

## Research reports

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**A review of the literature on the role of advertising in the consumption of  
alcohol products by younger people**

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To Ruth Bale, my research assistant, who gathered together most of the material on which this Report is based.

## Introduction

In the autumn of 2002 I was asked by the Independent Television Commission (ITC) to prepare a paper on the role of advertising of alcoholic products on the alcohol consumption habits of older children and young adults. The purpose of this paper was to inform any discussions within the ITC on their alcohol advertising policy and in particular how exposure to or consumption of<sup>1</sup> advertising of alcoholic products would affect their consumption. Would they drink more? Would they drink differently? Would they be encouraged to start drinking? These (and other questions) were discussed with the author and the end product is this brief Report.

The Report is structured in three parts. You are now reading the first part and will shortly be looking at the second which is by far the most substantial. Here some of the relevant academic literature is reviewed - both experimental and theoretical. I've drawn some conclusions and the landscape of the literature unfolds. The final part can be read as an executive summary because here we have answers to the questions I put in the previous paragraph as well as others. I hope that when you stop reading you will be in a better position to understand just what the role of advertising is in the complex patterns of alcohol consumption (including non-consumption) by young people today.

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this point is too important to be relegated to a footnote but hopefully it will reappear in some guise or other throughout this paper. These two expressions 'exposure to' and 'consumption of' are by no means synonymous. They reflect entirely different ways of looking at the relationship between children and media, including advertising. The first suggests a passive recipient whose behaviour and beliefs are shaped and moulded by what he or she sees and hears. The second on the other hand anticipates active children at the centre of their media worlds, making sense of what they view and being in charge of their media interests.

## **The early work**

There are a few early papers that are still cited in the literature on the advertising of alcohol and the role such advertising has on adolescents. Ambler (1982) looked at the argument that advertising causes alcohol misuse and that an advertising ban would reduce alcohol misuse<sup>2</sup>. He identifies two ways in which advertising can promote misuse. The first suggests that advertising increases consumption – he calls this the ‘strong’ control theory. The second or ‘weak’ control theory held that human behaviour is shaped by social stimuli and the media were an important part of such stimuli. By removing alcohol from advertising and editorial in the media, except in negative contexts, we can be schooled away from alcohol dependence. The latter approach can be reformulated as follows. There are various forms of influence on children and young people and this influence often results in the child developing a repertoire of beliefs, attitudes, and intentions to behave in certain ways. In other words there are various agents of socialisation in the life of the child. That’s one of the reasons why children are different and it’s also one of the reasons why children from similar backgrounds often have similar ideas and cope with different situations in similar ways. It’s also the case that, as a general principle, families or ‘significant others’ in the early years of development are the main agents that socialise the child into these beliefs and behaviours. So for example if alcohol is consumed to excess as part of family life and if this is accompanied by violence, the child of such a family will grow up with different values and behaviours from the child where alcohol is consumed in moderation at meals and is accompanied with conversation and laughter. As the child establishes friendship patterns and moves away from the influence of the family, peer relationships become important in determining beliefs and behaviours. But these two ‘flesh and blood’ sets of social relationships – family and peers – have the strongest influence on children. The evidence is that the role of media influence, and advertising should be seen as part of this, is weaker than these agents of primary socialisation and will operate on an already established set of beliefs laid down from infancy through the pre-school period.

Leathar et al. (1988) from the Advertising Research Unit at the University of Strathclyde sampled 150 children, aged from 10-16 years who discussed issues concerning advertising, including ads they liked and disliked. They found that these young people enjoyed watching TV commercials for alcoholic drinks and that ads for alcoholic drinks became increasingly salient and attractive between the ages of 10 and 14 years. Developmental trends in their descriptions of liked and disliked qualities of ads and of symbolism in commercials for alcoholic

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<sup>2</sup> It’s important to keep these two aspects of the argument separate in any discussion. Alcohol advertising could have a contributory influence for example on drinking patterns but a ban might prove ineffective or impossible.

drinks were also found. They concluded that ad campaigns for alcoholic drinks aimed at young adults present qualities that older teenagers find attractive.

In the second study cited (Leathar et al., 1988) they reported on interviews conducted with 433 Glasgow children, aged 10-17 years. Findings indicated that children are much more aware and appreciative of alcohol advertising than adults realise. They were particularly appreciative of TV commercials for mass-produced lagers<sup>3</sup>. Under-age drinkers were more adept than non-drinkers at recognising and identifying brand imagery in alcohol commercials, suggesting that the under-age drinkers tended to pay more attention to alcohol commercials. Under-age drinkers also tended to be more appreciative of TV advertisements for alcoholic drinks, implying that they get more pleasure out of alcohol commercials.

Both studies are described in a later paper by Aitken (1989). It is appropriate to pause and establish just what claims can be made on the basis of the evidence adduced. Consumer researchers and advertising researchers in particular would recognise and indeed use different names for the different processes of; interest or attitude toward the ad (Aad), interest or involvement in the brand, and intention to purchase. There is no reason to suppose that a similar distinction is not available to older children and young people although there is a tendency for **younger** children to perceive and judge goods and services in a more global way than adults who can analyse feelings and intentions in a more analytic fashion. If we look at Aitken's own position - as best exemplified in his 1989 article where he recognises that many in his audience will be advertisers - then the evidence presented shows that by and large older children and young people enjoy alcohol ads on TV. They like the humour and the visual effects and they also enjoy the style and innovative production values when they are older (14-16-year-olds). But they do recognise that these are aimed at adults and not children. During individual interviews Aitken and his colleagues interviewed children individually to establish their awareness and appreciation of alcohol advertising and these confirmed that they were attractive and well-liked. So far it can be argued that ads are 'working' with this population in that children like, enjoy, and appreciate them. Their attitude toward the ad is very positive. In order to make a stronger case it is necessary to categorise the children further into non-drinkers (have never even tried a drink), triers (have had a sip) and drinkers (have 'had a proper alcoholic drink, a whole drink, not just a sip') and see, by using a multivariate analysis whether there is any difference between the groups. It should be noted that these three groups are identified as very much at the initiation stage of their socialisation into drinking and there is no way of knowing whether these patterns will be maintained or changed later as young adults. The conclusions were (as summarised above) that there was evidence

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<sup>3</sup> At that time these would be Scottish lagers like McEwans and Tennants

that under-age drinkers paid more attention to and were more appreciative of advertisements for alcoholic drinks than non-drinkers.

There is no way that this research can establish a causal link between advertising alcohol and its subsequent consumption with this population. The causality (if it does exist at this early stage in the career trajectory of social drinkers) could work in several ways. For example, induction into a small clique of teenage ‘drinkers’ in the terminology used above might be a result of curiosity or even experimentation with peer group pressure providing the final push. Having been labelled or categorising oneself as a person who has had experience of alcohol would mean a consequent higher appreciation of ads for one’s own choice of behaviour and it has been argued that one of the functions of advertising is to provide reassurance that indeed you have done the right thing. Or that alcohol advertising is then a more salient and noticeable part of one’s environment just because ‘having done that’ is part of one’s self and one’s identity and this drives the new drinker to seek out information to confirm this new aspect of one’s own identity.

I have spent some time on these early studies because early work often sets the stage and lays out an agenda for later research and what is offered first as tentative conclusions is then re-produced in later papers as established and uncontested fact<sup>4</sup>. There is no evidence here that advertising has a causal role to play in the process of children starting to consume alcohol.

### **Further research**

Kloep et al. (2001) sampled a large number (over 4000) rural adolescents aged 11.8 to 16.5 years of age in Norway, Sweden, and Scotland. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used in order to explore drinking behaviours in these young people. Initiation into drinking occurs earlier in the UK (Balding, 1997) and this has been increasing since the mid-80s<sup>5</sup>. However in all three cultures the majority of rural adolescents claimed they didn’t drink at all<sup>6</sup> and drinking is usually restricted to weekends. When asked why they drank, the reasons spontaneously cited were:

- Excitement and fun – boredom and ‘nothing to do’
- Sociability and relaxation – easing shyness with the opposite sex
- Group ‘pressure’
- Parents’ reaction – too strict or negative

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<sup>4</sup> Aitken and his co-workers present the information from their research with all the hedges and qualifications that characterise the good, professional researcher.

<sup>5</sup> The onset of puberty has been occurring earlier over the years (Coleman and Hendry, 1999) and this is in line with that secular trend.

<sup>6</sup> Scottish teenagers self-report drinking more than both Scandinavians – questionnaires however reflect social desirability bias and there may be cross-cultural differences in ‘boasting’ or ‘keeping quiet’ about this behaviour depending on what socially desirable self-image is being projected.

- Adult symbolism – looking grown-up (op. cit., p286, also Pavis et al., 1997)

At no point is advertising of alcohol per se cited as a contributing feature to the spontaneously elicited categories of reasons provided as to why adolescents drank<sup>7</sup>. A quick search of recent articles in Health Education Research on adolescents and alcohol (Lintonen et al, 2001; Norman et al., 1998; Twigg et al., 2000) revealed that advertising or even media sources of influence were not mentioned in these publications. It would appear that advertising is not recognised as a significant feature worthy of discussion in general papers on alcohol and adolescence.

Most countries in the Western world would accept drinking alcohol as a legal and as a socially legitimate form of activity. There are social *mores* that guide when it is appropriate to drink, how to behave when drinking, patterns of drinking, and often a recognition when drinking becomes excessive and problematic although the boundaries between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ drinking will differ from culture to culture. Non-drinking societies do exist as do teetotal subcultures but they usually do so on the basis of a set of principle either ideological or religious that proscribe the activity. Many societies accept that the desires of many adolescents to experiment with alcohol is an aspect of their transition through adolescence toward adulthood. Sharp and Lowe (1989) described young people’s drinking as part of the socialisation process from child to adult and as a symbolic practice related to seeking social acceptance in adult society. They systematically reviewed the British literature on adolescents and alcohol at the end of the 1980s and their conclusion was generally optimistic. They concluded that it was clear that drinking alcohol may be considered a normal part of growing up and that many young people were introduced to it by their parents. They claimed that there was no evidence that this did any harm but problems started when parents neglected this role. Parents should give their children a reasonable example to follow and should allow their children the option of not drinking rather than perpetuating the myth that drinking is a sign of adulthood.

There do exist some experimental data where groups receive different ‘treatments’ and the effects are measured. The experiments are found in the alcohol literature as well as the children and food literature<sup>8</sup>. So for example, Kohn and Smart (1984) showed three groups of college males a sports programme in which there were either nine, four, or no beer advertisements. Beer was available to buy during the programme. There was an increase in beer consumption in the ‘some beer ads’ groups during the first half hour or so

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<sup>7</sup> Advertising of course can use techniques of persuasion and can draw on these reasons in order to craft persuasive commercial communications, assuming that the existing regulatory framework permits the use of them.

<sup>8</sup> For a review of the experimental literature in advertising and children’s food choice, see Young, 1996.

but no significant differences by the end of the programme. In a similar study, Kohn and Smart (1987) had 3 groups of women with either nine, three, or no wine advertisements shown to them during a TV programme and each group had the opportunity to buy wine or soft drinks during the viewing. In this case there were significant differences between groups but the authors claim the results might not be valid as the subjects were suspicious about the nature of the experiment.

Sobell and Sobell (1986) looked at the drinking behaviour of 96 male normal-drinking college students after they viewed a videotape of a TV programme ("Dallas") complete with advertisements. There were different versions of the videotape. Some had alcohol in the programme or no alcohol and there were also three different types of advertisements embedded in the programme - ads for beers, non-alcoholic beverages, and food. After viewing the videotape, the students were asked to perform a taste rating of light beers, which provided an unobtrusive measure of their alcohol consumption. Results provide no support for the widely held assumption that drinking scenes in TV programs or advertisements for alcoholic beverages precipitate increased drinking by viewers. However in a later study (Sobell et al., 1993) they assessed the self-reported ability of 96 male alcohol abusers to resist the urge to drink heavily after they viewed a videotape of a popular prime time TV programme. Different versions of the videotape were used to evaluate the effects of a TV programme with and without alcohol scenes as crossed with the effects of 3 types of commercials (beer, non-alcoholic beverages, and food). Before and after viewing the videotape, respondents completed several questionnaires about their drinking habits. Results indicate that alcohol cues affected some alcohol abusers' perceived ability to resist the urge to drink heavily. In particular, those with higher alcohol dependence scores showed a decrease in confidence after viewing alcohol cues compared to those people who watched the same programme without the alcohol scenes.

It can be argued that these two studies carry an important message. Advertising and programme content cannot create a demand if the demand is not there. So ordinary people won't start drinking heavily if there they are watching TV that shows people drinking whether it's in ads or not. But people who need alcohol and have problems with alcohol will be cued for drinking by the presence of media representations much as alcoholics report problems with not drinking if they're in pubs or in supermarkets or shops that sell alcohol for example.

Lipsitz et al. (1993) sampled 92 10-11-year-olds who watched 40 television ads. These ads included 5 beer commercials, 5 soft-drink commercials, or 5 beer commercials plus 2 anti-drinking messages. Afterwards, as an unrelated task, they completed the Alcohol Expectancy Questionnaire-Adolescent (AEQ-A) Form. Exposure to different commercials produced no differences in drinking expectancies. The experiment was repeated on 74 13-year-olds with



similar null results; however, these girls believed more strongly that alcohol leads to deteriorated cognitive and behavioural function. In a comparison of 10-year-olds and 13-year-olds, 13-year-olds had significantly more positive scores on 3 AEQ-A scales that tapped social/emotional expectancies.

Wyllie et al. (1998) interviewed 500 10-17-year-olds in three urban sites in New Zealand<sup>9</sup>. They claim in the Abstract that their findings were consistent with the position that alcohol advertising is likely to have some influence on young people and that this position is substantiated by “qualitative and quantitative research and different theoretical perspectives on advertising processes” (op. cit.; p361). Their measures were:

- **Response to advertising.** Respondents were asked about several frequently shown advertisements, including some for alcohol products, and measures of liking and how many times they had seen the ad were taken. It should be noted that they were shown a photograph from the advertisement “...that contained no reference to the brand being advertised” (p365) and read a brief description of the advertisement. So it would seem that the measures are attitude toward the ad (Aad) and self-report recall of exposure.
- **Drinking behaviour/expectations.** Frequency measures of drinking behaviour were obtained using self-report and scaled frequency measures. For non-drinkers in this age group they were asked to think about when they would be 20 years old and “...how often *do you imagine you will probably drink alcohol then?*” [italics added<sup>10</sup>].
- **Others.** Four attitudinal items that were positive toward drinking and four that were negative were presented. In addition “there were also questions included to ascertain perceived peer and parental approval of drinking and perceived peer and parental drinking behaviour” (p365).<sup>11</sup>

I have spent some time on the actual measures that assess these behaviours because many papers that have been considered in preparation of this Report pay only cursory attention to what is being asked to whom and yet considerable time and space is devoted to sophisticated statistical analyses where careful comparisons are made with previous research. Wyllie et al. are no different in this respect. A description of the measures used in the research take up less than half a page whereas the analyses and discussion occupy almost five pages of text. The data obtained and the ways in which the measures are interrelated are only as good as the reliability and validity of the procedures used.

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<sup>9</sup> Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch

<sup>10</sup> I have done this because in my experience of teaching questionnaire design to postgraduates for several years this would be an extremely unreliable and invalid question and for any answer provided it would be impossible to ascertain what processes or constructs were being utilised

<sup>11</sup> No more detail is provided.

What do Wyllie et al. do with the data? They admit that “the analyses must be seen as exploratory, rather than confirmatory” (p366) and conduct multivariate analyses in order to establish a model of the different paths of influence on frequency of drinking or, in the case of children or young people who don’t drink, expected drinking at age 20. The strongest relationship was between peer behaviour and current frequency of drinking. In addition a combination of the variables ‘liking of the beer advertisements’, peer and parental variables accounted for a third of the variance for the frequency of drinking.

In the Discussion they claim that “the findings were consistent with the hypothesis that positive responses to beer advertising were contributing to an increase in expected frequency of future drinking” (op. cit.; p369). For an exploratory analysis this is probably true. But I would argue that the evidence is also consistent with the hypothesis that being part of a culture where alcohol consumption is common, where friends and family drink, and where a lot of TV is being watched and alcohol ads are found to be interesting would increase the frequency of future drinking. There is a similar argument in the literature on contributory factors toward obesity where the term ‘obesogenic’<sup>12</sup> environment’ has been coined to describe the mélange of circumstances that promote obesity. Perhaps one should coin an equally awkward term ‘alcohologenic’ to characterise cultures and subcultures. Somewhere within that mix would be the advertising of alcohol.

## Attitudes

What do people think about advertising alcohol? Wyllie et al. (1998) report *inter alia* that, for their sample of 10-13-year-olds, over half of the boys agreed that they got to know more about drinking from watching alcohol advertisements. For a similar group of young girls there was 39% agreement and for the 14-17-year-olds the figure for boys was 27% and girls 20%. So we can see that scepticism with advertising (based on this item) increases with age (c.f. Mangleburg and Bristol, 1998) and that there is a smaller gender effect. Smith and Atkin (in press) report on a study (Atkin and Thorson, 2000<sup>13</sup>) which surveyed popular opinion on the subject in the United States. The writers argued that almost three-quarters of all adults sampled thought that teenagers are susceptible to influence by televised liquor<sup>14</sup> ads, and most perceive that

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<sup>12</sup> A general global description of a cultural and environmental ‘style’ that is conducive toward an imbalance in energy input/output and can promote obesity. It refers to an environment in which fertility rates are falling, life expectancy is growing, social structures (including marriage) are changing the family dramatically and urban development is growing, children have fewer safe places to play, there is declining agriculture, an increase working mothers and less home-cooked food. All of these taken together are conducive to the development of obesity globally. This environment, it is claimed, is conducive to sedentary lifestyles and altered dietary habits.

<sup>13</sup> In the absence of the availability of this report, I have relied on the account provided by Smith and Atkin.

<sup>14</sup> There is a distinction used here between ‘liquor’, which I take to assume what we would call hard drink or spirits, and ‘beer’ - we at least share that same name across the Atlantic!

underage audiences are encouraged to experiment with liquor or to drink a greater amount of this product. Half of the adults feel that liquor companies are trying to influence teenagers to drink liquor. By a two-to-one margin, adults disapprove of teenagers seeing liquor ads on TV; they disapprove of children seeing liquor commercials by a five-to-one margin.

The poll also showed that more than two-thirds of adults would prefer a strict prohibition of these ads in order to protect youthful viewers. Indeed, there is broader public support for prohibiting TV liquor ads than prohibiting sex and violence in youth-oriented programming. If liquor advertising is to be permitted on TV, large majorities support requiring warnings in ads, delaying ads until late evening, restricting content that might appeal to young people, and balancing ads with more public service spots.

It should be noted that this survey emerges from a culture with different attitudes toward alcohol consumption than we have in Europe but the extent to which members of the public over there view liquor advertising in a negative light should not be underestimated.

## Theoretical links

Atkin and Block (1984) reported on a study where young people were interviewed. The basic survey and experimental research involved questionnaire administration, interviewing, and testing with the same master sample of 1,227 respondents with diverse backgrounds from different regions of the USA. Because the investigation was primarily concerned with responses of young people to alcohol advertising, most respondents were between the ages of 12-22. A variety of different methods were used including self-report questionnaires and diary studies. Various questions about advertising and alcohol were put.

