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Selling and Marketing Alcohol Responsibly

Aims and learning outcomes

This aim of this chapter is to examine the marketing of alcohol and explore the ways in which national governments, major industries and individual establishments have collaborated to create agreed national standards for the marketing and selling of alcoholic products in a responsible manner. After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- Explain the challenges involved within the marketing environment for the advertising, promotion and merchandising of alcohol products.
- Describe how the partnership, self-regulation and social norm approaches towards developing alcohol policies operate individually.
- Demonstrate a knowledge of the impact of alcohol sponsorship and of the labelling requirements which warn consumers about the health risks from alcohol products.
- Apply good business practices for the sale of alcohol across the whole sector which includes retail and mixed trading premises.

8.0 Introduction

We must accept that there are many influences on the relationship between alcohol and consumers, and although many of these interact, there is no single factor that can be said to be dominant in the development of poor drinking patterns. For that reason, it is clear that no single prescription can be offered to any society regarding the harms associated with alcohol abuse. Similarly, no single sector can effectively tackle these issues alone. It is for this reason that the drinks industry, retail establishments and the relevant stakeholders need strategic partnership approaches which incorporate their moral and legal duties to sell and market alcohol products in a responsible manner.

These partnerships can be advanced through education, training, dialogue and joint action, but this collective work requires all stakeholders to respect one another's positions and to act in good faith. This chapter will examine these challenges and highlight how governments and industries across the hospitality, tourism and retail sectors have worked together to deliver training programmes and policies aimed at selling and marketing alcohol in a responsible manner.

8.1 Marketing alcohol

It is important to remember that marketing encompasses advertising, promotion and merchandising, sponsorship, labelling and point-of-sale materials.

The marketing campaigns for alcoholic beverages are constantly changing. In recent years some companies have targeted specific groups with enticing brands or have organised campaigns which influence drinkers to consume that brand. One group which has been targeted is that of young people, and the impact of this marketing has received special attention. For some drinks companies their marketing approach has revolved around the development of 'alcopops' (sweet-tasting, brightly coloured beverages with appealing names). With catchy slogans, the idea that drinking is trendy, and no mention of the negative side of the abuse of alcohol in most marketing and advertising campaigns, this can be dangerous. Research studies have indicated that underage consumption of alcohol is directly correlated with exposure to alcohol advertisements. This has brought some governments to ban alcohol ads on public transport. Nelson (2006) states that it is difficult to prove allegations regarding the response of young people to exposure to these types of advertisements, but believes that it is necessary to find ways in which the impact may be limited. Kuo et al (2000) suggest that alcohol advertising on college campuses has been shown to increase binge drinking among students, but they note that if these promotions are organised in a consistent and responsible fashion, they can actually help reduce harmful drinking patterns. Stacey et al, cited in Nelson (2010), speak about the effect of television ads on young people's feelings about alcohol and report that they have more positive feelings about drinking after viewing these ads.

The WHO adopted a 'Framework for Alcohol Policy for the Europe', which states five ethical principles including that 'all children and adolescents have the right to grow up in an environment protected from the negative consequences of alcohol consumption and, to the extent possible, from the promotion of alcoholic beverages' (WHO, 2006). These countries have moved towards a complete ban of alcohol advertising on billboard and television: France, Norway, Russia, (BBC News Europe, 2012) and Ukraine,(KyiPost,

2010). India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, (Asian Tribune, 2006) and Kenya have banned all alcohol advertising on television and billboard (BBC News, 2005). The majority of drink companies, however, host websites which carry huge amounts of information about their brands. They nominally require an age of 21 to enter, but the security levels of these sites are poor and in most circumstances there are no restrictions besides simply entering a birth date. Parents, peers and the media have a large impact on young people's decisions to drink (Federal Trade Commission, 2003).

