spirits and drinkers in

a responsible manner. These materials should not show a distilled spirits product being consumed abusively or irresponsibly.”¹⁵

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has noted that “while many factors may influence an underage person’s drinking decisions, including among other things parents, peers and media, there is

reason to believe that advertising also plays a role.”¹⁶ Research studies have found that exposure to and liking of alcohol advertisements affects young people’s beliefs about drinking, intentions to drink, and actual drinking behavior.¹⁷

Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth

www.camy.org

The Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Georgetown University monitors the marketing practices of the alcohol industry to focus attention and action on industry practices that jeopardize the health and safety of America’s youth. Reducing high rates of underage alcohol consumption and the suffering caused by alcohol-related injuries and deaths among young people requires using the public health strategies of limiting the access to and the appeal of alcohol to underage persons.

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Virtual Media Resources

The Center commissioned Virtual Media Resources to conduct this analysis. Virtual Media Resources is a media research, planning, market analysis and consulting firm based in Natick, Massachusetts, serving communications organizations and marketers in a wide variety of market segments and media. VMR was established in 1992 to provide an independent research firm serving advertising agencies, and has grown to service over 100 clients across the US and Canada, including retail, publishing, financial, automotive, public health and other fields.

VMR adhered to industry-standard methodologies in conducting this analysis, using standard industry sources. More information about the analysis used to create this report is included in the Methodology section.

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¹⁴ Beer Institute. "Advertising & Marketing Code." <<http://www.beerinstitute.org/admarkcode.htm>> (19 Nov 2002).

¹⁵ Distilled Spirits Council of the United States. "Code of Good Practice for Distilled Spirits Advertising and Marketing." 1998. <<http://www.discus.org/industry/code/code.htm>> (19 Nov 2002).

¹⁶ Federal Trade Commission. *Self-Regulation in the Alcohol Industry*. 4.

¹⁷ Grube, J. "Alcohol advertising-a study of children and adolescents: preliminary results." <http://www.prev.org/prc/prc_videopresentations_grube_aasca.html>. (19 Nov. 2002).