One of the arguments about media exposure has been based on the extended metaphor of ‘cultivation’. Watching a lot of media and advertising cultivates, so the argument goes, a picture of the real world that bears a certain statistical similarity to the world as portrayed on the media. So people who watch a lot of frightening television should then tend to think the world out there is similar and is more frightening than it really is. Does the same happen with alcohol advertising and young people? Atkin and Block’s work provides some weak links. Respondents who report high exposure [to alcohol advertising] are somewhat more likely to have favourable perceptions of both whisky and beer drinkers. Those reporting heavy exposure to liquor ads tend to perceive whisky drinkers as more friendly, relaxed, fun-loving, happy, manly [the male actors, presumably], successful, sophisticated, and good-looking; those reporting heavy exposure to beer advertising tend to perceive beer drinkers as more adult, fun-loving, young, friendly, and happy. There is also a slight tendency for reported advertising exposure to be associated with perceived pervasiveness of drinking in society; those in the heavy exposure category estimate that the typical person consumes about two more drinks per week than do the lightly exposed respondents. This last finding does suggest a small cultivation effect here although Atkin and Block do not provide statistical information to support ‘slight tendency’.

In addition “...the field survey contained 50 items that represented overall attitude toward drinking, including measures of agreement with statements about alcohol (e.g., “It’s OK for a teenager to get drunk every once in awhile”, “alcohol helps people relax and unwind”), the range of situations considered appropriate for drinking (e.g., “during lunch”, “after work”), and propriety of drinking in various amounts, at various ages. This attitudinal variable is positively associated with advertising exposure to a moderate degree”.

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<sup>15</sup> In the American sense.

But does this unequivocally establish this ‘holy grail’ of media effects research that there is a relationship there between watching and subsequent thoughts, feelings, and intentions - a relationship that is theoretically well-established and sound and that is substantiated by reliable and valid empirical work? Well not really. If we look at the theoretical arguments that have been adduced (e.g. Smith and Atkin, op. cit.) to support such an effects argument they involve various assumptions which I’ve outlined below:

- Alcohol advertising presents the brand in a positive light, in the context of people having fun, being with members of the opposite sex in a party atmosphere for example. These media representations will then induce and reinforce favourable attitudes toward drinking and drinking practices through persuasive processes.
- These processes of persuasion include conditioning, social cognitive learning, and reasoned action. In addition there are other processes such as legitimisation, and rationalisation that have been mentioned as mediators between viewing alcohol advertising and future behaviour<sup>16</sup>.

If we look at conditioning and social cognitive learning as possible processes or routes to persuasion then one of the main theorists in this area would be Albert Bandura (see, for example, Bandura, 1986). I have described this research in more detail elsewhere (ITC, 1997) in the context of violent TV content and subsequent aggressive behaviour but the principles are the same. So a media representation of say young people enjoying themselves and drinking might then be modelled by viewers of the ad - next time an occasion arises which is similar to the setting of the ad, the person who has watched the ad might buy a drink or accept one. If the **consequences** of this behaviour are reinforcing<sup>17</sup> or rewarding (and this can be social such as approval from others or psychological such as the effects of alcohol) then the drinking patterns are learned.

There are however several caveats that need to be made on such a simplistic interpretation. To take a standard textbook on the subject (Van Evra, 1990):

“Developmental and gender differences are important in modelling, however, and many other variables affect the extent to which imitation actually occurs. Similarities between viewer and model, the credibility of the model, the context of the viewing, and similarities and differences between the televised models and real-life models in the child’s environment are important determinants of which behaviours are actually imitated. A child’s motivational state, the perceived reality of what is being observed, and the number of other experiences that provide competing models and information are additional

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Cultivation’ is a general metaphor that applies to a world view being gradually installed based, partly, on what is assimilated through the media. These other processes cited are more specific and have their own provenance in psychology and social science.

<sup>17</sup> This principle is known as vicarious reinforcement

significant influences on the imitation of television models that social learning theory predicts” (op. cit., p163)

What this implies, if we locate these in the context of a young person watching a lot of advertising of alcoholic drinks, is that there are several other variables that need to be in place before a strong case could be made that such learning occurs. So for example the reality as portrayed in advertising should have a certain level of perceived reality. Whereas violent behaviour in action films can often be disturbingly real, it is often the case that advertising as a genre bears a highly symbolic relationship with reality. Older children and teenagers know and understand this and often display a cynicism with advertising at that age just because it’s unreal and symbolises a particular style (Mangleburg and Bristol, 1998). So some of Aitken’s respondents claimed that:

‘That Martini one, she goes about on roller skates, skirt up to here, an a’ that’ (*Boy, 14 years*)

‘Expensive adverts.’ ‘All sun and sea’. ‘Suntanned, bronzed people’. ‘You too could look like this if you drink...’ (*Girls, 16 years*). (Aitken, 1989; p140).

In order to appeal to youngsters of that age whose level of advertising literacy is advanced enough to recognise the fantasy and rhetoric within the genre, one often has to make the ads more rather than less real, more fantastical and less down to earth, with high production values to catch their attention<sup>18</sup>.

Turning now to reasoned action, this theory stemmed from an approach toward social psychology which emphasised that it was possible to look at decisions to engage in certain behaviours as the consequence of certain rational processes which involve the consideration of behavioural options. So when people make up their minds to drink or not for example then the consequences and outcomes of each option are evaluated and a decision (as a behavioural intention) is made. Such theories are popular in health psychology for example, including alcohol related behaviours (see Conner et al., 1999<sup>19</sup>). The decision making processes are psychological and not subject to the complete rationality of *homo economicus*. So in real life making up one’s mind does not necessarily examine all courses of action and rationality is bounded (see Simon, 1978). The early theory, called the theory of reasoned action, consisted of attitudes toward the behaviour where it was assumed that the strengths of different beliefs and their values could be combined in a sort of ‘mental algebra’. So the decision to drink while under age could consist of a whole set of attitudes such as, for example, the thrill of doing something illicit and daring, the price paid

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<sup>18</sup> At the time of writing ads for Guinness or Stella Artois exemplify this kind of ad with an eloquent narrative that’s unreal but amusing

<sup>19</sup> The predictive power of the theory of planned behaviour in explaining alcohol consumption was tested with three samples of university students. Generally, the theory performed well, with attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (PBC) explaining between 28% and 40% of the variability in intentions.

for the drink, and the guilt at doing something one's parents might disapprove. But as well as the attitudes toward different parts of the behaviour, there were what's called the subjective norms for each behaviour. Each individual perceives the beliefs of others to be important and significant others provide a guide to 'what is the proper thing to do' for that person. To return to adolescents and drinking, then an individual's intention to drink would be influenced by how he or she perceives that 'this is the thing to do' as reflected in the beliefs of others. If these are of major importance and the beliefs of others are primarily those of peers and members of the immediate group, then we have the well-known phenomenon of peer-group pressure and decision-making is influenced by the adolescents' peers by and large. But it also includes significant others which could be a particular person or people that are important in that young person's life irrespective of whether they are members of that person's immediate group with the same or similar ages. The beliefs that these other people hold need not be the actual beliefs – it is just what young people perceive their beliefs to be. People who have an actual relationship with the young person who knows them and who interact with them on a regular basis are by far the most important source of influence. But there are other influential and significant others out there in the culture whom the young person most probably has never met or interacted with. These are the heroes of popular culture and if they are seen to approve of or condone particular behaviours then they should be factored into the calculus of decision making procedures that constitute theories of reasoned action. Often these behaviours will involve drinking to excess and readers of popular magazines and viewers of TV chat shows have a wide variety of such dubious role models to choose from. Advertising is but one aspect of media sources of influence and is a genre which is subject to regulation and is perceived as 'different' by children and young people from an early age (Young, 1990). But if a famous footballer for example is seen to endorse a particular brand of alcoholic drink and if it is generally accepted that he is a significant other for many children then this can establish norms of drinking behaviour within the child in accord with psychological theories.

The fact that family as well as peers are generally accepted in social science as major agents that influence the child<sup>20</sup> is not surprising given the fact that family influences are the first agents of socialisation for the child during the formative years before school and friends have any effect. We know that basic values and behaviours are learnt through the various processes such as modelling and vicarious reinforcement and that the family nexus is the primary site where imitation of, for example, drinking and eating patterns occur.

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<sup>20</sup> In contrast advertising is generally seen as having a minor role to play which often operates at the level of the brand and can affect brand choice although there may be some evidence that the consumption of certain low-level categories of goods and services are affected by advertising

## Econometric studies

One of the central issues in the public debate about advertising of alcohol is the extent to which alcohol affects total alcohol consumption or whether its effects are limited to brand choice. This debate is not limited to alcohol but covers other categories of goods and services such as so-called ‘junk’<sup>21</sup> foods advertised extensively to children, tobacco consumption<sup>22</sup> and chocolate consumption (see for example Eagle and Ambler, 2002). We have seen that there are many factors operative between watching advertising for alcohol products and services and consuming more of the stuff and that a theoretical argument must recognise the multi-factorial nature of the question. There is no real evidence on that basis that advertising alcohol to young people makes them drink more or that banning advertising to this group would result in them drinking less. But econometric studies might help. Econometrics is simply the application of statistical methods to economics. In econometrics a model of some aspect of the economy is set up, stated in mathematical terms. This model is compared with the available statistical facts about the economy; the model and the facts. So if advertising is banned, we can look at the sales over time across different countries that have or haven’t introduced such a ban. A ban will affect **all** those firms that use advertising in the country that has imposed the ban and this can be modelled and tested against sales or other measures of consumption. Or we can gather statistics on advertising expenditure on alcohol products or other indicators of how much alcohol advertising people are exposed to and relate it to consumption. The models in both cases will be slightly different. Alcohol consumption is a good candidate for econometric research<sup>23</sup> because reliable statistics are usually kept by governments as alcohol is often taxed.

Most of the statistical analyses used are multivariate and, assuming that indicators are available that are reliable and valid, and would be considered as relevant, they are then entered into the mathematical models and conclusions drawn from the solutions. So in a recent paper, Saffer and Dave (2002) looked at alcohol consumption and alcohol advertising bans using international data. Apart from per capita consumption of pure alcohol and an index of ‘banning’, they incorporated data *inter alia* on, for example, alcohol price, real income, ‘alcohol culture’, and public health expenditure share. Saffer and Dave’s results (and this confirmed the earlier work of Saffer, 1991) seemed to suggest that banning decreases alcohol consumption. “The primary conclusion of this study is that alcohol advertising bans decrease alcohol consumption” (op. cit., p1333). To be more specific both Saffer’s (1991) and Saffer and Dave’s (2002) results indicate “that one more ban on beer and wine or on spirits would

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<sup>21</sup> The terms must be well-hedged as it is often held by nutritionists that there is no such thing as bad food, only a bad diet. ‘Junk’ is a pejorative term but is part of the contemporary lexicon in the context of ‘food’ so it’s been used

<sup>22</sup> Not a live issue now with the demise of tobacco advertising in many industrialised countries such as the UK

<sup>23</sup> As is tobacco consumption



reduce consumption by about 5% and one more ban on all alcohol advertising in a media would reduce consumption by about 8%” (op. cit., p1333). But there is another problem with the implied causality of these statements as banning alcohol advertising, alcohol consumption, and health demands are rather intricately related over time. In many countries there has been a downward trend in alcohol consumption since 1988 that could be attributable to increases in the demand for health. This means that people are getting more health conscious and drinking less. Now this downward trend in alcohol consumption could result in a decrease in the number of advertising bans. Saffer and Dave do not expand on the reasons why this could be the case but I would have thought that a society where alcohol consumption decreases as a function of health concerns does not need the added spur of bans and the consequent antipathy from the advertising industry, and politically astute governments will not be unaware of this. Saffer and Dave (p1333) state very clearly though that “this downward trend in alcohol consumption could result in a decrease in the number of advertising bans”, citing Canada, Denmark, New Zealand, and Finland as examples of countries that recently decreased the number of total advertising bans.

Econometric research on the UK market has been reviewed by Calfee and Scheraga (1994). The general conclusion was that advertising had very small or no effects on alcohol consumption. The differences in the studies were in the models used for econometric analysis and the variables sampled. Martyn Duffy’s (1982) analysis used sophisticated mathematical models including a statistical technique to correct for reverse causality between advertising and sales<sup>24</sup>. McGuinness (1980) used advertising, prices, income and the number of licensed premises as explanatory variables for alcohol consumption, whereas Hagan and Waterson (1983) included a lagged advertising variable to represent the persistence of advertising effects over time and measured real expenditures on alcohol rather than the more common consumption of pure alcohol as a dependent variable. Interestingly, an analysis by Godfrey (1988) (using Duffy and McGuinness’ data) found evidence of offsetting so that spirits advertising reduced wine demand. This would suggest that although the total alcohol market is relatively insensitive to advertising, there are shifts at changes not just as the brand level but - with the phenomenon of offsetting - at an intermediate aggregate level.

The complexity of the relationships between alcohol consumption and advertising expenditure and the presence of social forces affecting demand for alcohol was brought out in an earlier paper by Calfee and Scheraga (1994). They also reviewed some of the studies using non-market data and cited Atkin et al.’s (1983) survey that used self-report measures with teenagers asking them about their alcohol consumption and their exposure to mass media which

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<sup>24</sup> There is rationale for sales increasing advertising as an increase in sales might stimulate a further investment in commercial communications either in the light of increased expenditure opportunities or as an optimistic investment.

showed a strong correlation between alcohol consumption and exposure to advertising, but that most of the correlation had disappeared after taking into account demographics and social influences.

That concludes this section where the literature on the role of alcohol advertising - theories as well as experimental evidence - is reviewed and the picture that emerges is by no means simple. This is not exactly unexpected as it is generally accepted that the role of advertising in many aspects of health-related consumer behavioural is as part of a multi-factorial system where there are main effects and also interaction effects. So there is no simple solution and the material above should be interpreted with that in mind.

I shall now turn to the final, shorter section, where answers are given to various questions.

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

(These are based on questions posed in the ITC brief for this review)

*1. Will alcohol advertising encourage young people to start to drink sooner than they otherwise would?*

Drinking alcohol like many other habitual activities<sup>25</sup> has a beginning, a middle, and (possibly) an end which we can call initiation, maintenance and change (or extinction). Initiation into drinking is often normal adolescent experimentation subject to peer group pressure and as such advertising would not be a major factor. The availability of alcohol certainly would. Maintenance of this behaviour would be supported by the culture or subculture of which the young person is a member. If it is conducive to alcohol consumption (I coined the neologism ‘alcohologenic’ in this connection) then it is more likely this early stage is maintained. Advertising and other media representations of alcohol consumption are part of the young person’s culture and there are theoretical grounds to assume that advertising alcohol has a minor role to play although in my opinion there is no solid empirical evidence. Also, the ‘alcohologenic’ cultures cover such a variety of models and ways of representation of drink and drinking that removing one aspect of this - advertising - would not solve the problem as they are all linked together.

*2. Would alcohol advertising encourage young people to drink more than they otherwise would?*

Again we would have to rely on theory here based on children modelling the behaviour that’s seen on TV. Modelling would work if the media reality that is perceived is seen as realistic and if the behaviour is seen as easily imitated and if there is identification with the characters who are actually drinking<sup>26</sup>. For a young person I would have thought the kind of behaviour one sees on the *Uncensored Ibiza* genre with heavy bouts of excessive drinking is probably more likely to lead to bout drinking patterns than Jools Holland advertising Scotch whisky. But it might be prudent to take these general principles on board about the possibility of children and young people emulating binge drinking when considering regulations.

*3. Would alcohol advertising make young people think that drinking alcohol is a badge of some kind? Could advertising encourage children and young people to consume alcohol in a way which is antisocial or harmful to themselves?*

Alcohol is often advertised in an aspirational way and the message could be read ‘drink this and you too can be successful/play jazz piano/score with the opposite sex’. But older children and young people are literate with advertising. They realise that advertising is crafted and designed to sell brands and that much of the content of the ad or commercial is there in service of that end. That’s why adolescents and older

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<sup>25</sup> Can be called trajectories and can cover disparate behaviours like smoking, marriage, and ‘being a teenager’.

<sup>26</sup> I made a similar argument in Young (1997)

children become cynical with advertising. They are old enough to see through it but still young enough to be intolerant of it.

4. *Are commercials which feature children more influential for young viewers?*

Yes - if other factors like identification with the children by the child viewer for example are also operative.

5. *Would there be any disbenefits in allowing family scenes in which parents are drinking responsibly in their parents' company? (The idea would be to encourage a healthier, continental-style attitude to drinking.)*

Much research (including some by Leathar) makes a big issue of media representations of alcohol consumption in ads on the basis that this will cultivate an image in adolescents about drinking and its consequences. My own interpretation would be different in that media representations can promote an attitude toward the ad (Aad in the jargon) which will not necessarily transfer to wants, desires, attitudes about drinking per se. So there's no evidence that having family drinking scenarios shown in a positive light, where people are eating and drinking sensibly, will necessarily change people's drinking habits.

6. *What motivates kids to start to drink and to develop drinking habits and culture?*

Being immersed in a culture where drinking is endemic. It is well known for example that drinking patterns of southern Europeans is one where drinking is done in cafes, with families, and with often with food. Many Northern European cultures however will drink in bars or pubs which are designed for the consumption of alcohol, will drink with peers (often the same sex) or 'mates' and food is a drunken afterthought when the pubs close. This is reflected in drinking pathologies where patterns of alcoholism vary culturally between continual consumption and binge drinking. Culture however is closest when it involves real and significant others - family and friends. So if they drink then that increases the probability that the child will drink too. But if they drink sensibly and in moderation then the child will model that.

7. *Is there research which shows the extent to which the effect of advertising (and particularly alcohol advertising) is restricted to brand switching?*

I have reviewed the econometric evidence in the previous section. Unfortunately there is no simple answer and some of the evidence suggests that banning alcohol is related to a reduction in consumption whereas other evidence (relating adspend to sales for example) shows no effect. The jury is out on this one.

8. *What evidence is there to support the argument that advertising will have no greater influence simply because children and young teenagers particularly enjoy it?*

Finding advertising amusing can be a first stage in influence provided factors such as attention and recall but other factors are relevant. The literature offers a more sociological/social psychological argument that says (i) media representation of

drinking often shows young people having a good time with lots of colour and music (ii) this ‘cultivates’ an image of the social act of drinking alcohol that is aspirational to people younger than 18. It is suggested that this encourages young people in some way but, as I pointed in the my paper for the ITC “Emulation, Fears and Understanding”, lots of other factors that supports these images have to be in place. These include identification with actors as heroes or ‘predisposing’ factors like a boozy family or peers. There isn’t, and I don’t know if there ever could be, a longitudinal study that tracks families and sees which are the danger ones for drinking. That would of course be the watertight study. It’s been done for violence on TV (though not as a true longitudinal study involving continuous tracking) but it’s very expensive and would need a rich country that sees it as a major social problem that they’re prepared to throw money at.

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**Children's responses to alcohol  
advertising on television:  
A summary of recent research**

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Appendix A: Table of research papers

## **Children's responses to alcohol advertising on television: A summary of recent research**

In the present day, with access to television at all hours, a wide range of alcoholic drinks and, perhaps most importantly, with far more sophisticated advertising campaigns than in the past (i.e. ones which tend to promote image by associating a lifestyle with a particular product consumption, rather than product quality), what is the present situation regarding the effects of alcohol advertising on children? Will it simply encourage later brand awareness, or will the commercials they see as children encourage them to start drinking earlier perhaps than they would have done or to drink more, or more frequently, than they would have done otherwise? The following report summarises recent research which has examined children's responses to televised alcohol advertising.

Specifically, the review will consider the amount of research undertaken and its sources, whether children like alcohol commercials and, if they do, what particular aspects of such advertising they find attractive, and their awareness of it on television. Research that has studied actual influence on children is covered and is followed by an assessment of issues raised by the reports to date, including methodological concerns. The report ends with suggestions for areas and methods for future research which will help to provide a more rounded picture of the effects of alcohol advertising on children.