These challenges and the potential for abuse and misuse surrounding alcohol beverage products places a direct onus on private and public organisations to set rigorous standards around the responsible marketing and sale of beverages. These standards can be set through a series of approaches which include government regulation, self-regulatory, partnership and social norms approaches which are reviewed in the next sections.

8.2 Media reviews, advertising and celebrity endorsements of alcoholic drinks

Consumers can be influenced by media reviews and advertising which promote a brand's image. Research studies conducted in Australia concluded that individuals are exposed to alcohol promotions through a range of media channels, both directly, e.g. television and print media, official brand websites and alcohol sponsorship of sports and cultural events, (Jones and Gordon, 2013) and indirectly, e.g. product placement in films, music videos and television programmes, social media and in-store promotions (Smith and Folcroft, 2009; Roche et al 2007). The Australian Medical Association (2012) maintain that this exposure was increasing due to the expansion of alcohol advertising into digital media, and via globalised platforms, and is likely to have a cumulative effect (Roche et al, 2007). Sargent et al (2006) add that alcohol use in movies is also found to be a predictor of the prevalence and initiation of alcohol use. Additional longitudinal studies, mainly conducted in New Zealand (Casswell and Zhang, 1998) and the US (Stacy et al, 2004; Collins et al., 2007), consistently suggest that exposure to media review and alcohol advertisements which drive brand image is associated with the likelihood of adolescents starting to drink alcohol (Sargent et al, 2006; Fisher et al, 2007), and with increased drinking amongst baseline drinkers (Snyder et al, 2006). These studies possibly underestimate the true size of the effects since as Hastings et al (2005) maintain that in reality alcohol advertisers use a combination of different marketing strategies to promote brand image.

Celebrity endorsements

Celebrity endorsements of alcoholic drinks can be a very effective marketing tool. McCracken (1987) define a celebrity endorser as 'any individual who uses his or her public recognition on behalf of consumer goods by appearing in an advertisement'. The suggestion is that 'celebrities are successful spokespersons for a company's brand or product in that they deliver a company's advertising message and persuade consumers to purchase the sponsored brand' (Amoateng and Poku, 2003). Hsu and McDonald (2002) reported that celebrities used in advertisements have considerable influence on consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions. Celebrity endorsement is not a new phenomenon. The following list is just a small collection of the film, sports and musical celebrities who have endorsed certain alcoholic brands: Woody Allen – Smirnoff Vodka; Ed McMahon and Frank Sinatra – Budweiser; Ice Cube – Coors Light; Leonardo di Caprio – Jim Beam; P Diddy (Sean Combs) – Cîroc Vodka; Will Ferrell – Bud Light; Dan Aykroyd – Crystal Head Vodka; Roger Federer – Moet Chandon; and Dita Von Teese – Cointreau. The list is endless. Till et al (1998) point to the risks involved with celebrity endorsement, arguing that a celebrity's image may have a negative impact on the alcohol brand that they endorse as a result of negative news or publicity. Amoateng and Poku (2013) reported that respondents overwhelmingly endorsed musicians as the personalities that attract them the most, with film makers and television presenters next and sports personalities last, in adverts of alcoholic beverages. They found that people are enticed to consume more alcoholic beverages if musicians are portrayed in advertisements singing their favourite songs.

Individuals are also likely to be attracted to an alcoholic beverage advertisement if it exposes the functions or performances of the product. The suggestion here is that, when an advertising message presents detailed information about the functions of the alcoholic beverages, many individuals are likely to be attracted to consume more. O'Guinn et al (2003) related this attraction to consumers determining the meaning of these messages based on the pre-existing values, attitudes, motivations, and beliefs they bring to the message.

8.3 The partnership approach

One of the most popular approaches to dealing with the challenge of marketing alcohol responsibly is the partnership approach, which involves regular dialogue and cooperation between the drinks industry, the public health community, and others interested in alcohol policy. This approach starts with setting the case for partnership alliances, then highlights the partners and their individual responsibilities and finally identifies the areas of common ground