### **Previous studies on children and alcohol advertising**

Literature searches for children and television alcohol advertising were carried out via recognised scientific databases such as PsychInfo, the Web of Science and Zetoc (British Library). These revealed only 11 studies in peer reviewed journals in the last 10 years which have included children aged 12 years and below. Of these studies, nine include children of 10 years and below, four of which have 10 year olds as the youngest age group studied. The source of papers is varied: three of the eleven journals are concerned with drug issues, three with health and two with child development and adolescence. Of the remaining three papers, one comes from a

psychology journal, one from a psychopharmacology journal and one from a broadcast media journal. The table in Appendix A details peer reviewed papers in this area and also includes examples of research involving adolescents and some pre-1992 studies.

This review, concentrating largely on papers in the last 10 years, reveals a distinct paucity of empirical studies specifically involving children rather than adolescents and young adults. Those studies which have taken place tend to be concentrated in the USA, with other research emanating from New Zealand and South Africa. However, for the two most recently published UK studies it is necessary to refer back as far as 1988 (Aitken, Eadie, Leathar, McNeill, & et al., 1988; Aitken, Leathar, & Scott, 1988). It is, of course, possible that more studies have occurred but are retained in-house by advertisers, as is often the case in advertising research. It is also important to note that, as styles of advertising and the use of humour in commercials vary between the UK and the USA, there may be less generalisability of findings from one country to another than might initially be thought (Caillat & Mueller, 1996). Equally, the minimum legal age for drinking differs between the USA and the UK and this should be borne in mind when considering any results reported, as personal relevance to the product advertised has been shown to increase influence (Andsager, Austin, & Pinkleton, 2001; Gorn & Florsheim, 1985; Moore & Lutz, 2000).

Fortunately, despite the lack of research, three studies in particular provide a wealth of information about children's likes and dislikes, although the youngest children taking part in any of these studies are 9 years old. Aitken, Leathar et al. (1988) interviewed a total of 150 children in groups similar to focus groups; they were aged from 10 to 16 years of age. This was followed by another study where individual interviews were carried out with 433 children aged between 10 and 17 years old and included the identification of stills from television advertisements (Aitken, Eadie et al., 1988). Both of these studies took place in Scotland. Far more recently, and as part of an ongoing study, Waiters et al. (2001) held focus group discussions with a total of 97 children aged 9-15 years in California. In their groups, the children viewed 6 pre-selected television commercials for beer and were then asked for their opinions and responses to them.

### **Do children like alcohol advertisements?**

In general, research suggests that a lot of children as young as 10 years old like televised alcohol advertisements (Aitken, Eadie et al., 1988; Aitken, Leather et al., 1988; Waiters et al., 2001; Wyllie, Casswell, & Stewart, 1989; Wyllie, Zhang, & Casswell, 1998). Not only do some children like them, but they are also included in their list of favourite advertisements (Aitken, Leather et al., 1988; Nash, Pine, & Messer, 2002; Wyllie et al., 1998) and children rate them more highly than other advertisements aimed at adults (Aitken, Leather et al., 1988).

Age and gender differences appear to exist in the liking of alcohol advertisements. For example, younger children, i.e. 10-12 years old, prefer humorous commercials for beer, older girls prefer stylish advertisements, or ones which contain feminine imagery and older boys were found to prefer modern or surreal advertising (Aitken, Eadie et al., 1988). In the same study more boys than girls liked alcohol commercials.

Whilst it seems in general that 10 year olds like alcohol advertisements they are, nonetheless, less enthusiastic about them than 12 year olds; certainly 'liking' and including alcohol advertisements as favourites increases with age. In fact, some of the younger children disliked alcohol advertisements (Aitken, Leather et al., 1988).

However, several studies suggest that this dislike may be the result of some of the younger children taking a moralistic point of view and the fact that children at this age appear to have difficulty separating the advertisement from the advertised product. Whilst children may initially say that they dislike an alcohol advertisement, Aitken, Eadie et al. (1988) found that when asked specific questions about features of the commercials it was clear that the 10-12 year olds enjoyed them. Furthermore, both Waiters et al. and Aitken, Eadie et al. identified conflict in this area and provide examples of comments made by their younger participants such as "I like almost everything about it except that it's an ad for beer" (Waiters et al., 2001, p.704) and "I like the ads, but I don't like the alcohol" (Aitken, Eadie et al., 1988; Aitken, Leather et al., 1988). So it may be that disliking an alcohol advertisement is perhaps

more associated with a lack of ability to separate the product and the advertisement rather than appeal simply increasing with age.

Waiters et al (2001) also discovered some more specific dislikes amongst children. Negative portrayals of women, encouragement to drink, and exploitation of others were all seen as off-putting aspects of alcohol advertising. Equally, visual displays of drinking, product-focused adverts and ones which associated alcohol with the outdoors or health, and which were often deemed ‘boring’, all provoked dislike. The girls in this study also disliked the association between drinking alcohol and popularity and the idea of being ‘cool’.

In general, children in the studies felt that alcohol advertisements were targeted at adults although there was some suggestion in the most recent study that teenagers could be attracted by them (Aitken, Leathar et al., 1988; Waiters et al., 2001).

### **What features of alcohol advertising appeal to children?**

Humour in advertising appeals to children (Preston, 2000). When asked to identify favourite commercials, younger children mentioned humorous advertisements for products and items aimed at their age group, e.g. sweets and breakfast cereals (Aitken, Eadie et al., 1988; Aitken, Leathar et al., 1988; Nash et al., 2002). All of the groups in the Aitken, Leathar et al. (1988) study considered humour an important aspect of advertising and one which often redeemed an advertisement for a boring, or adult-directed, product.

Humorous advertisements for alcoholic drinks were identified as popular with all the children in the Aitken et al (1988) study and were included as the main favourites for those of 12 years and over. It was also the humorous commercials which were generally mentioned by 10 year olds in response to cued recall for alcohol advertisements in this study.

Some thirteen years after Aitken’s studies, Waiters et al. (2001) had similar findings and identified different levels of sophistication of humour according to age. As would be expected, the younger children prefer simple, physical humour whilst older

children were able to appreciate more complex humour. This is in line with studies examining age-related understanding of ambiguity in advertising which is often essential to understanding or ‘getting’ the joke (Nippold, Cuyler, & Braunbeck Price, 1988). Again, more recently, in the Nash et al. (2002) study, the humorous Budweiser commercials – both the ‘Whassup’ and the chameleon campaigns - were nominated as favourites by more children aged 9 and 10 years old than any other advertisements. Moreover, unlike the Aitken study, no alcohol commercial cue was necessary to elicit this response; this would suggest that the type of humour employed in these advertisements is more appealing to younger viewers than that used fourteen years ago.

Humour can also be seen as a redeeming feature of alcohol advertisements as it appears to provide a way in which children can like a commercial without necessarily liking the product. This can be seen from the comment made by a middle school boy on his appreciation of an amusing beer commercial “I think it was because of the comedy ... because it didn’t really have anything to do with beer.” (Waiters et al., 2001). By distancing the advert from the product, it seems to ‘allow’ the viewer to enjoy the advertisement.

Music appears to attract all age groups, and brightness and colour were both cited as important ingredients for a successful advertisement by ten year olds (Aitken, Leather et al., 1988; Waiters et al., 2001; Wyllie et al., 1989). Although some of the children were against the use of personalities to promote alcohol, humour was again seen as a redeeming feature when they were used, as in the case of Paul Hogan and the Fosters’ lager advertisement, which was popular at the time of the study (Aitken, Leather et al., 1988).

As a very recent report, the Waiters et al. (2001) study is the only one to include the appeal of animated animals such as those in the Budweiser commercial. These were very popular with all age groups, but particularly the 9-11 year old children and girls of 11-14 years. In addition to the humour involved, children appreciated the cuteness and antics of the animations and the older children recognised the anthropomorphism. Of interest here is that, as with humour, one of the reasons for the appeal was again to distance the advertisement from the product. One of the middle school girls put it



succinctly, “It didn’t say [anything] about beer and it was nice. I wasn’t looking at the sign. I was looking at the main attraction – the animals.” (p.712) Clearly however, as the ‘sign’ was noticed, the advertising message was getting across. As another female said about the animatronics “You get so used to it you don’t even need to see Budweiser, you just know it’s them” (p.713).

Today, alcohol advertisements are increasingly portraying an image rather than emphasising the qualities of the drink. By associating a product with a particular image, whether it be a stylish, sociable or similar one, and often with a humorous element, advertisers infer that by using the advertised product the viewer, too, can have a similar lifestyle or, in some way, be like the person in the commercial. In this way advertisers are changing the emphasis of the advertisement by shifting it from the qualities of the product to the qualities of the consumer and his or her lifestyle. Clearly this should be an important consideration if, as studies show, television and advertising provides a source of world knowledge for children (Van Evra, 1995).

Overall, image advertisements for alcoholic drinks are popular with children: they are found to be liked, considered more likely to persuade and more likely to appeal to peers (Aitken, Leathar et al., 1988; Covell, 1992; Kelly & Edwards, 1998; Waiters et al., 2001; Wyllie et al., 1998). Interestingly, this contrasts with a preference for product oriented advertisements for general products such as clothing and personal care items (Covell, 1992). This may again have something to do with the fact that, as the Waiters et al. (2001) study found, children liked beer commercials that did not look like beer commercials. The use of strong imagery was even found to remove the need to show the product without losing the message, although a straightforward sports sponsorship advertisement depicting the New Zealand rugby team, whilst proving very popular, was far less successful at promoting the main message (Wyllie et al., 1989).

Whilst image ads were generally preferred, there were nevertheless some individual, age and gender differences. Perhaps one of the most noticeable differences appears to be a temporal one. Whereas Aitken, Leathar et al. (1988) found that only the older children in the study appreciated and understood the more complex issues in image advertisements, there was a noticeable difference in the far more recent Waiters,

Treno et al. (2001) research. In this study children appeared to be far more consumer literate: even some of the younger children (in the 9-11y group), though not all, were able to go beyond the surface features of an advertisement and were explicitly aware of the message being promoted by the advertiser. These children could identify the target audience for the advertisement and label them as ‘cool’, etc., and were able to make the associations between drinking beer and lifestyle, popularity and masculinity. Whether this can be attributed to better consumer education, to greater exposure to advertising or to more sophisticated and earlier maturing child consumers is open to question. Whatever the reason, Waiters et al. found evidence of children’s awareness of “the implicit promise of overall psychological well-being” in a comment by an elementary school female who said “‘You’ll feel better about yourself if you drink Bud Light’.” (p.711).

Nonetheless this was not the case for all of the youngest children in the Waiters et al study, nor for some in the 11-14 year age group. Some clearly did not understand what the advertiser was trying to convey. These children made negative comments about the drinkers suggested by the commercials and had negative thoughts and outcomes for the image alcohol advertisements, suggesting that people would “lose personal control, feel bad, or become less intelligent” (p.711). This was particularly true for female elementary school children (Waiters et al., 2001). Moreover, some children found difficulty in explaining themselves as the Wyllie, Casswell et al. (1989) study found: “The interviewers felt that answering imagery-type questions was not particularly easy for the children ... likely that those who were actually aware of the tough, active, outdoors type imagery exceeded the 45% who actually verbalized it” (p.645). This suggests that findings may differ if methods to tap such knowledge can be found.

However, older children (14-16 years) explicitly recognise the association between the product and sexual attractiveness, popularity, masculinity, etc. (Aitken, Leather et al., 1988; Lieberman & Orlandi, 1987; Waiters et al., 2001). Indeed, one of the 14-15 year old boys in the Waiters, Treno et al (2001) study demonstrated a mature understanding of advertising intent when talking about a beer advertisement: “‘A lot of people won’t be attracted to the beer but they will be to the lady, they won’t even notice the beer. It’s a two-in-one deal [for the Budweiser company]’” (p.704) This

skill of two loop recursive thinking, or thinking about thinking about thinking, appears not to be available to younger children and only starts to develop in early adolescence at around the age of 12 years old. (Paget, Kritt, & Bergemann, 1984).

Responses to image advertisements varied by gender as well as age or maturity. Covell (1992) found that although image alcohol advertisements were preferred overall, boys of 11-13 years were more like the younger age group of 8-10 year old girls and boys, in that both groups were less image oriented. This reflects perhaps earlier maturation amongst girls. Conversely, Kelly and Edwards (1998) found that it was boys who tended to prefer image advertisements, although this difference may be attributed to studying teenagers (aged 13 years and over) rather than children.

Preferences were not the only gender differences, however. For example, in the Wyllie, Zhang et al. (1998) study, 46% of males perceived the alcohol commercials to be realistic compared to only 28% females. Equally in the Waiters et al. (2001) study 9-11 year old boys proposed a positive outcome for the people in the advertisements whilst the 9-11 year old girls suggested a negative outcome. This would indicate that, whilst girls prefer image style commercials they are more realistic about them and that boys may possibly be more vulnerable to them.

### **Do children remember alcohol commercials, and what do they remember?**

Clearly, advertisers would like consumers to remember particular brands if, as they claim, advertising is used to promote brand loyalty or change. What about children, do they remember advertisements, even if the commercials are not targeted at them? Here it is important to distinguish between recognition and recall as they draw on either implicit or explicit knowledge respectively. In children, it is important to access their implicit knowledge, as it has been shown that children frequently hold knowledge which is not consciously available to them and which they may be unable to verbalise (Karmiloff Smith, 1992; Pine & Messer, 1999).

Recognition measures involve children reporting whether or not they have previously seen a specific advertisement and, in general, recognition of alcohol advertisements is quite good. Around 50-60% of 10-12 year old children were able to recognise a half

to two-thirds of the stills taken from television commercials shown to them (Aitken, Eadie et al., 1988; Wyllie et al., 1998), and 84% demonstrated recognition from a verbal description (Wyllie et al., 1989). Nevertheless, recognition for other adult-directed advertising was found to be better in the Nash et al. (2002) study. Whilst 48% of 9-10 year old children recognised stills from three or more alcohol advertisements, 82% of the children were able to recognise the same number of non-alcohol television commercials.

Identification of brand names, or explicit recall is, as expected, lower. In the Wyllie, et al. (1998) study, half of the children who recognised the advertisement were able to name the beer although Aitken, Eadie et al. (1988) found that the majority of children could name at least four of the commercials. Even in free recall, 10 year old children have been found to have good recall of alcohol advertisements when asked to name as many they can remember; the difference between these children and older ones is that they require a prompt or cue to alcohol advertising in order to do so (Aitken, Leathar et al., 1988). One thing that emerged from the Wyllie et al. (1989) report is that although recognition and recall for alcohol commercials were good, even in 9 and 10 year olds, both abilities nevertheless improved as a function of age.

The ability to recognise that an advertisement was for alcohol, even when unable to name the product, also increased with age, e.g. 67% of 10 year olds who had seen the advertisement and 88% of 14 year olds in the Wyllie et al. (1989) study. Of interest in the Wyllie et al. (1998) study is that, despite no beer being included in either of the two advertisements shown to them, 82% were able to say that the advertisement was for alcohol or beer even if, again, they were unable to name the brand. A similar, though not quite as substantial, effect was found in the Nash et al. (2002) study where 52% of those who recognised the advertisement identified them as alcohol commercials. As with the Wyllie et al. (1998) study, the stills chosen for this research avoided showing the product. This suggests that implicit knowledge of particular types or styles of advertising are being associated with the product.

There even appear to be differences in recall and recognition of alcohol commercials by gender. For example, in the Aitken, Eadie et al. (1988) study, boys were found to recognise and recall more alcohol commercials. These findings contrast with other

studies where, in general, girls have been found to have better knowledge of non-alcohol television commercials (e.g. Edens & McCormick, 2000; Nash et al., 2002). Whilst it may be that alcohol advertisements are more memorable to boys, it may also be due to the nature of the advertisements used in the Aitken et al. study, which were largely beer advertisements, as equal numbers of girls and boys recognised the Malibu commercial.

So if children are aware of alcohol advertisements, recognising and identifying them, are they learning from them? Certainly Grube & Wallack (1994) found that children's knowledge of brands and slogans was related to their awareness of alcohol advertising and that better awareness resulted from increased television viewing. As television commercials present only a positive view of alcohol then this would suggest that those who watch more commercial television when young should have more positive expectations of alcohol. Clearly, however, it is important to note that such expectations may be tempered by other viewing, i.e. television programmes that portray drinking.

Equally, Austin and Nach Ferguson (1995) found that brand knowledge outweighed general knowledge about alcohol, and suggested that children are gaining a lot of their information about alcohol from advertising. This was confirmed by 54% of 10-13 year old males and 39% 10-13 year old females in the Wyllie, Zhang et al. (1998) study who indicated that they get information about alcohol from advertising, although this information gathering decreased as a function of age. However, the direction of causality in these relationships has yet to be identified as it may not be a causal relationship.

Are children influenced by televised alcohol advertisements?

Surely the most important part of research into alcohol advertising and children, and probably one of the most difficult to assess given their age, is the actual influence that advertising plays in promoting drinking, *per se*, to children, albeit for use at a later date. In general, research up to early the 1990s had very inconclusive and mixed

findings and there have been very few studies on the effects of televised alcohol advertising on children.

Strickland's (1982) study of teenagers and Adlaf & Kohn's (1989) reassessment of the Strickland data both found little evidence of the positive direct influence of alcohol advertising on behaviour. More recently both Lipsitz, Brake et al. (1993) and Austin & Nach Ferguson (1995), in both cases in studies with younger children (10 years and 7 years respectively), also suggested that there was little effect of alcohol advertising, although brand specific knowledge was found to predict drinking. However in both these studies the validity of some of the measures was questioned by the authors.

More generally in the 1990s the influence of television alcohol advertising on alcohol behaviour has tended to find a more positive relationship between advertising and alcohol behaviour, although direction of causality continues to be a problem. Even children tend to believe that alcohol advertising encourages drinking and this is especially true for image based advertisements (Lieberman & Orlandi, 1987; Wyllie et al., 1989; Wyllie et al., 1998). Liking alcohol advertisements, in conjunction with parent, peer and age variables, was found to predict 35% variance for drinking at 20 years old (Wyllie et al., 1998); and Grube & Wallack (1994) found that an awareness of advertisements led to more positive beliefs about alcohol and, in turn, to intention to drink as an adult. Similar findings have resulted from research into tobacco advertising (Aitken, Eadie, Hastings, & Haywood, 1991).

Austin & Meili (1994) found that intentions to drink could be related to a desire to be like the person on the television who is drinking. Again, research into tobacco advertising with children has uncovered similar, though not identical, findings in that a favourable comparison of self-image with a smoker stereotype on television was more likely to result in smoking as an adolescent (Aloise Young, Hennigan, & Graham, 1996). Equally, the age of the actor in a commercial appears to be important, particularly for those in their early teens, with a positive relationship between alcohol use and those who perceived the actor in an alcohol advertisement to be under age for drinking (Slater, Rouner, Beauvais, Murphy, & et al., 1996).

Perhaps one of the most interesting studies showing the positive effects of alcohol advertising on a sample of 551 children as young as 9 is that by Dunn & Yniguez (1999). In this study exposure to beer commercials as opposed to soda commercials (control group) meant that 4<sup>th</sup> graders were more likely to activate positive and arousing expectancies and that these expectancies would be more like those of 5<sup>th</sup> graders than those in the control group. As a result Dunn et al. suggest that, “exposure to advertising may accelerate the developmental process of shifting toward the activation of positive and arousing expectancies and away from the activation of negative and sedating expectancies” (p.480).

These studies suggest that even with more sophisticated, consumer literate children – ones who are aware of the advertising message as an exhortation to buy the product to benefit the company (Waiters et al., 2001) – there is still a need to research further: a knowledge of the purpose of advertising is clearly not enough to reduce influence. Moreover, Linn, Delucchi & de Benedictis (1984) highlighted the discrepancy between consumer knowledge and advertising cynicism in teenagers with the teenagers’ actual behaviour, finding that original criteria set by the individual was disregarded in the face of advertisers’ promotional criteria.

### **Issues arising from research to date**

Studies of the effects of alcohol advertising frequently rely on survey instruments and correlational data. However, as with many such studies, whether finding a positive or negative relationship between television alcohol advertising and drinking behaviour, it is difficult to attribute directional causality, i.e. did an interest in alcohol stimulate the interest in alcohol advertisements or vice versa. Indeed, this is acknowledged by several researchers in the field who have called for prospective or longitudinal studies on children and alcohol advertising, although to date this has not occurred (Aitken, Leather et al., 1988; Dunn & Yniguez, 1999; Grube & Wallack, 1994; Lieberman & Orlandi, 1987). Nevertheless, two longitudinal studies have considered the more general role of television on alcohol behaviour and children (Anderson, Huston, Schmitt, Linebarger, & Wright, 2001; Robinson, Chen, & Killen, 1998) whilst a third researched the effects of alcohol advertising on teenagers (Connolly, Casswell, Zhang, & Silva, 1994).

Leaving aside the problem of causality, conventional survey instruments, as used in many of the experiments cited in this report, use measures which tap only explicit knowledge. A few have made some attempt to tap implicit knowledge, (e.g. Austin & Johnson, 1997; Covell, 1992; Dunn & Yniguez, 1999; Waiters et al., 2001) although some of the measures used suggest more validity than others. For example, whilst Austin et al. (1997) made an admirable attempt at detecting influence on behaviour, asking children to choose between toy can of either an alcoholic or soft drink may not have the best external validity. It is therefore important to develop and use reliable and valid measures which access non-verbalisable knowledge in order to provide a more complete picture of children's responses to alcohol advertising on television. The use of research measures which tap both children's implicit and explicit knowledge of alcohol advertising would assist in gathering more accurate information about 10 year olds' awareness and preference for alcohol advertisements and in ascertaining whether liking and awareness really do increase solely as a function of age or whether there is already underlying knowledge and what that knowledge is. Hopefully, it would also help to overcome difficulties in responding to questions about image advertisements and would be more applicable for use with even younger children. In this respect it would be valuable in discovering whether children below the age of 10 are aware of alcohol advertising, whether it is influential at this age and, if necessary, inform decisions on intervention techniques and at what age to introduce prevention programmes.

One of the criticisms of many of the alcohol studies to date is that they tend to concentrate on beer advertising which children, and adults alike, perceive as being male oriented (Wyllie et al., 1989). In fact, such was the difference in both consumption and recall of advertising in the Connolly, Casswell, Zhang & Silva (1994) study that analysis of data was separated by both gender and type of alcohol. In their study, for example, 68% males compared to 20% females reported that three-quarters of their alcohol consumption was beer; likewise beer ads comprised 75% of the total advertising recalled by males at 15 years old compared to 39% for females. Of a total of 18 studies in the past ten years researching the effects of alcohol on children of school age (8 to 18 years old) eight of these used only beer advertisements. So, whilst gender differences appear throughout the literature the



effect may be artefactual. It may be that alcohol advertisements are even more popular than the studies suggest, especially in view of a recent rise in targeting females with such products as Bacardi Breezer, Archers, Reef, etc. Ideally future studies should include advertising for these types of drink.

Finally, one of the recurring issues from the review is that of children liking alcohol advertisements but not liking alcohol. For example, the youngest children, taking a moralistic approach, would sometimes claim to dislike an advertisement because they did not like the product and yet further probing found that the advertisement itself was liked. Children aged 9 to 11 seemed to find it difficult to separate the commercial from the product. Next came children who declared that they liked the commercial, but not the product, and then children, even some of the older ones, who liked specific types of advertisements – i.e. image oriented commercials or ones containing humour or animatronics, - for the very reason that the particular feature distanced the advertisement from the product, alcohol. It seems that even some of the older children prefer not to see the alcohol.

### **Summary and conclusions**

Although there has been a distinct lack of studies looking at the effects of alcohol advertising on children below the age of 12 years old, certain key findings emerge:

- ◆ children aged 10-12, like alcohol advertisements but not necessarily the alcohol
- ◆ children find specific aspects of TV alcohol advertising appealing, namely:
  - humour
  - music
  - bright colours
  - animated characters and animals
  - image ads rather than product quality ads
- ◆ gender differences appear to exist but may be artefactual
- ◆ generic alcohol advertisement knowledge is better than brand awareness
- ◆ children find the advertisements easily recognisable as alcohol commercials
- ◆ positive influence may be related to:

- liking alcohol advertisements
- the actor in the advert,
- the age of the actor in the commercial
- mere exposure to advertising
- ◆ there is a lack of time order evidence
- ◆ developmental issues need to be considered, e.g. measures to tap implicit knowledge are required for children
- ◆ studies examining all type of alcohol, and not just beer, are needed

So it seems that, despite not being targeted at them, some children in the 10-12 year age group find television alcohol commercials attractive, that certain styles of advertising are more attractive than others and that there are gender differences in responses to such commercials. However, the research also suggests that there may be more information available which is difficult to access via explicit methods. Moreover, very little is known about the response to alcohol advertising by children younger than this – are they, too, being attracted to the advertisements, do they understand what is being advertised, etc?

Future research should concentrate on such shortfalls, including remedying the lack of research, particularly in the UK. For example, a prospective study would provide valuable information as suggested by several researchers, as would complementary studies which access both implicit and explicit knowledge in children from the ages of 7 to 12 and which explore alcoholic drinks in general, not solely beer. These would help to define whether there really are gender differences and age differences in responses to alcohol advertising. Equally, studying younger children, i.e. below 10 years, should help to identify at what age children become attracted to alcohol commercials. Taken together the studies would provide a rounded view of the effect of television alcohol advertising on children.

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## APPENDIX A

**ALCOHOL ADVERTISING AND ...****AGE, GENDER, MEMORY, LIKING, APPEAL, IMAGE ADS, SPORTS**

Author	Date	Country	Adv	Testing	Type of stdy	Ages	Type of Publication
(Anderson, Huston, Schmitt, Linebarger, & Wright, 2001)	2001	USA	TV gen	Effect of adult tv/adv Effect of sports view	long	5y view 15-19 study	Child Dev't
(Andsager, Austin, & Pinkleton, 2001)	2001	USA	beer	PSA messages v alc ads	quan	college	Communication
(Walters, Treno, & Grube, 2001)	2001	USA	beer	Appeal of alc ads	c/s	9-15	Drug
(Dunn & Yniguez, 1999)	1999	USA	beer	beer v soft drink / expectancy	c/s	4 <sup>th</sup> gr 9.7y 5 <sup>th</sup> gr 10.8y	Psychopharmacology
(Zinser, Freeman, & Ginnings, 1999)	1999	USA	alc + non	Attitude & recall for variety of ads incl alc	c/s	22y	Drug
(Kelly & Edwards, 1998)	1998	USA	alc	Image v product quality ads (print ads)	quan	7 <sup>th</sup> gr 9 <sup>th</sup> gr 11 <sup>th</sup> gr	Adolescence
(Parker, 1998)	1998	USA	beer	Reader response/ meaning based model (uses life knowledge)	qual	college	Advertising
(Robinson, Chen, & Killen, 1998)	1998	USA	TV gen	TV viewing on alc use	long		Pediatrics
(Wyllie, Zhang, & Casswell, 1998)	1998	NZ	beer	Response to alc ads (10-17y)	quan	10-17	Drug
(Ziervogel, Ahmed, Flisher, & Robertson, 1997)	1998	SA	alc	Alcohol misuse in S African males inc infl of alc ads	qual	9 <sup>th</sup> gr equiv	Health
(Austin & Johnson, 1997)	1997	USA	beer	Effects of media literacy training	quant	3 <sup>rd</sup> gr	Health

## Annex 5b to Ofcom Alcohol Advertising consultation

Author	Date	Country	Adv	Testing	Type of study	Ages	Type of Publication
				on alc ads			
(Bloom, Hogan, & Blazing, 1997)	1997	USA	beer	Sports & beer			Health behaviour
(Slater, Rouner, Beauvais, Murphy, & et al., 1996)	1996	USA	beer	Age of actors in alc ads	c/s	13.3y 16.6y	Drug
(Slater, Rouner, Murphy, Beauvais, & et al., 1996a)	1996	USA	beer	Effectiveness of alc education on counterarguing beer ads		12-18	Drug
(Slater, Rouner, Murphy, Beauvais, & et al., 1996b)	1996	USA	beer	Beer, non-beer, sport, no sport	c/s qual	13.5y 16.4y	Drug
(Austin & Nach Ferguson, 1995)	1995	USA	alc	Sources & influences of knowledge of alc	quant	7-12	Health
(Unger, Johnson, & Rohrbach, 1995)	1995	USA	alc +tob	Recognition & liking of adv. Users, non & susc non-users		13-16	Health
(Austin & Meili, 1994)	1994	USA	alc	Alcohol portrayal on TV on alcohol beliefs	quan	10-11y*	Broadcast
(Connolly, Casswell, Zhang, & Silva, 1994)	1994	USA	alc	Recall of ads/alc consumption	long	13/15 – 18	Drug
(Grube & Wallack, 1994)	1994	USA	beer	adv awareness – effect on intention to drink	c/s	10-14	Health
(Thomson, Casswell, & Stewart, 1994)	1994	NZ	alc	experts' opinion on alc adv  1. comms/educ 2. advertisers 3. market researchers	qual	-	Drug
(Lipsitz, Brake, Vincent, & Winters, 1993)	1993	USA	beer	viewing alc ads v soft drinks on alc expectancy	c/s	5 <sup>th</sup> gr 8 <sup>th</sup> gr	Psychology
(Covell, 1992)	1992	Can	alc + tob + non	appeal of quality vs image	c/s	8-10 11-13 14-16	Adolescence
(Adlaf & Kohn, 1989)	1989	USA	alc	effect of ad exposure on alc cons/abuse	re- asst	12y 14y 16y	Drug

Annex 5b to Ofcom Alcohol Advertising consultation

<b>Author</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Adv</b>	<b>Testing</b>	<b>Type of study</b>	<b>Ages</b>	<b>Type of Publication</b>
(Wyllie, Casswell, & Stewart, 1989)	1989	NZ	beer	boys responses to beer ads – inc sport & patriotism  gender	c/s	9,10, 11,12, 13, 14y	Drug
(Aitken, Eadie, Leathar, McNeill, & et al., 1988)	1988	UK	alc	perceptions of alc ads	c/s	10-17	Drug
(Aitken, Leathar, & Scott, 1988)	1988	UK	alc	perceptions of alc ads exploratory work	c/s	10, 12, 14, 16	Drug
(Lieberman & Orlandi, 1987)	1987	USA	alc	Recall any alc ad, specific aspects recalled and noticed	qual	6 <sup>th</sup> gr	Drug
(Atkin, Hocking, & Block, 1984)	1984	USA	alc	does adv make a difference			Communication
(Atkin, Neuendorf, & McDermott, 1983)	1983	USA	alc	alc adv effect on ex- cessive/haz drinking	quan field surv	12-22	Drug
(Strickland, 1982)	1982	USA	alc	Effect of alc ad exposure on alc consumption	quan	7 <sup>th</sup> gr 9 <sup>th</sup> gr 11 <sup>th</sup> gr	Advertising



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Alcohol Advertising and Young  
People

RESEARCH REPORT

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- Independent Television Commission and Ofcom
- British Board of Film Classification
- Advertising Standards Authority

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# **A. Research background and objectives**

## **A.1 Research background**

The Independent Television Commission (ITC) was responsible for licensing and regulating commercial television channels in the UK. These responsibilities passed to Ofcom (the Office of Communications) in January 2004. The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) classifies advertisements for cinema release. The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is the independent, self-regulatory body for non-broadcast advertisements, seeking to ensure that all advertising is legal, decent, honest and truthful. All three make (or made, prior to the creation of Ofcom) decisions regarding alcohol advertising – advertising which young people may see – and this project was jointly commissioned in 2003 to improve their mutual understanding of the effects of alcohol advertising on people who are too young to buy alcohol legally. More specifically, the research was intended to inform decisions about:

- the code of practice regarding television alcohol advertising likely to be seen by young viewers;
- the classification of cinema advertisements involving alcohol;
- the rules (and their enforcement) relating to alcohol advertising in non-broadcast media.

## **A.2 Research objectives**

The overall objective of the research was to help inform decisions about alcohol advertising that would be seen by young people. To do this the research needed, ideally, to establish:

- whether alcohol advertising encourages young people to see drinking as appealing;

- whether the behaviour of young people is influenced by alcohol advertising in the ways that the ITC, BBFC and ASA wished to prevent (see background above).

Our starting point was that it was difficult to see how this could reliably be done. We envisaged two significant problems:

- first, the difficulty of separating impressions of alcohol which have been drawn from the wider culture, from impressions derived from the way it is advertised;
- second, it is clear that the effects of advertising may be at a subconscious level; matched samples – young people who had been exposed to alcohol advertising, matched with others who had not – would have been helpful, but were not feasible; moreover a cohort of young people who had not seen any advertising for alcohol would have other distinctive characteristics that would muddy the waters.

The ITC, BBFC and ASA had anticipated this likely difficulty but wished to proceed on the grounds that, even if the more ambitious objectives proved elusive, highly relevant and useful material at the conscious level would be obtainable. The project therefore aimed to inform debate about the issue by investigating, so far as possible:

- via 'projective' techniques, what young people have absorbed about alcohol advertising messages seen in the past;
- what key messages young people absorb, or appear to absorb, from examples of television and cinema commercials and press and poster executions advertising alcoholic drinks;
- how young people interpret the advertising – what they say about it and what they identify as appealing about it;
- how the advertising is thought of in terms of:

- its relevance to them now, as people below the legal drinking age;
  - what it says about ways in which alcohol is enjoyed by older people;
  - its contribution to assumptions young people make about who is 'cool', 'sexy', 'hard', 'tough', 'sophisticated', 'mature', 'successful' etc.
- How young people talk about alcohol and about people who drink it, and the extent to which what they say appears to reflect the influence of advertising.

The hope at the outset was that knowing what young people say about the advertising, combined with projective techniques aimed at getting beyond top-of-mind reactions, would enable more informed decisions to be made about codes of practice and film classification. But it was accepted on commission that a single piece of qualitative research was unlikely to provide a robust answer to the question – what is the true influence of this advertising on behaviour? Firm conclusions in such areas are notoriously elusive despite many independent academic studies over many years.

## **B. Research methodology and sample**

### **B.1 Research methodology**

Fieldwork for the research comprised 18 extended small group discussions, each lasting up to two hours, and six paired depth interviews with pairs of friends lasting between 60 and 90 minutes.

As described in the previous section, projective techniques were employed in both the groups and the paired depth interviews in an effort to get beyond top-of-mind and rational perceptions about alcohol advertising. These included:

- Planet Ideal', for which respondents were asked to imagine an environment in which everything was organised to suit them and were then asked a long series of questions about what life was like on this planet (see Appendix C for lines of questioning);
- kindred exercise, 'Planet Rubbish';
- making collages typifying advertisements; respondents were given a set of visuals and words cut from magazines and asked to choose those they felt evoked the feelings they thought advertising strove to create;
- similarly, a collage representing the mood of a typical soft drink advertisement; as would be imagined, this exercise was intended to highlight the differences respondents saw between alcohol and soft drink advertising.

The exercises used were not always exactly the same in each piece of fieldwork; the researchers chose whatever they thought would work best with those particular respondents.



A variety of advertising material was shown to respondents, including cinema and television commercials and press and poster executions, to cover the various expected associations with alcohol – sex, rebellion, cool, tough and so on. A full list and discussion of the advertising material exposed will be found in section F of the report.

## **B.2 Research sample**

The sample included:

- a roughly equal mix of male and female respondents, interviewed separately;
- a range of ages, weighted to 10–15 year olds, with age breaks in line with the school year for homogeneity: Year 6 (10–11); Year 7: (11–12); Year 8 (12–13); Year 9 (13–14); Year 10 (14–15); Year 11 (15–16);
  - following a pilot group, it was decided that sessions with Year 6 pupils were unlikely to be helpful; the remaining session was replaced by a session with 17 year olds
- a broad spread of social–economic grades (B, C1, C2, D and E) weighted equally and split BC1/C2DE;
- a range of reported attitudes to, and behaviour regarding, alcohol;
- five locations: three in England (London, Birmingham and Leeds), one in Wales (Bridgend), and one in Scotland (Glasgow).
  - this spread of locations included urban, suburban and more rural neighbourhoods.

The intention was that respondents should not be alerted to the subject of the research and the contact questionnaire was designed to obscure its focus. However (as is often the case) some parents (whose permission was required) spilled the beans. The majority of the sample

had been to the cinema in the last four months and all respondents watched commercial TV channels on a regular basis.

The sample specification, in terms of demographics, alcohol use and location, was as set below.

### **Extended small group discussions**

- EG1: Male, year 11, BC1, regular users, South urban<sup>27</sup>
- EG2: Female, year 6, C2DE, non-user, Wales urban
- EG3: Male, year 7, C2DE, occasional users, Midlands suburban/rural
- EG4: Male, year 7, BC1, non-users, South urban
- EG5: Male, year 8, BC1, occasional or regular users, Scotland
- EG6: Male, year 9, C2DE, occasional users, North non-urban
- EG7: Male, year 10, BC1, non-users, Wales urban
- EG8: Male, year 11, C2DE, regular users, North non-urban
- EG9: Female, aged 17, C2DE, regular users, Scotland
- EG10: Female, year 7, BC1, non-users, North non-urban
- EG11: Female, year 8, C2DE, occasional users, South urban
- EG12: Female, year 9, BC1, regular users, Midlands suburban/rural
- EG13: Female, year 9, C2DE, occasional users, Midlands suburban
- EG14: Female: year 10, C2DE, regular users, South urban
- EG15: Male, year 10, BC1, regular users, South urban
- EG16: Female, year 11, BC1, non- or occasional users, Scotland
- EG17: Male: 17, C2DE, regular users, South urban
- EG18: Female, 17, BC1, occasional users, North non-urban

### **Friendship pairs**

- PD1: Male, year 6, C2DE, occasional users, Midlands urban
- PD2: Male, year 8, C2DE, non-users, South urban
- PD3: Male, year 10, BC1, regular users, North non-urban
- PD4: Female, year 7, C2DE, occasional users, South urban
- PD5: Female, year 9, BC1, non- or occasional users, Scotland
- PD6: Female, year 11, C2DE, regular users, Wales urban

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<sup>27</sup> The order may seem odd; this is because some group definitions were changed after initial agreement of the sample design.

## C. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**C.1** On this evidence young people often appear to accept that alcohol advertising is not aimed at them, but at people who are over 18. The age of the people depicted in advertising is often said to make it clear that an audience of people over 18 is intended. However, the level of interest and involvement shown by respondents in some of the more arresting advertisements shown tended to believe this, and:

- some advertising (of the examples put into this research, Budweiser *Ants* and Bacardi Breezer *Vet*) frustrates this mechanism by using animals or animation;
- much of the advertising which features older people also appeals to the young by virtue of the cast, the humour, or the music (for example, Bacardi *Vinnie Jones*, Smirnoff Ice *Theatre* and *Answerphone*);
- the brand values of alcopops are strikingly attuned to adolescence; they celebrate mocking the older generation and getting away with things.

**C.2** A spirit of kicking against restraints is apparent in much alcopop advertising. We have no clear evidence to offer on this but we formed the impression that one of the constraints these brand values may undermine is young people's acceptance of the minimum legal age for drinking. A parallel factor is that, in the past, the taste of alcohol has generally been unappealing to children and to many young teenagers – it has been an acquired taste (notwithstanding concoctions like rum and black). Now, however, alcopops have made alcohol much more palatable, and therefore appealing, to the young. It seems likely that impatience with society's rules on drinking has increased as a result. Our impression strongly is that young people view the combination of the product's palatability and the tone of the advertising as indicating that this form of alcohol is not so clearly targeted at adults.

**C.3** Some of the advertising examined in the research (for Bacardi) shows alcohol being poured with reckless abandon. Excess perhaps always

seems cool and exciting, moderation and self-restraint uncool and boring, but it is not likely to be helpful to celebrate excess in the way that these images clearly do.

- C.4** Much of the advertising exposed includes sexual references of some kind. A number of ads, both TV and print, quite clearly attempt to associate brands with sexual reward. Young people seem not to take much notice of the most blatant of these. Sexual attitudes and behaviour are influenced by a host of powerful cultural influences and it would be foolish to imagine that alcohol advertising is prominent among them. However young people do notice that apparent sexual opportunity and abundant alcohol frequently go together in the advertising and it would be equally foolish to imagine that this does not, cumulatively over time, strengthen the perception that there is a connection between them.
- C.5** The projective techniques proved of only limited help in penetrating deeper than top-of-mind attitudes and exploring what, if anything, young people may unconsciously absorb from alcohol advertising; many respondents were unwilling to enter into the exercises sufficiently whole-heartedly. This was disappointing but not a surprise given the long history of unconvincing attempts to measure the real effects of advertising on behaviour. The techniques did not suggest that alcohol advertising is unusually prominent in young people's minds, or provide any firm evidence that advertising was influencing their ideas about alcohol in harmful ways. Nevertheless, as explained above, the research as a whole offered interesting insights into how these age groups view alcohol brands and advertising, and throw up some concerns about potential conflict with social policy.
- C.6** The picture and word collages reinforced what respondents' consistently said – namely that they associate alcohol with parties and thereby with 'a good time'. The collages also suggest a link between alcohol and sex, with many young people of about 15 and above justifying this by saying that alcohol is an element in social gatherings when the sexes get together, and that it also reduces inhibitions in a way that facilitates negotiating sex.

## **D. MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **D.1 Context: attitudes to alcohol**

With respondents ranging in age from 11 to 17 years old, it was inevitable that this study should find widely varying feelings towards, and experience of, alcohol. In addition to age, a number of other factors – among them: social background, family circumstances and the influence of school and peer groups – played a part in this variation, making it difficult to divide respondents into groups with discrete sets of attitudes.

As far as it is possible to generalise on the basis of the fieldwork, younger respondents (those in school years 6 to 9) had little or no experience of regular drinking, and a large majority seemed content to treat alcohol as an adult prerogative.

Those in the middle of the age range (school years 10 and 11) identified a clear connection between drinking alcohol and having a good time. For these respondents, alcohol seemed to be an important ingredient in a 'great party', but most placed the emphasis on the quality of the overall experience and alcohol's contribution to this, rather than on the effects of alcohol more exclusively.

Concentration on the effects of alcohol only emerged clearly among older respondents (those in year 11 and those aged 17). There was no mistaking the appeal of getting drunk among both male and female respondents of this age – indeed, many regularly planned their drinking so as to get intoxicated as fast and cheaply as possible, whatever the occasion and circumstances.

The factors mentioned in the first paragraph above mean that these age boundaries are loose, and many respondents fell outside the main patterns.

We should note at this point that the projective techniques used in the research, notably the 'Planet Ideal' exercise, did not suggest that the young people in the sample were unusually or precociously interested

in alcohol, or were under significant misapprehensions about its place in adult life (see also section E).

### **D.1.1 When, with whom and how much do young people drink?**

As noted above, many of the youngest respondents had little or no experience of drinking alcohol; what consumption there is at this age is mostly limited to special family occasions, and is moderated and provided by parents. It seemed that the majority of these respondents were content for this to be the case.

Some younger respondents said that they had been drunk, and clearly a significant minority had tried alcohol outside adult control. It was not always clear that they had enjoyed the experience or wanted to repeat it. Drinking at this age seemed to express curiosity to find out what alcohol was like in terms of both taste and effects. Episodes were seen, self-consciously, as experiments and did not seem to represent determination to jump the gun and start incorporating alcoholic drinks into everyday social life.

By year 10 or 11, respondents had begun to drink more frequently, but most consumption still seemed to be limited to certain situations. Going to parties and being with large groups of mates was increasingly important to respondents of this age, and drinking some alcohol was often seen to be key to the success of these occasions.

*“A great party obviously has to have alcohol—otherwise you’d be sitting there doing nothing, not scared but conscious of what everyone else is doing. So you need to get eased up a little bit to have a good party.”*  
*Group 15: male, BC1, year 10, regular drinkers, south*

Respondents of this age did not often intend to get drunk – their drinking was usually only part of the overall experience of going out, and the amount that they drank reflected this. Consumption of alcohol outside large groups of friends still seemed limited to family occasions, although these might be more frequent than was the case for younger respondents. There seemed to be

little inclination to drink outside these organised situations – respondents did not see the point of getting even a little drunk alone or with small groups of friends.

*“If you’re just sitting in, watching TV or something like that, or just hanging out over at a friend’s house, you know, then you could get nailed, but there would be no point.”*

*Group 7: male, BC1, year 10, non-drinker, Wales*

After year 11, the emphasis of a night out changed for many respondents. Whereas before they might have had some alcohol as part of the overall ‘good time’ experience, now they drank frequently as a matter of course, often in very small groups of friends, and often with the aim of getting drunk.

**Question 1:** *How does the [perfect] evening end up?*

*“Everybody is flying.”*

*“Everybody is wasted.”*

*“Everybody is still drunk at 11 o’clock in the morning – the next morning.”*

*Group 9: female, C2DE, 17, occasional/regular drinkers, Scotland*

There was also a greater tendency for respondents at this age to drink at home, or at times other than ‘a night out’. Alongside this, drinking a lot became increasingly central to a ‘good time’.

*“Even if there is not a party, as long as you are drunk, you can still turn a boring night into an exciting night, so alcohol is good because it means that you are always enjoying yourself.”*

*Group 15: male, BC1, year 10, regular drinkers, south*

There were, of course, respondents of this age to whom these generalisations did not apply. Some drank only occasionally, and a significant minority could not see the attraction of getting very drunk for its own sake.

*“I don’t see the point of going out and getting absolutely plastered and not knowing who or where you are. The amount of money it costs as well.”*

*Group 18: female, BC1, 17, occasional drinkers, north*

But very few could conceive of having a good time – especially at a party – without alcohol playing a significant part.

*“I could never imagine going out on a big night out and just not drinking.”*

*Group 18: female, BC1, 17, occasional drinkers, north*

#### **D.1.2 Question 1: What do young people drink?**

The most popular type of drink across all age groups (both male and female) in this sample was the alcopop, typically Bacardi Breezer, Smirnoff Ice or WKD. Alcopops were especially associated with going out to clubs, and with partying generally, although many respondents also drank them at home and occasionally with their parents.

#### **Question 2: Why ?**

*“Because they are sort of aimed at those 19 year olds who want to go clubbing.”*

*Group 11: female, C2DE, year 8, occasional drinkers, south*

An important feature of alcopops is that they offer the ingénue a painless way into alcohol – unlike most beers, wine and spirits, alcopops taste pleasant to the first time drinker.

*“I think alcopops is best because it’s similar to juice but it’s alcohol at the same time.”*

*Group 5: male, BC1, year 8, regular drinkers, Scotland*

*“They taste just like pop, so you can just keep downing them.”*

*Group 6: male, C2DE, year 9, occasional drinkers, north*

It seems probable that, before, young people were more accepting that alcohol was appropriately an adult preserve because they did not like the taste; alcoholic drinks were, with some exceptions, ‘*an acquired taste*’. Alcopops make alcohol taste reliably pleasant and thereby make it more accessible to young people. This is conjecture, but it may be that, for young people, alcopops make the alcohol licensing laws, or parental



restrictions, seem less warranted – rules perhaps born of a desire to control the young. There is a hypothesis that the minimum drinking age is more likely to seem arbitrary in relation to drinks that taste pleasant than in relation to drinks that are unpleasant unless you are (old enough to be) used to them.

This development alone perhaps makes it more likely that young people will want to start drinking alcohol regularly at an earlier age than previous generations. The law and parental control used to be undergirded by aversion to the taste, now less likely to be the case.

There have long been drinks that include mixers that effectively mask the taste of the alcohol – rum and coke, gin and tonic, gin and orange, port and lemon, etc. Alcopops appear to be giving such mixes a more unitary identity, so that both the spirit base and the mixer are transcended by the brand image which (we will go on to argue) is itself very accessible to the young.

### **Question 3: What would alcohol be like on an ideal planet?**

*“It would taste nicer.”*

*“Vodka wouldn’t taste like inflammable liquid – it would taste like water.”*

Group 15: male, BC1, year 10, regular drinkers, south

*“Bacardi Breezers are nice. I don’t like beer. It leaves a horrible taste in your mouth.”*

Group 4: male, BC1, year 7, non-drinkers, south

Some respondents chose alcopops because they thought that the alcohol content was lower than in other drinks; misconceptions about the alcoholic strength of alcopops were common.

*“You’ll think nothing’s happened and you’ll get another one. With alcopops you don’t realise that it’s alcohol – you just drink loads. They are 3.5%, someone said. It’s basically lemonade.”*

Group 15: male, BC1, year 10, regular drinkers, south

*“They’re not that strong, about three per cent. One wouldn’t do anything to you, whereas a lager would make you slightly dazed.”*

*Group 4: male, BC1, year 7, non-drinkers, south*

*Question 4: Do people get drunk on Bacardi Breezers?*

*“Yeah, but they would have to drink about eight bottles of them.”*

*Group 13: female, C2DE, year 9, occasional drinkers, Midlands*

It was difficult to disentangle the image of some of the most popular alcopops from the spirit brands behind them. Smirnoff and Bacardi, in particular, seemed to have a high level of recognition as leading brand names in the ‘alcohol’ market. It seems likely that these long established brands confer a degree of authenticity on the newly created alcopops, Ice and Breezer. This authenticity seems more likely to matter to slightly older drinkers than to teenagers but we are uncertain about this. It was noticeable that there was often a degree of confusion between commercials for Bacardi and Bacardi Breezer, for example. It may be that ‘Breezer’ signals something that will taste reliably pleasant, and ‘Bacardi’ supplies a degree of sophistication, a validation that the drink does indeed (despite tasting so pleasant and innocuous) belong with the deep mysteries of alcohol.

Cider and wine appealed because they were available inexpensively, and were especially popular amongst older girls who wanted to get drunk as quickly and cheaply as possible.

*“I usually drink cider because it’s cheap.”*

*Group 9: female, C2DE, 17, occasional/regular drinkers, Scotland*

*“It depends where you are, really. If you’re going out somewhere, you probably get something cheap but effective (Lambrini).”*

*Group 1: male, BC1, year 11, regular drinkers, south*

Some older respondents also reported drinking cheap alcohol at home before going out, so that they would not have to spend so much on drink later.

Beer, neat spirits and more expensive wine were not as popular, although some older boys (and a few girls) did drink beer and others wanted to in the future. As noted above, very few respondents reported enjoying spirits without flavoured mixers, and many thought that drinks with such a high percentage of alcohol were only drunk by people of their parents' ages. Wine was drunk in family situations (and provided by the parents) and sometimes among friends, but, again, it was usually seen as an older, more sophisticated drink.

### **D.1.3 The appeal of alcohol**

Different people are attracted to alcohol for different reasons and generalisations are hazardous. Some observations may be useful to provide a context for what we report later about respondents' attitudes and reactions to alcohol advertising.

As noted above, attitudes to alcohol tend to evolve as a young person grows up. Simple curiosity and consequent experimentation give way to identification of alcohol as important to sociability and the success of a party. For some young people of 16 and over, drinking a lot becomes a focus for enjoyment in itself. There is great variation in how and when these patterns unfold.

Illegality contributes to the interestingness of alcohol for some young people under 18. Drinking is modestly rebellious, a bit of a challenge, something to talk about with your friends, a manifestation of cool, a rite of passage.

*"Because we know we can't have it, it makes us want it more. Something that we are not allowed. If in a book or on a CD it says Parental Guidance or something, then it makes you want it more."*

*Paired depth 4: female, C2DE, year 7, occasional drinkers, south*

*"It's also like being cool if you rebel a bit, get a bit drunk with your friends. If you just sit there in a corner, with no girls, not having a good time, then they are just going to think you are a boring person."*

*Group 15: male, BC1, year 10, regular drinkers, south*

The element of rebelliousness in the appeal of alcohol of course diminishes as young people get older. Respondents of 16 and above generally took it for granted that virtually everyone their age was drinking; doing so did not deliver the same psychological or image rewards as it had when they were younger.

*“Up until 17, part of the fun is it not being legal.”  
Group 18: female, BC1, 17, occasional drinkers, north*

*“In the day, you’d go right down to the beach and go swimming; in the night, just like parties all the time.”*

*Question 5: And what are the parties like [on your ideal planet]?*

*“Just all going out and getting drunk.”  
Paired depth 6: female, C2DE, year 11, regular drinkers,  
Wales*

Respondents in the middle of the age range tended to locate the appeal of alcohol less in rebelliousness, more in a perceived association with maturity. Younger respondents were often happy to accept that drinking is an adult activity, but some in years 10 and 11 were drawn to drinking precisely because it was an adult preserve.

*“By the time you get to 15 or 16, you start thinking, ‘Oh, that looks good.’ I don’t think you think, ‘Oh, that’s for older people.’ It looks grown-up and when you’re that age, you want to be grown-up.”  
Group 9: female, C2DE, 17, occasional/regular drinkers,  
Scotland*

*“We see it and we think, ‘Oh, wow, that’s for older people.’ Like we want to be older so we want to drink it.”  
Group 12: female, BC1, year 9, regular drinkers,  
Midlands*

That some young people drink to appear cool of course puts pressure on their friends to do the same.

**Question 6: Do you think there is much pressure on people to drink?**

*“Yes. Younger than us. If you go out in a massive group and everyone else is drinking, you think, ‘I’ll have to drink’, even if you don’t want to.”*

*Group 18: female, BC1, 17, occasional drinkers, north*

*“The majority of us do drink. There’s people like our school friends, there are a few of them that don’t drink but . . . if you offer them, they will.”*

*Paired depth 6: female, C2DE, year 11, regular drinkers, Wales*

In so far as much alcohol advertising celebrates the social pleasures of drinking, this may accentuate pressure on young drinkers, but there is no clear evidence of this.

*“There’s more peer pressure on drinking because they’re advertising it all the time on TV.”*

*Group 6: male, C2DE, year 9, occasional drinkers, north*

Another factor here may be that the easy palatability of alcopops deprives hesitant debutantes of the excuse that they do not like the taste. If this is so, it would increase the potential of peer pressure to induce young people to start drinking alcohol before they personally feel ready.

**D.1.4 Awareness of a downside to alcohol**

A basic awareness that there could be health and other risks associated with alcohol had been instilled in many respondents at school. Excessive drinking was often identified as a particular danger.

*“Nobody actually talks about the long-term effects of drinking.”*

*Question 7: So drinking is dangerous?*

*“It can damage your liver and stuff, can’t it?”*

*Group 6: male, C2DE, year 9, occasional drinkers, north*

*“Instead of going mad and having loads and then being ill, and some people die from poisoning from it, I think it*

*should be in moderation. There should be a little tester and if you've had too much then you can't have any more."*

*Group 13: female, C2DE, year 9, occasional drinkers, Midlands*

Witnessing the drunken behaviour of others had also created negative impressions for some respondents. Aggression, loss of control, injury and foolishness were all associated with alcohol.

### **Question 8: What are these parents' parties like?**

*"Fighting and getting annoyed with each other. Because they are drunk."*

*Question 9: Is that what happens when people get drunk?*

*"Some people."*

*Paired depth 1: male, C2DE, year 6, occasional drinkers, Midlands*

*"I think it would be a bad thing to let people get drunk ... I know a girl, she got really drunk once and she punched this boy in the face, she became really aggressive. My friend got so drunk that she had to go to hospital and have her stomach pumped."*

*Paired depth 4: female, C2DE, year 7, occasional drinkers, south*

*"I have seen what my dad does when he comes home drunk after he has been to the football. Or he is hung over in the morning. You don't want to end up like that."*

*Paired depth 2: male, C2DE, year 8, non-drinkers, south*

These negative impressions were concentrated amongst respondents in year 10 and under. It may be that some older respondents who drank less or not at all had been affected by similar experiences but were less prepared to talk about them.

## **D.2 Feelings about advertising**

### **D.2.1 Advertising in general**

Respondents' recall of advertising was consistent with what might be expected, namely that they were especially likely to notice commercials that featured products or services which they already owned or used, or to which they aspired.

**Question 10: What is it that made you pick out that particular BMX ad?**

*“Maybe because I’ve got that one.”*

Group 6: male, C2DE, year 9, occasional drinkers, north

However, a lot of advertising catches young people’s attention, irrespective of whether, at a rational level, they believe themselves to be within the target for it. Commercials are remembered for a host of reasons, including: their humour; their music; the people in them; the feelings they arouse; some intriguing incident or visual. Each of these elements is capable of exerting a strong appeal to the young. Certain kinds of humour reliably appeal to them; generalisation here is difficult but slapstick, irreverence and getting the better of authority seem prominent in what makes young people laugh. As is well known, many young people have a well-developed sensitivity to music; they ‘read’ the different music genres and they know what they like. Similarly, they observe actors in commercials very keenly – are they famous, are they good-looking, cool and ‘fit’? Are they wearing cool clothes? Do the feelings evoked in the ad mesh with those that are prominent for many teenagers; feelings of being misunderstood, wanting to rebel, vulnerability? The way in which commercials are shot may remind young viewers of their favourite TV programmes or pop videos.

Young people will often discover a personal relevance in a commercial through one of the many elements in it – the humour, the music, the people, the feelings, the filmic style, the story line and so on. The advertising will make a connection with them even if they do not think of themselves as interested in the products and services.

**D.2.2 Alcohol advertising**

Commercials for alcoholic drinks were often among those mentioned by respondents when they were asked what advertising they recalled. Recognition of the commercials

shown in the course of the research, especially of the alcopops advertising, was high (see Appendix A).

**Question 11: Would you say that you've seen a lot of ads for alcoholic drinks?**

*"Yeah, that's how we know the kinds of drinks, the names of them, from the adverts."  
Paired depth 5: female, BC1, year 9, non-drinkers, Scotland*

Many of these commercials were well liked. In a research situation appearances have of course to be treated with caution, but it often seemed from respondents' demeanour that they found the advertising absorbing and enjoyed watching it, particularly commercials for Bacardi, Bacardi Breezer, WKD, Smirnoff Ice and Budweiser.

Advertising for these brands was popular because it was, variously, funny (often with an impish humour), featured attractive people and/or had music which appealed to the young (see further below in this section, and Appendix A for examples).

Nevertheless, it was quite common for respondents to say that they did not pay much attention to advertising for alcoholic drinks because they knew they were under-age and therefore that the advertising was not aimed at them.

*"I kind of don't engage with it much, because I feel that it's aimed at adults more than me."  
Group 15: male, BC1, year 10, regular drinkers, south*

*"I think it's for older people. I don't think they'd be encouraging under-age drinking."  
Group 16: female, BC1, year 11, non- and occasional drinkers, Scotland*

Often, respondents cited the age of the actors in the commercials as evidence that people under 18 were not intended as the target. The perceived age of the actors often had a significant effect on assumptions about whom the advertising was intended to influence.



*"If you put people who look a lot younger in there, then it would be aimed more at us."*

*Group 7: male, BC1, year 10, non-drinker, Wales*

We should notice that some advertising avoids signalling its target audience in this way by using animals or animation. Bacardi Breezer *Vet* and Budweiser *Ants* are examples of commercials which give nothing away about the age of those enjoying the drink. It is arguable that these commercials thereby make the drinks seem more accessible to young people, if only because the viewer is not prompted to think – 'I'm not as old as them'.

**Question 11: Do you think the one with the cat was aimed at people over 18?**

*"I think it's aimed at our age because they used a cat and it's a playful cat. He's enjoying himself."*

*Group 16: female, BC1, year 11, non- and occasional drinkers, Scotland*

The age of the people depicted was quoted, with varying degrees of emphasis, as a reason why respondents were not interested in the Guinness, Worthington, Dooley's, Gordon's Edge, Freixenet and Lambrini advertising (see Appendix A). The music and the sort of drinking occasion depicted were other ways of deflecting interest among the young.

*"It doesn't look like a party, like a rave, that people like us would be going to."*

**Question 12: What's the difference?**

*"Don't know really."*

*"It's just older people, the music is different."*

*"You don't really see everyone dancing and that. Those are just crowding round."*

*Group 11: female, C2DE, year 8, occasional drinkers, south*

*"I think that's for a bit older, maybe like 25. Not really old up to 30. I don't know it's just the way the people in it are a lot older, like Vinnie Jones ... they're more sophisticated and they like to party."*

*Group 12: female, BC1, year 9, regular drinkers, Midlands*

But age and setting cues could be transcended by other elements in the mix and the commercials for alcopops often made a strong connection with young people because they were funny, or insubordinate, and/or the music was appealing. A difficulty here is that of separating the influence of advertising per se from the influence of the cumulative brand image to which the advertising contributes. Many respondents spontaneously recalled the endlines for popular alcopop brands like Smirnoff Ice (*'as clear as your conscience'*, and WKD (*'do you have a WKD side'*). These brand images include elements with strong appeal to people in year 10 and above; they are funny and they suggest an easy impatience with rules and authority. Many of these respondents clearly liked the attitude towards life that these brands seemed to project. It is probably fair to say that the overall brand images of Smirnoff Ice, WKD and Bacardi Breezer appeal at least as strongly to 15-17 year olds as to 18-25 year olds.

Those who regularly drank alcopops often found advertisements for the 'parent' brands appealing. Many of those who drank Bacardi Breezer, for example, were able to recall a number of Bacardi commercials (they often confused adverts for the spirit and the alcopop). Similarly, though to a lesser extent, Smirnoff Ice drinkers admired the Smirnoff advertising.

It may just be worth noting that respondents could enjoy the style of the advertising, and the brand values, without apparently being persuaded to buy the drink. Of the material put into this research, Budweiser was the prime example of this. Several of its commercials were well remembered and very well liked, but few of these respondents drank the lager (or any type of beer). Several respondents stressed that liking the advertising did not necessarily translate into liking or buying the product.

*"I might find the Smirnoff [adverts] quite funny, but I'm still not going to go out and buy Smirnoff because I don't like it."*

*Group 15: male, BC1, year 10, regular drinkers, south*

*“They are funny but it has nothing to do with beer. You don’t want to drink the beer because the ad is funny.”  
Paired depth 2: male, C2DE, year 8, non-drinkers, south*

### **D.3 In what ways might advertising have regrettable effects on young people’s perceptions of alcohol?**

#### **D.3.1 Encouraging interest at an inappropriately young age**

Impatience with authority, and an ability to outwit its representatives, is a discernible theme of several brands’ advertising, notably the alcopops. Smirnoff Ice and WKD are the chief examples. Their brand values as expressed in the scenarios, and the endlines – *As clear as your conscience* and *Do you have a WKD side?* – are roughly about daring to do what you want and getting away with it. These themes make for brand images, and advertising, which are well liked by people under 18 (as well, presumably, as people under 25). There is no clear evidence that young people interpret this advertising as daring them to drink when they are underage, but the tone is all cheeky rebelliousness – perhaps unlikely to foster cheerful compliance with licensing laws.

It is worth noting that the commercials which mine this vein do not usually give away the product advertised until the end. Young people seeing these commercials for the first time can enjoy the fun before they come to any indication that the advertising is for something theoretically denied them.

The kind of scenarios featured in Bacardi Breezer’s *Parents*, Smirnoff Ice’s *Theatre* and *Answerphone*, and WKD’s *Donut* are very well liked by young people. The humour is grounded in teenage territory – the joy of kicking against restraints. The advertising is not, of course, about the products themselves, but is devoted to building brand values. The worry is that these values have very strong appeal to adolescents, who like kicking against restraints, including restraints on their access to alcohol.

As already noted, the apparent age of people in commercials supplies an important clue to the age of the intended audience. By using animals or animation, Bacardi Breezer *Vet* and Budweiser *Ants* frustrate this mechanism and give no indication of the age of a typical user.

### **D.3.2 Associating alcohol with other benefits**

#### **A good time**

Most respondents associated alcohol with parties, or at least with groups of young people drinking together. Alcohol was widely seen as a means of intensifying the fun of being together (especially if there was music).

Some of the advertising was very widely perceived as playing on, or reinforcing, this association between alcohol and having a good time. It was not uncommon for commercials to depict (cool, attractive, fashionably dressed) young people seemingly really enjoying themselves, often dancing at parties or clubs. A number of commercials, most strikingly for Bacardi, Bacardi Breezer, Red Square and Budweiser, projected these brands as facilitating a good party (see also Appendix A).

*“Most of them are trying to sell a good time instead of a refreshing drink.”*

*Group 17: male, C2DE, 17, regular drinkers, south*

*Question 13: In a nutshell, what are these [alcopop] adverts trying to tell you?*

*“That it’s fun. The adverts that I’ve seen, people are dancing around in the clubs, having a good time.”*

*Group 15: male, BC1, year 10, regular drinkers, south*

*“If someone was watching that for the first time and they never knew anything about alcohol, they’d think, ‘Yeah, that looks fun. I’d like to try that.’”*

*Group 5: male, BC1, year 8, regular drinkers, Scotland*

The association between alcohol and a good time seemed to spring from respondents’ experience and not to need much help from advertising. There are, nevertheless, perhaps two grounds

for concern about this theme in alcohol advertising. First, as noted above, some of it appeals strongly to people who are too young to drink. Second, some of the advertising features scenes in which alcohol is dispensed with reckless abandon. Examples of this are the two Bacardi commercials shown in the research, in which rum is sloshed out as if it were water. The visual communication here is the polar opposite of moderation or self-restraint. Nobody appears to be drunk, but the advertising is open to the perception that being this free with the drinks is part of what is so cool about the people and the occasion. There is, of course, no indication that if you drink spirits with a complete disregard for how much you are drinking, you get drunk and that being drunk may not be pleasant.

*“There are probably some women who can look amazing when they are absolutely hammered, but there are very few. You want to be like this woman. She has long brown legs and she is pouring a bottle of vodka into his mouth.”*

*Group 18: female, BC1, 17, occasional drinkers, North*

*“They are always sober, even though they’re supposed to be drinking all night.”*

*Group 16: female, BC1, year 11, non- and occasional drinkers, Scotland*

### **Sexual reward**

A second broad theme of alcohol advertising relates to sexual and social rewards. Much of the advertising shown to respondents (and indeed recalled by them) included attractive young people and at least a hint of sexual opportunity. Older respondents sometimes argued that sex and alcohol *did* go together; alcohol helped lower inhibitions.

*“I do think that you have got more chance with a girl if you are drunk because she is probably drunk as well. When you are out drinking you are not as tense as you would be with a normal girl, taking her to the cinema. You are both more relaxed from just the environment you are in, and alcohol must have an effect on you as well because your confidence is higher.”*

*Group 17: male, C2DE, 17, regular drinkers, south*

However, it seemed that the majority of respondents in year 11 and below did not pick up the sexual references in the advertising. Either they failed to notice them or they said they found them uninteresting or, occasionally, disgusting. We have to be cautious about our evidence here because most of the fieldwork was conducted as groups and it may easily be that respondents were reluctant to give anything away about their responses to sexual content.

*“They do put a certain amount of sexual things in their adverts, raunchy things and all that, but I just don’t even pay attention to the alcohol.”*

*Group 5: male, BC1, year 8, regular drinkers, Scotland*

*“You watch stuff like that on TV anyway. Really rubbish stuff. Like watching Hollyoaks, doing it, tonguing each other on the bed and stuff.”*

*Group 4: male, BC1, year 7, non-drinkers, south*

*“[The sexual adverts] are a bit too far fetched ... I don’t think it does encourage me to go out and drink it.”*

*Paired depth 6: female, C2DE, year 11, regular drinkers, Wales*

*“Again, [that advertisement’s] referring to sex and it’s supposed to be seductive. I don’t know. It’s not the sort of thing I want to dream about.”*

*Group 15: male, BC1, year 10, regular drinkers, south*

The advertising which appeared most blatant in its attempt to align the drink with a sexual reward was that for Freixenet, Dooley’s and (in press and poster) JW Lees and Abbot Ale. None of this advertising seemed to interest or connect with respondents; they were not interested in the drinks or the people and those who registered the sex seemed to find its association with the drinks derisory. Red Square’s commercial *Beaches* had a lot of girls in bikinis and seemed to be trying to associate the brand with illicit pleasures. But it did not seem to be particularly appealing.

*“It doesn’t look very nice. I wouldn’t want to lick somebody’s chin.”*

*Paired depth 5: female, BC1, year 9, non-drinkers, Scotland*

*Question 14: What would you say about these [advertisements] in general?*

*“They’re all about sex.”*

*“Every one of them is advertising sex.”*

*“It’s like a false guarantee.”*

*Group 5: male, BC1, year 8, regular drinkers, Scotland*

*“I think they associate sex with them to make them more appealing.”*

*Group 13: female, C2DE, year 9, occasional drinkers, Midlands*

Smirnoff Ice’s *Theatre* and Bacardi Breezer’s *Parents* were much better liked and it is arguable that both make clear links between the brands and sexual success. However, in both these cases, the humour and the brazenness of the protagonists seem more central to the appeal of the commercials than any implications about sex.

What we have no way of knowing is whether the persistent, though often quite subtle, suggestions of sexual opportunity in much of the advertising have a cumulative effect and encourage young people in the view that drinking alcohol is a preliminary to sex or makes sexual activity more likely.

#### **D.4 Cinema advertising**

Our understanding is that the advertising shown in cinemas is usually also shown on television, but that cinemas sometimes show somewhat extended versions of what appears on TV.

There was very little unprompted comment on cinema advertising in the course of this project. Many respondents said they liked to be in the cinema in time to see the trailers, and that therefore they often saw the ads as well. However, recall of specific commercials – remembered as having been seen in the cinema rather than on TV – was very rare.

**Question 15: Do you get there early, ideally, and see the trailers?**

*“Yeah, that’s what I try to do ... I don’t like the adverts but the trailers for new films I like to see, just so I know what is coming out and stuff like that.”*

*Group 1: male, BC1, year 11, regular drinkers, south*

On prompting, some respondents, spread across the age range, said that they thought they had seen advertising for alcoholic drinks in the cinema, but many were tentative about this. The general opinion that alcopops and lager were heavily advertised appeared to rely much more on TV than on cinema advertising.

#### **Question 16: Typically, what are the ads for in the cinema?**

*“Mostly it’s adverts for films coming out, mostly for drinking, and chewing gum.”*

*Group 16: female, BC1, year 11, non- and occasional drinkers, Scotland*

*“I remember seeing some of the adverts - the only ones that I remember seeing are the Budweiser and Carlsberg but I think I often see beer adverts.”*

*Group 1: male, BC1, year 11, regular drinkers, south*

When they were prompted about cinema advertising, several respondents said they expected what was advertised (and the trailers) to marry up with the film – a children’s film would be accompanied by child-appropriate advertising.

*“If you’re in the cinema watching an action film you want trailers for action films that are coming out.”*

*Group 7: male, BC1, year 10, non-drinker, Wales*

*“If you’re watching something like Teletubbies at the cinema, then it will be all really young, really young adverts, like toys.”*

*Group 1: male, BC1, year 11, regular drinkers, south*

However, there was no evidence to suggest that going to the cinema had exposed respondents to advertising which had struck them as inappropriate – that they should not have seen. Nor was there evidence that cinema advertising had made a particularly strong impression on them – rather the opposite; recall of advertising seen in the cinema was poor.



There are a number of coherent reasons for thinking that advertising for alcoholic drinks seen in the cinema might have a stronger influence on young people than advertising seen on TV. These arguments include: a greater sense of occasion (and a price of admission) producing more consistent or keener attention; being a captive audience, limited in alternatives to watching the screen; a bigger screen, better sound, etc.

Prompting around these hypotheses with these respondents was unrewarding. It did not seem to have occurred to anyone that cinema advertising was unusually difficult to ignore, or otherwise distinctive. There was, accordingly, no real evidence in this study to either support or weaken the various hypotheses. In general terms, it did not seem that the influence of advertising seen in the cinema was qualitatively different from the influence of advertising seen elsewhere.

## **E. PROJECTIVE EXERCISES**

### **E.1 Planet Ideal**

#### **E.1.1 Overview**

In asking respondents to describe life on a planet that suited them perfectly, the hope was that they would to some degree ignore the constraints of the real world and express desires and tastes that may currently be frustrated and repressed.

The exercise had a number of goals: to gauge respondents' interest in alcohol in the absence of rational, legal obstacles; to explore the place of advertising in their lives; to find out what and whom they thought 'cool' (and if alcohol played a part here); and, generally, to delve into the world they created, looking at the laws, societies, facilities, financial arrangements and even the weather. The hope was that, if they had a precocious interest in alcohol, or associated alcohol with inappropriate rewards, this would become clear, and any role of advertising in promoting inappropriate ideas and alcohol might emerge also.

These hopes were only very partially met. Not all respondents entered into the spirit required to give the exercise life and make it work. There

were no clear patterns by age or gender of those willing to do so. The results do provide useful insight into the place of alcohol in young people's lives and on other aspects of life, but they did not give us, as researchers, any confidence that we had been able to glimpse into respondents' unconscious or identify influences of which they were unaware.

In general, very few respondents exploited the licence afforded by an 'ideal planet' to give alcohol a bigger or more precocious role than would be expected, and there seemed surprisingly little emphasis on sexual activity or experimentation (although this may well have been due to an unwillingness to discuss such matters in a group environment). Other fantasies, usually about the weather, money, school or work, and relationships, tended to be played out before alcohol or sex were brought up.

### **E.1.2 Interest in alcohol and sex**

Although respondents (both younger and older) were often slow to bring up the subject of alcohol – it was often not mentioned even after prompting on celebrations, or on 'how to be cool' – most did come round to it in the end. In general, their attitudes towards alcohol seemed to be (perhaps suspiciously) sensible. Although some said that they would want alcohol without its bad effects (to drink to excess without getting a hangover or becoming aggressive), many accepted that drinking had a negative side and thought that it should be allowed but somehow restricted. These balanced attitudes were also evident in many of the other fantasies respondents expressed for Planet Ideal.

Many younger respondents (year 9 and below) said that they would have soft drinks only at their parties on Planet Ideal; it often seemed that having alcoholic drinks did not enter their heads. And there were a number of references to the penalties of excessive alcohol consumption, such as violence, accidents, hangovers, liver damage and foolish behaviour (including having unplanned sex with inappropriate people).

The descriptions of the sorts of lives these respondents would like to lead on Planet Ideal did not suggest that young people were impatient to start drinking alcohol socially, with their peers, as opposed to experimenting with it on a much more occasional basis. Nothing that was said convincingly suggested that respondents had inappropriate confidence in alcohol as conducive to social or sexual success.

Older respondents (those in year 11 and 17 year olds) *did* want their Planet Ideal to provide them with cheap or free alcoholic drinks. Many also wanted a lot of people of the opposite sex at their parties. A fridge full of lager or alcopops, and “*fifty naked women to choose from*” was a not uncommon male fantasy. But, even with older respondents the association between alcohol and having a good time with friends was much stronger and more evident than any association between alcohol and a sexual reward. Abundant alcohol was regularly mentioned as a necessary condition for a good party for people of 16 and up.

The associations between alcohol and good parties, and between alcohol and sexual opportunity, are, of course, two themes that recur in alcohol advertising. But nothing that emerged in the Planet Ideal exercise exposed a clear connection between attitudes towards alcohol and the way it is advertised. Rather, the association between alcohol and successful social events and sexual encounters was attributed to experience of the real world and not to advertising.

It was argued by older respondents (see also section D.3.1) that it was perfectly reasonable for advertising to associate alcohol with a good time and even with an increased likelihood of having sex. Alcohol *did* help people enjoy themselves and, by making them less inhibited, made it easier for them to negotiate sexual opportunities. Of course, this is as would be expected – it would be extraordinary if, in a research exercise of this sort, advertising transcended real life as an influence on young people’s perceptions of alcohol. The point here is that there was no evidence from the Planet Ideal exercise itself to suggest that advertising has created inappropriate expectations of alcohol.

### **E.1.3 Attitudes to advertising**

Television, cinemas and magazines all had their place on respondents' ideal planet, and some advertising was thought necessary or desirable for its entertainment or informational value. During the Planet Ideal exercise, nothing that respondents had to say about watching TV, or going to the cinema, or reading magazines, suggested that alcohol advertising was especially prominent in their minds, or that they took particular note of it (although it later emerged that good drinks advertising was generally expected to be enjoyable). Neither did it seem to be in any way exceptional (relative to other advertising for cars, games, travel, etc) in the extent of its influence on their view of the world or on what they wanted to do.

### **E.2 Making an alcoholic or soft drinks advertisement**

In this exercise, respondents were given sets of images and words, taken from magazines, which avoided alcohol advertising and brand names. They were asked to create collages representing the themes they would use for an advert for an alcopop and (sometimes) one for a soft drink. All respondents were given the same bank of pictures and words to choose from.

The result was a high degree of consistency in the images and words selected across age, gender, social grade and attitudes and behaviour towards alcohol. But it was difficult to get respondents to think about advertising in this situation and many images chosen reflected their wider views of alcohol and associated social situations, rather than their ideas of advertising specifically.

Those images chosen to represent alcohol were primarily in the area of parties, a good time, fun and being with friends. Had respondents been asked to do this exercise entirely unaided and unprompted, without being given any stimulus, our feeling, based on comments when the collages were being made, is that 'having a good time' would have been much the dominant theme, and other themes, such as sex, loss of inhibition and risk-taking, would have been less conspicuous. However, given images and words that included romance, nudity, sex

and risk-taking, respondents unsurprisingly wanted to include these – alcohol is associated with social situations where the sexes meet and with facilitating meeting members of the opposite sex by boosting confidence and lowering inhibitions.

The same exercise for a soft drink resulted in the choice of images that were predominantly in the area of taste and refreshment qualities, being thirsty and being active outdoors. In general, the emphasis was on the product and its associated benefits rather than the image created for that product, as tended to be the case for alcoholic drinks. There was some mention of sports drinks such as *Lucozade* and an association with sporting achievement and prowess; more generally, the associations were with bright colours, energy boosts and fantasies about being the best.

Unlike the collage created for alcohol advertising, it was clear that this was the territory of children and family – although, perhaps surprisingly, there was little mention of parties, good times and social situations.

A composite of the various collages can be found in Appendix B.

## **Appendix A: Discussion of advertising material used in the research**

# Responses to individual advertisements

In the last paragraph of each assessment we try and address the question of whether or not it is appropriate for the regulatory bodies to be concerned about the particular piece of advertising in question.

## 1. TV and cinema commercials

### 1.1 Bacardi: *Vinnie Jones*

*Vinnie Jones is walking past a bar with a bunch of flowers, when a tray flies through the door and cuts them in half. He picks up the tray, marches into the bar and up to the (attractive, female) bartender, and is told to take an order to a table - "And get a tip". After some extravagant pouring at the table, the bartender collars him for a dance: he 'gets the girl'. Before leaving, he rests two bottles of Bacardi against his shoulders in a reference to Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels.*

This was a well-remembered and well-liked commercial. Everyone knew Vinnie (although the final reference to *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* was surprisingly often missed), and the visuals – the flying tray, for example – were well remembered. The Bacardi branding was strongly recognised but, as was frequently the case, what is an advertisement for Bacardi was occasionally remembered as one for Bacardi Breezer.

The impression given by respondents is that they enjoyed the commercial for its famous actor, its high spirits, the party atmosphere and the music. Younger respondents often said it was targeting older people for familiar rational reasons: clubs like this are not young people's territory; and the people in the bar looked to be in their mid 20s or older.

*"It's not realistic enough, I don't think. I don't see people of our age in clubs like that."*

*Group 15: male, BC1, year 10, regular drinkers, south*

*"I think that's for a bit older, maybe like 25. Not really old up to 30. I don't know, it's just the way the people in it are a lot older, like Vinnie Jones."*

*Group 12: female, BC1, year 9, regular drinkers, Midlands*

Many respondents' enthusiasm for the actor, the music and the atmosphere of the commercial suggests that they connected with it in ways that challenge or marginalise their awareness that it is supposed, really, to be aiming at older people.

It was occasionally noted that Jones was flamboyantly generous with the rum.

*"He starts pouring it over everyone. Throwing the Bacardi everywhere. They are drinking a lot of it. It's a good ad. Not really funny, though."*

*Paired depth 2: male, C2DE, year 8, non-drinkers, south*

It seemed that few respondents had much interest in decoding or interpreting the commercial unless they were prompted. Jones's aggression and change of mood (perhaps a pastiche) attracted some comment, but most respondents seemed just to enjoy the good party atmosphere.

*"He was walking and he was, like, angry, and then as soon as he seen a girl ..."*

*"It can turn angry people happy and get the girl."*

*Group 7: male, BC1, year 10, non-drinker, Wales*

*"He goes into a club in a bad mood and as soon as he gets in there he is all happy."*

*Group 1: male, BC1, year 11, regular drinkers, south*

Several aspects of this commercial perhaps give cause for some concern. First, Vinnie's mood changes dramatically during the commercial: first he is angry and isolated, then he is the life and soul of the party. It is possible that Bacardi will get the credit for this transformation at some subliminal level.

Second, Vinnie gets the girl. This is an engaging story, one liked by young people, in which Bacardi may be seen as not just facilitating the



good time but also contributing to what makes the hero sexually desirable.

Third, the commercial makes a connection between drinking and having a good time that most young people feel is entirely true to life. However, the flamboyant mood of abandon, especially in the way a spirit is being dispensed, clearly does not help foster responsible attitudes towards strong alcohol consumption. It is at least arguable that *immoderation* – going mad with the booze – is presented as cool.

## 1.2 Bacardi: *Waitress*

*The scene is a trendy bar/nightclub with loud music playing. A crowd masses in the middle of the floor, and a young waitress rises from its centre, arms outstretched, spinning slowly and pouring Bacardi (very approximately) into the glasses of the crowd below.*

Again, this commercial was well recalled and liked; the branding was strongly recognised but sometimes confused with Bacardi Breezer. Although respondents thought that the situation was a good party and a cool place to be, on a rational level they seemed to feel that the age of the characters and the sophisticated setting meant that they were not being targeted. The music was important to their enjoyment and involvement.

Once again the rum was poured with a striking lack of restraint.

*“I think that was a lot more than two bottles ... Everyone wants more and more. You might drink too much.”  
Group 5: male, BC1, year 8, regular drinkers, Scotland*

At a rational level young people say this is aimed at older people because of the club setting, but the music and the atmosphere make it very watchable. Alcohol and the girl are central to the action and to the party, and there is almost a sense of the crowd worshipping them both. The girl's extravagant pouring is yet more conspicuous than Vinnie's, and again, the atmosphere, the manner of pouring and the girl's expression are all antagonistic to a spirit of moderation. There would appear to be a danger that lack of restraint will be interpreted as cool.

We are not clear whether the potential for confusion between this Bacardi commercial and Bacardi Breezers is regrettable.

### **1.3 Red Square: *Beaches***

*The scene switches between parties in a club in Brighton and on the beach on Kavos, in Greece. A TV link between the two allows a guy in Brighton to 'meet' a girl on Kavos.*

Many of the younger respondents found this commercial difficult to follow; they did not understand what was going on, and why there were switches from black and white to colour.

Some older respondents linked the commercial with TV coverage of clubbing on Mediterranean islands, and some seemed to assume that the people in the commercial had taken ecstasy. The dawn ending contributed to this, as did the filmic style – the quick cutting, the switches from black and white to colour, the general sense that something was going on that was not being spelled out. Older males, in year 10 and above, enjoyed the young girls in bikinis.

This commercial seemed designed to give the brand an edge by associating it with club culture and thereby with complicated, perhaps illicit, pleasures. We are not clear how much success it will have. There are lots of attractive young people not wearing very much and, for the initiated, the drug references are probably hard to miss. But the commercial seemed not to be especially appealing and there was little to suggest that many young people in this sample read much into it or thought much about it.

### **1.4 Bacardi Breezer: *Vet***

*A vet has been called to examine a cat whose owner, an elderly lady, is concerned that he might be ill. After flashbacks to the night before, in which the cat is seen dancing and as the centre of attention in a trendy club, the vet finds a lipstick heart on the cat's paw – "Do you think it was a fox?"*

This commercial was a favourite and was often spontaneously recalled by respondents of all ages (especially among those in year 10 and above). It was usually attributed correctly to Bacardi Breezer (not confused with the spirit). Bacardi Breezer was perhaps the most popular drink among these respondents. The popularity of the brand probably increased interest in the commercial as well as vice versa.

The commercial was widely thought to be intriguing because it was not immediately clear what was going on. It often seemed that respondents enjoyed seeing it more than once because they found something new in it each time.

The suggestion that the cat (most pointedly via 'fox') had been enjoying himself sexually often seemed to be missed. The action was interpreted as the cat going out and having a good time, getting drunk (and perhaps therefore having a hangover), and staying out late in the process. There was an atmosphere of a successful conspiracy; the cat had gone out and got away with something.

*"It's sort of saying because it's cheeky to it's owner, It's like saying you can sneak around your parents and stuff, and it's cool. He's like the party animal in you."  
Group 12: female, BC1, year 9, regular drinkers, Midlands*

*"You are going out to parties and when you get back, no one knows what you have done."  
Paired depth 2: male, C2DE, year 8, non-drinkers, south*

The fact that the cat is ageless, and moreover seems to be cared for by adult, parent-like figures in the owner and the vet, increases the relevance of the scenario to the young. A worry about this commercial is that it makes it unusually easy for young people to identify with the 'drinker'. There is also an argument that it could encourage young people to think that it is cool to break the rules in relation to going out and drinking.

## **1.5 Bacardi Breezer: Parents**

*A young woman is invited to tea by her boyfriend's rich, conservative parents. Every part of their conversation prompts a flashback to their wild, alcohol-fuelled, sexually adventurous university days, and a*

*switch from black and white to vivid colour. At the end, the mother offers "Tart?" causing the girlfriend to choke in shock.*

Perhaps surprisingly for Bacardi Breezer there was no spontaneous recall of this commercial. However, there was widespread recognition of it when it was shown and most respondents found it amusing.

The tension between the parents and the 'children' resonated with respondents (especially those in year 10 and above), and perhaps especially with girls. The take-out often appeared to be that having a wild life is pretty cool, and alcohol is an important part of this. The commercial also encourages the view that there is inevitably an enormous gulf between the generations and young people are always getting up to things parents would not approve of.

Many younger respondents said that this commercial was not aimed at them, as the characters were clearly older; they had been to college or university. But this did not seem to reduce the commercial's appeal for them.

This commercial makes a strong association between alcohol and good times, losing inhibitions and having a wild time (of which sex is a part). This perception of alcohol was widespread among respondents anyway. It is possible that advertising of this kind helps normalise the notion that of course people get drunk when they are having a good time but we have no new evidence to offer on this. Once again, the tone of the commercial and the brand values are antagonistic to restraint and young people may be reinforced in their view that it is appropriate to have secrets, including secrets about drinking, from their parents.

## **1.6 Budweiser: Ants**

*A column of ants is carrying a bottle of Budweiser towards their nest. They turn it upside down and lower the neck into the entrance hole, and pile inside. The bottle is opened, music starts and the ground starts to vibrate to the beat.*

Other Budweiser advertising seemed to have made a much stronger impression than this, notably *Frogs* and *Whassup?* But this commercial was well liked right across the age range because it is amusing, tells a little story and the music is good. Budweiser ads are often quoted as evidence that *“lager advertising is a laugh”*.

The commercial was viewed as a simple piece of fun and seemed not to be much interpreted. There was no evidence that the sexual imagery was appreciated at all, even by older respondents. The key moment seemed to be when the music comes on and the ground starts vibrating. The communication is taken to be something like ‘Budweiser is a good drink for a party’.

*“It was pretty boring when you just saw the ants carrying the Bud but they made it funny at the end.”*  
*Group 5: male, BC1, year 8, regular drinkers, Scotland*

Ants, of course, are ageless so there are no adults to mark the territory rationally as ‘for adults only’. The music appealed strongly to respondents and the humour was easily in reach of the youngest. Indeed nothing in the commercial would need to be changed to target it at children in years 9 to 11. Alcohol was projected as mood changing, an injection of fun, an excellent way to get a party going. Many young people seem to see alcohol in this light anyway, and the worry here, if there is one, is that this image is being projected in a way that potentially reaches people who are a lot too young to be thinking about alcohol.

### **1.7 Dooley’s: *Licking***

*Dooley’s (a creamy coloured liquid) is poured into a glass. A woman looks at the camera suggestively, drinks from the glass, then wipes a couple of drops from her lips into her mouth, again with a very suggestive look. Ends with “Not for the sweet and innocent”.*

There was no spontaneous recall of this commercial, and only limited recognition when respondents were shown it. The product itself was not well known either. Initial reactions were that this was a product for older people, especially women: *‘Mum drinks it’*.

*"It looked like a milkshake."*

**Question 17: Who do you think they were trying to appeal to?**

*"Ladies, I think, older women. Bailey's."*  
Group 12: female, BC1, year 9, regular drinkers, Midlands

The commercial was not thought lively or social enough for a young audience and some described it as 'boring'. This despite many respondents liking the idea of a toffee-flavoured drink. The bottle attracted attention and positive comment because it looked bright and colourful.

*"I liked the colour of the bottle, but [the ad] is not that good. She was acting all sexual. I don't think that was right for a drink, the way she was."*  
Group 16: female, BC1, year 11, non- and occasional drinkers, Scotland

Although wiping the dribble of the drink off the woman's face is clearly intended to be a significant moment, the youngest respondents (in years 6 and 7) generally did not notice sexual innuendo or attempt to decode it.

*"You don't want to waste a drop ... You get it all over your face and go like that and lick it off."*  
Group 5: male, BC1, year 8, regular drinkers, Scotland

*"It seemed like it's worth every drop ... It's like don't waste a drop."*  
Paired depth 5: female, BC1, year 9, non-drinkers, Scotland

Older respondents (in year 10 and above) were more likely to recognise the sexual imagery, but it often provoked embarrassment and sometimes expressions of disgust. Most did not see, or at least admit to seeing, the commercial as associating alcohol generally, or Dooley's specifically, with a sexual reward.

*"It's obviously sex appeal. Oral sex. That's what I got from it, anyway."*

**Question 18: Anybody else?**

*"I agree with the point – I think they do apply lots of sex – but I think that one's just the vodka on her mouth. I don't*

*know if it has any kind of hidden message behind that.”*  
Group 7: male, BC1, year 10, non-drinker, Wales

Although the drink appeared to have some appeal to the young, mainly because of the toffee, most younger respondents did not find this commercial appealing or comprehensible at any level and did not feel they were the intended target. That the drink was being aligned with some sort of sexual reward was clear to most older respondents, but they did not find the visuals appealing either.

### **1.8 Freixenet: *Ice Cubes***

*A young, adult, scantily clad couple are alone in a room. He lets ice cubes run over her body, and there are a number of suggestive looks to the camera. Ends with a cork popping out of a Freixenet bottle.*

Respondents of all ages were bored by this commercial, and did not identify with any of its elements: the music, the tone of voice and the visuals all seemed to indicate an older audience. Most respondents did not drink much wine anyway, and in other ways this was not a situation they readily imagined themselves in.

*“That’s sitting with your husband drinking rather than partying. It’s not the sort of drink I’d be interested in from the advert.”*

Group 9: female, C2DE, 17, occasional/regular drinkers, Scotland

It seemed unlikely that young people would watch this commercial with much attention, and they are very unlikely to think it is aimed at them. The association between alcohol and sex is blatant but seems unlikely to influence underage drinkers, except conceivably indirectly and, over time, in conjunction with other advertising that links sex and attractiveness with alcohol.

### **1.9 Smirnoff Ice: *Theatre***

*Loud, sexual moans come from one of the boxes in a theatre during a serious performance. As the actor stops mid-speech, angry stewards rush to the box door and find a young man kneeling over a young woman with a bulging midriff who is lying on the floor. “The*

contractions have started.” *They are both whisked outside into a taxi, where the woman pulls the man’s jacket from under her top. “What are you like?” “Freezing, actually.” Ends with the sign off “As clear as your conscience”.*

There was some spontaneous recall of this commercial and it was often liked, especially by older respondents. Smirnoff Ice was a popular drink among respondents of all ages, and there was very high spontaneous recall of the ‘*As clear as your conscience*’ sign off prior to exposure or as soon as the commercial started.

Many older respondents knew the narrative and found it funny and appealing in attitude – giving two fingers to authority and getting away with it was an appealing prospect. The bravado usually seemed more satisfying than the sex.

*“It was about sex, but it was quite funny. That’s why it appeals to us . . . A funny advert.”*

Group 5: male, BC1, year 8, regular drinkers, Scotland

Younger respondents also sometimes knew the narrative and were receptive to the ‘getting away with it’ theme, but they were not always certain what had been going on. These younger respondents (in year 9 and below) had rational reasons for identifying the commercial with older people: the situations – theatre, taxis and pregnancy – were generally not their territory; and the people in the theatre looked considerably older than them.

*“I just thought it was a funny advert.”  
“Yeah, like the way he is going about covering himself up. I don’t get why that has got anything to do with drinking.”*

Group 11: female, C2DE, year 8, occasional drinkers, South

*“It was saying you are bad and it is as clear as your conscience. It is being sarcastic. They have just pretended she is having a baby to get out of the opera because they are bored. Like you are clever and you know what to do when you don’t like something.”*

Paired depth 2: male, C2DE, year 8, non-drinkers, South

This commercial would appear to be making some sort of connection between Smirnoff Ice and good sex. But even older respondents did



not articulate this and nobody seems to see it as important. We do not know if it registers at some subliminal level. The spirit of the commercial (and the campaign in general) does not encourage restraint or respect for the rules. *'As clear as your conscience'* may be thought to translate into *'do you dare'* and this is probably unfortunate in a market where young teenagers are impatient with rules designed to restrict their access to alcohol.

### 1.10 Smirnoff Ice: *Answerphone*

*A young man is in his living room during the day with some friends, watching the football. He leaves to phone in sick to work. Soon afterwards, the phone rings and he answers normally. It is his boss, who questions whether he is really ill. The young man pretends to be an answerphone and ends with a beep from the microwave.*

This was widely recalled – many recalled the narrative in detail – and thought funny by respondents across the age range. It was better understood by the youngest respondents than *Theatre*.

As with *Theatre*, this commercial was considered funny and appealing (two fingers to authority; getting away with it), and, again, *'As clear as your conscience'* was spontaneously mentioned and was thought to sum up the communication well. The 'hero' was of course admired for thinking on his feet. He was witty, popular, cheeky, laddish and 'cool', and the brand seemed to be successfully associated with the same qualities.

*"I thought it was funny how he was just lying and then he almost got found out, but then he didn't."*

Paired depth 3: male, BC1, year 10, regular drinkers, north

*"Some people might panic easily but Smirnoff Ice is quite cool and calm and quick."*

Paired depth 2: male, C2DE, year 8, non-drinkers, south

At a rational level respondents saw the commercial as targeting older people because he was working – in the kind of job that has training weekends – and he seemed to have his own place.

Like *Theatre* the worry with this commercial, if there is one, concerns the association between the brand and breaking the rules. Making thinking on your feet and getting away with it so cool and attractive may be unhelpful because it potentially encourages young people to see the rules on alcohol as a challenge to their courage and ingenuity.

### 1.11 WKD: *Donut*

*A young (rather tubby) man is putting on sun cream on the beach. Three friends come up, rib him for doing this, then ask if they each want a donut. When the first man says yes, they roll him onto the sand, which sticks to the cream. Ends with all four drinking happily at the bar.*

There was no spontaneous recall of this commercial, but when it was shown to respondents some did recognise it and it was well-liked by respondents of all ages. WKD was often spontaneously mentioned in the context of drinks respondents had tried and enjoyed and they had clearly noticed WKD advertising.

Younger respondents said that this was childish humour, that they would enjoy pranks like this and that they identified with it on this level. They understood and enjoyed the spirit of the brand and there was little to decode in this commercial. But at a rational level they did not think that it was aimed at children – they did not expect alcohol advertising to target them and the protagonists were considered to look too old (20 or over). However, it seemed that nothing other than the age of the characters (and the product advertised) would need to be changed for this commercial to be perfectly attuned for them.

*“There is a real story line. All the others you can tell it has been faked up, it didn’t really happen. This is what would really happen. You never expected it to be an alcohol advert . . . but it has adults in it.”*

Group 10: female, BC1, year 7, non-drinkers, north

The sense of humour here appeals to people a lot below 18 and perhaps thereby invites them to consider the product and identify with the brand. The brand is aligned, though less by this commercial than in other advertising, with kicking against restraints and this may be

thought unhelpful in the way that the Smirnoff's 'as clear as your conscience' is.

### **1.12 Lambrini: *Girls' Choice***

*Three young women look at two young men on a sofa. "Eeny, meeny miny mo, one of you will have to . . . stay." "Is there a third?"*

This commercial was not remembered spontaneously and there was little recall on prompting. When shown, it usually failed to engage – it is very short and respondents generally made little effort to decode it.

Most reactions were that the ad was not aimed at respondents – the women were older; it was not a drinking situation they would find themselves in and wine was not a popular drink among them.

A few found the cheeky, girls-on-top theme amusing, but many of those who understood the innuendo distanced themselves further from the women (sometimes described as 'mingers') and the brand generally. Some found the air of desperation unappealing and the women's behaviour appeared to some older respondents to be sexually predatory. In general, there was thought to be no chemistry or narrative to engage the viewer.

If there is a risk in an advertisement like this, it is that it may strengthen the link between alcohol and casual sex and licence this behaviour to some degree. In this case, the commercial was unappealing and the brand communication was not positive as far as this audience was concerned.

### **1.13 Southern Comfort: *Rooftop Sunrise***

*A group of young adults is drinking in a laid-back way on a roof terrace at night. Ends with the sky turning light at dawn.*

There was no spontaneous recall of this commercial and little interest in it when it was shown. The scene appeared too sophisticated and insufficiently fun and upbeat for under-17s to enjoy and the music

(described as ‘bluesy’/‘jazzy’) reinforced impressions that this is adult territory. Southern Comfort was seen as a drink for older people by these respondents.

*“It was a bit of a blur, you wouldn’t really remember it . . . It didn’t look like they were having that much fun . . . They are trying to project the American atmosphere with the song.”*

Group 18: female, BC1, 17, occasional drinkers, north

But some older respondents found the imagery and mood ‘cool’. They could imagine, and perhaps aspire to, nights like this where conversation flows and friends bond over a drink.

It is arguable that the apparent duration of the drinking session (until sunrise) gives a misleading impression of prolonged drinking, but the commercial did not seem to have any real potential to engage with or influence underage drinkers.

#### **1.14 Gordon’s Edge: *Pool Party***

*A man walks around a party in an ultra-modern house with a bottle of Gordon’s Edge. As he passes objects, they are cut in two. When he gets outside, he gives a woman the drink and sits down on a sofa. Ends with a shot of the pool and the lights going out.*

Respondents did not mention this commercial spontaneously and there was little prompted recall beyond a few older people. It was thought to be too old and sophisticated for young people; there were attractions (the party by the pool, for example), but the mood, pace and narrative failed to engage this audience.

*“It wasn’t lively enough...It wasn’t colourful enough...The people weren’t really enjoying themselves ... And you couldn’t really hear the music.”*

Group 9: female, C2DE, 17, occasional/regular drinkers, Scotland

With the exception of a few older respondents, there was no appreciation of the cutting metaphor and little effort to understand it. What might be regarded as drug terminology in the super (‘*cut with . . .*’) was also missed. There was little engagement with this commercial.

### 1.15 Smirnoff: *Wedding (cinema)*

*A man is sitting at a table at an elaborate wedding reception. He looks through a bottle of Smirnoff and sees other people in a different, sometimes humorous, sometimes grotesque, way. He ultimately looks at his own reflection in a tray, and sees a monster.*

There was no spontaneous recall of this commercial but some recognition when it was shown, perhaps particularly among older respondents. A minority of older respondents found it appealing – amusing, interesting or compelling and bizarre or mysterious. Some fancied they could decode it, which was gratifying and made them feel cool.

Younger respondents were typically bored and confused and occasionally uncomfortable. Rationally, they did not take out much from the advertising; it is long and repetitive, and they did not make the leap between looking through the bottle and drinking the vodka. This uncertainty also applied to some older respondents and the commercial appeared to them to encourage consideration of the negative aspects of alcohol. There were suggestions that it turns you into something dark and uncontrollable that you are not, and that it plays with your mind in a disturbing way.

*“They were quite old people. You think, ‘Oh, that’s boring and serious. It didn’t really appeal to you. Then when you saw all the things it was making fun of . . . It is quite powerful.”*

Group 18: female, BC1, 17, occasional drinkers, north

*“[It says] vodka makes you a different person . . . It shows a bad side to you, a different side.”*

Group 16: female, BC1, year 11, non- and occasional drinkers, Scotland

*“It wasn’t saying nice things about alcohol. It makes you think, but it makes you smile though. He was smiling.”*

Group 12: female, BC1, year 9, regular drinkers, Midlands

*“If I was doing an advert, I wouldn’t use something like that to advertise an alcohol product ‘cos it shows people the dangers and puts you off.”*

Paired depth 4: female, C2DE, year 7, occasional drinkers, south

No respondent seemed to feel that the commercial was aimed at a young audience; the setting and visual style is sophisticated and unfamiliar – this was not considered young people’s territory. In isolation, vodka, a spirit and a relatively popular choice, did have some appeal, but not when advertised in this way.

*“It makes out that it’s made for dinner parties and socialising ... but when I think of it, I get like watching Club Reps and everyone doping shots, so it’s really a two-way thing with vodka.”*

Group 11: female, C2DE, year 8, occasional drinkers, south

We do not know how to assess the effects of this commercial. In attempting to give the brand image elements of intrigue and mystery it does the same for vodka generically and perhaps for drinking generally. There seemed to be some cachet for older respondents in decoding the sequence, which may foster a sense of inclusion in, or induction into, adulthood.

#### **1.16 Rolling Rock: *Bed of Nails***

*A man (always behind the camera) is given a bottle of Rolling Rock. Every time he takes a drink, the scene changes, but he is always in a slightly sleazy urban environment. The last scene has him enter a bedroom with a woman who pulls back the sheets to reveal a bed of nails.*

Respondents did not recall this commercial at all, but some older people found it engaging when it was shown. Younger respondents were typically bored – the cars, seedy atmosphere and confusing sequences all suggested older people. But the music was appealing; some knew the song (‘Drinking in LA’), which was thought to fit the sleazy tone of the commercial.

Some older respondents noticed that the person with the camera is drinking and took an interest; irregular movement and sequence changes with each drink could suggest that the person with the camera is becoming drunk.

The spirit of this commercial is perhaps difficult to reconcile with moderate drinking. The images were unlikely to be attractive to young people (he appears to be confused, not having much fun and to be on the outside looking in), but the music will make some young people pay attention.

### **1.17 Rolling Rock: *Dice***

*Two young men on a night out roll two dice to decide what to do next.*

There was no spontaneous recall of this commercial, but some older respondents remembered it when shown. It was not generally thought very engaging, although some older people seemed familiar with the campaign idea - laddish pranks, chance and adventure. But despite the pranks and immature behaviour, this was not thought to be aimed at young people (rationally, the lads are clearly not teenagers).

Respondents identified little to be concerned about. The risk area would be that the commercial fosters links between alcohol, a devil-may-care attitude and a lack of responsibility but there was no evidence from this research to justify such concerns.

### **1.18 Metz: *Judder***

*A young woman in a bar picks up a bottle of Metz, drinks from it, and experiences a 'judder'.*

Many respondents considered this boring – there was little to interest or engage them, no social situation or music and it was not thought funny. Respondents in year 10 and below did not interrogate what causes the 'judder', they seemed insufficiently interested to care. A minority of older respondents found the visual funny and saw the 'judder' as a metaphor for an 'effect' – not drunkenness, but something interesting. However, few of these respondents connected with this commercial at all.

### **1.19 Guinness: *Volcano***

*An erupting volcano is setting fire to a village. People are on the streets and they see beer barrels rolling out of a pub. One man takes off his shoes, walks across burning coals into the pub and comes out with a Guinness. Ends with the 'Believe' sign off.*

This was very familiar to almost all respondents, most of whom knew the visual details well. It was often well liked (perhaps more by males than females) for its sense of drama and the succession of surprising (often amusing) images. A few respondents were bored by it.

*"It was kind of unexpected because you're not sure what it is about, so you don't want to just stop watching it. But after you've seen it once it kind of loses its effect."*  
Group 15: male, BC1, year 10, regular drinkers, south

*"I don't think it's that good because that village/town thing is on fire and he just stops to save the beer. I think that's a bit unrealistic."*  
Group 11: female, C2DE, year 8, occasional drinkers, south

Although there were a few misattributions to Stella, the majority recognised this as a commercial for Guinness within the first few frames. As they were not interested in drinking Guinness, which was perceived as a middle-aged man's drink, it appears that they watched it for the entertainment value. Interpretations of the action had to be prompted and were almost all along the lines of *"He'll do anything for a Guinness"* and *"The whole town's in ruins but all they care about is the Guinness"*.

*"It is showing the importance Guinness and Stella has on blokes. I drink more for fun. A bloke, it is quite important to have a pint of Guinness or lager. For girls it is more of a fun thing. That is why the Guinness advert is more serious."*  
Group 18: female, BC1, 17, occasional drinkers, north

The vivid imagery clearly transcends the straightforward satisfactions obtainable from Guinness. The commercial sets out to evoke the big themes and values of life, and it is impossible to know what effect this association between emotion and alcohol has on young people.



### 1.20 Worthington: *Working Day*

*After a series of images of men working, both manually and in offices, the scene cuts to the men enjoying beer and televised sport in the evening.*

There was no spontaneous recall of this commercial and little interest when it was shown. This may be partly explained by a lack of interest in beer, although there was better recall of other beer commercials (John Smiths and various lagers, for example) that were enjoyed and considered funny.

It seemed that the turn off here was the work setting. Few respondents engaged with drinking in this context and most felt that the commercial was aimed at older men who are working and enjoy a pint after work. The music was the redeeming feature – it was often enjoyed and encouraged what little engagement there was with the commercial.

*“I would say if you drink this you are a real man, you are one of the blokes, down the pub, after a hard day’s graft. It’s probably aimed at a higher age group.”*  
Group 15: male, BC1, year 10, regular drinkers, south

There was scattered appreciation of some of the more subtle themes here - drink as part of the fabric of (social) life; macho ‘real men drink beer/Worthington’ – but most respondents, particularly the youngest, did not pick this up. The soundtrack was the main incentive to engage with this commercial and it seemed to be of little relevance to young people.

### 1.21 Carling: *Homecoming*

*John Peel’s voiceover invites the viewer to see the Manic Street Preachers in Cardiff with special packs of Carling.*

Respondents were not interested in this - the *Manics* are not currently a fashionable band among people under 18, and respondents found this commercial exceptionally dull.

*“It’s not appealing to you unless you’re a fan of the Manic Street Preachers.”*

Group 6: male, C2DE, year 9, occasional drinkers, north

The commercial was usually seen as suggesting that Carling are sponsoring a *Manics* concert; in a couple of groups this prompted references to sponsorship of TV shows by alcohol brands, notably *Friends* (Jacobs Creek) and *Sex and the City* (Baileys).

Nobody interpreted the commercial as suggesting that drinking Carling can make you successful and neither John Peel nor the *Manics* have strong appeal to the under-18s.

## **2 Press and poster executions**

### **2.1 Red Square: *Bridge***

*Young men and women are on a bridge and the bank of a river in a city at dawn, having a good time.*

This was not regarded as a very striking or likeable ad and is unlikely to generate much involvement from young people. Younger respondents seemed to identify it as addressing people older than them – this, many think, is an ad for people who go to pubs and clubs.

The main communication was seen as people having a good time and a laugh; most respondents saw this as perfectly appropriate to alcohol. But many did not enter into the ad enough to appreciate that the scene is set at dawn; the implication about excess is therefore weaker than it otherwise would be.

*“It is saying the alcohol will keep you awake all night like a party animal.”*

Group 4: male, BC1, year 7, non-drinkers, south

Although initial reactions were broadly in the area of *‘They’re having a good time’*, many respondents went on to say *‘They’re pissed’*. Moreover, some assumed that they had got drunk out of doors (not that they are returning from a club); drinking outside is associated with people too young to get into pubs and clubs.

Lack of interest in decoding this ad seems likely to mean its impact on the young will be minimal. However, some do have the impression that the characters are drinking in a way that respondents do themselves. A number of respondents read the ad as 'alcohol helps you stay up all night'.

## 2.2 Red Square: *Scratches*

*The naked back of a man has four red scratches forming a square.*

On the face of it, this ad had little appeal, especially not to younger respondents (those in year 10 and below). It was generally perceived as aimed at adults and was not well understood. Nakedness signalled sex but the scratches were often not associated with sexual abandon or aggression.

*"He's had a good time but he's had a wee fight."*  
Paired depth 5: female, BC1, year 9, non-drinkers,  
Scotland

Younger respondents often said they would not look at it twice and found it odd because it appeared to have nothing to do with drink. And those who got the sexual connection clearly often seemed uncomfortable – they found it bizarre and unpleasant more than violent or intriguing.

*"That one scares me with the four slashes in his back."*  
Paired depth 4: female, C2DE, year 7, occasional  
drinkers, south

Many respondents knew they were not understanding this and it may foster a feeling that adult life harbours dark mysteries of which both sex and alcohol are part. But to the few who fully understood the visual, the intended association between alcohol and exceptional (aggressive?) sex was clear – although it was also very likely to be thought ridiculous.

## 2.3 WKD: *Feet*

*Three pairs of feet fill a thought bubble coming from a bottle of WKD.*

Many respondents, including some of the youngest, were immediately attracted to this ad, perhaps in part because of the format, in part because the WKD TV campaign was well known and well liked. The visual was not as obvious as might be thought – quite a few of the young initially assumed the threesome were dancing. But the dawning recognition that they are having sex seemed to obscure the link to drink – respondents tended to lose interest once the penny had dropped.

*“If you were walking past, you wouldn’t get it.”*  
Group 1: male, BC1, year 11, regular drinkers, South

*“Funny with the feet. It is not immediately obvious.”*  
Group 13: female, C2DE, year 9, occasional drinkers, Midlands

The ad seemed to be seen as more about ‘being daring’ or ‘experimenting’ than about sexual success, and many respondents also read the ad as expressing an idea rather than depicting an event – this was someone’s fantasy.

Nothing any respondents said suggested there was any cause for concern here. As already noted in relation to the TV campaign, there is an argument that the brand values and the headline ‘*have you got a WKD side*’ may discourage respect for the law on the minimum drinking age.

#### **2.4 JW Lees: *Ribbed for extra satisfaction***

*A ‘ribbed’ pint glass.*

This ad caused embarrassment, especially among girls in years 8 to 10, though the youngest respondents sometimes did not understand it. But it was not perceived as targeting young people and few would give it a second look; the pint is prominent and people who like beer were thought to be middle-aged men.

*“It reminds you of those machines where you get certain things.”*

#### **Question 18: Condoms?**

*“Yes.”*  
Group 4: male, BC1, year 7, non-drinkers, south

Young people did not see this as intended for them and it is tempting to argue also that the promise of extra sexual satisfaction is too crude and blatant to work at a subliminal level.

## 2.5 **Abbot Ale: *Some things get better given longer***

*A woman in apparent ecstasy under the sheets.*

Young respondents were not interested in this ad – as with JW Lees above, beer meant nothing to them – and some did not see the sexual association, thinking she had a hangover or was really tired.

*“She has had it the night before and has a hangover.”  
“If she has a hangover, why is she smiling?”*

Group 4: male, BC1, year 7, non-drinkers, south

*“She’s been out the night before and she doesn’t want to get up.”*

Group 10: female, BC1, year 7, non-drinkers, north

The tone here was thought odd for beer – several respondents pointed out that the colours made you think of Bailey’s – and the consensus was that nobody would think drinking Abbot Ale is going to improve their sexual performance. A few suggested that the commercial was intended to be ironic in some way.

The ad makes a clear connection between drinking and sexual success. This seems very unlikely to affect young people specifically, but may contribute to the ‘drip drip’ effect discussed elsewhere.

## 2.6 **Southern Comfort: *Find your own comfort zone***

*A young man and woman recline and kiss on top of a bus shelter.*

Southern Comfort was widely regarded as an older person’s drink, yet this ad seemed to be aimed at a young audience. But it seemed not to connect because respondents were not interested in the drink; they found little to say about it unless prompted.

On prompting, it was noted that the ad seems to show people drinking outdoors in an urban setting (as under-age drinkers do) and a few pointed out that the couple looked as if they have been up all night and must have been fairly drunk to end up on top of a bus shelter.

These respondents did not connect with the ad and seemed uninterested in the product. The intention to associate Southern Comfort with sexual success (spontaneous sex?) could hardly be more blatant but the ad does not connect with the young.

## **2.7 Dooley's: *Chin***

*A man licks Dooley's off a woman's chin and neck.*

As noted under the TV commercial, there was quite a high level of interest in trying a toffee liqueur (it sounded like something a young person might like). But this ad tended to reduce rather than increase interest.

A close-up of a man licking a woman's chin did nothing for these respondents; many thought it looked weird and disgusting and not something anyone under 18 would want to do. They certainly did not regard it as sexy.

## **2.8 Diamond Zest: *It was a Diamond nite out***

*Young people lark around in shopping trolleys.*

Respondents did not find this ad appealing and it was one of the last to attract comment when all ten were displayed at once. It was thought to be not very good advertising for a brand that is not well known. It was linked with *Jackass TV* on Channel 4, which has a cult following among some young people (in year 8 and above).

Although a sizeable minority of respondents thought the characters depicted are '*adults having a laugh, being silly*', a majority saw them as under 18 and drunk. Furthermore, they were assumed to have been drinking outside, which is where young people below the legal age drink and there was a feeling that only kids would mess around in trolleys – this was not an adult form of amusement.

*"They're steaming. Because they're doing stupid things like pushing each other around in a trolley."*

Paired depth 5: female, BC1, year 9, non-drinkers, Scotland

*“They have got drunk and are doing silly things . . . I think teenagers would go around in trolleys if they had had an alcoholic drink.”*

Paired depth 4: female, C2DE, year 7, occasional drinkers, south

*“It is for teenagers. You don’t want to see adults getting out of their trolley. The age of the people also looks about 16.”*

Group 4: male, BC1, year 7, non-drinkers, south

This ad would seem to advocate excess and to portray Diamond Zest as a good way of getting drunk. There were clear indications that respondents could relate to the actions of the characters and that these actions were seen as childlike, not adult. There would appear to be potential for the ad to endorse this type of drunken behaviour among young people. But the potential is limited by the execution’s lack of appeal.

## **2.9 WKD: X-ray**

*An x-rayed skeleton with a ring under the pelvis fills a thought bubble coming from a WKD bottle.*

It was often difficult to gauge whether respondents fully understood that this is about genital piercing, as many were clearly embarrassed by it. A number of the younger respondents did not get it, but they usually guessed that “it’s dirty again”.

*“He’s got a wedding ring up his bum.”*

Group 3: male, C2DE, year 7, occasional drinkers, Midlands

*“I think it is meant to be dirty. I think that is a lady perhaps doing something to herself.”*

Group 4: male, BC1, year 7, non-drinkers, south

The ring is a secret and, as with the other WKD execution, this is regarded as less about sexual success and more about experimentation and what sort of a person you are. There was some feeling that the associations were social more than sexual – are you cool?



There did not seem any cause for concern but, as with the other WKD adverts, the endline, *“Do you have a WKD side”*, may be seen as an invitation to break the rules.

## **2.10 Smirnoff Ice: *I’m sure it’s just a rash***

*The execution includes just the phrase above.*

This was regarded as a poor example of a campaign that is generally well liked for being cheekily funny. It was not understood by respondents under about 15, and older respondents were often uncertain about the exact situation here.

*“Makes you wonder what they are getting at. You know that it is not actually a rash because it says ‘As clear as your conscience.’”*

Group 1: male, BC1, year 11, regular drinkers, south

*“He has got drunk one night and someone has given him a lovebite and he thinks it is a rash.”*

Group 13: female, C2DE, year 9, occasional drinkers, Midlands

When they thought about it, many people found it sleazy, even horrible, rather than funny. The story seemed to be that the speaker has given his girlfriend a sexually transmitted disease (or has one himself) and is trying to convince her that he hasn’t.

This execution does not successfully associate the brand with sexual success – in so far as they identified any sexual content, respondents seemed to find it unappealing. However, as noted elsewhere *‘As clear as your conscience’* potentially translates into *‘Rules are made to be broken’*.

## **2.11 Lambrini: *I lost 14 stone of fat last night . . . I dumped my boyfriend***

*A picture of three women drinking above this phrase.*

Some respondents, including some boys, liked Lambrini but no one thought this ad was aimed at them – the women depicted were perceived as too old and unattractive.

The campaign '*Lambrini girls just want to have fun*' was seen as being primarily about having a laugh and a good time. 'Women on top', or 'women behaving like blokes' was the general take-out, although some did not understand the joke.

*"She must have jumped about a lot for her to have lost 14 stone."*

Paired depth 5: female, BC1, year 9, non-drinkers, Scotland

*"I thought it was doing loads of dancing and stuff and at the end she lost 14 stone doing that."*

Group 10: female, BC1, year 7, non-drinkers, north

If there is a cause for concern, it is in the area of the overall campaign communication which perhaps comes across as '*Let's get drunk on Lambrini and behave badly*'.

## **2.12 Lambrini: *I treat all my men with a firm hand***

*See above.*

Respondents in year 10 and above saw a clear sexual implication here and some were embarrassed by it in the research situation. But, again, the communication seemed clearly aimed at women over 25 and the tone was thought to be less about sexual success than having a laugh about sex.

## **2.13 Smirnoff: *If Smirnoff made pain killers***

*A naked man slides down a long stair rail, approaching a large knob.*

Few respondents seemed to have seen this ad and it was not well recalled. On showing, however, it was well liked across the age range and thought to be a '*good laugh*'.

A few of the youngest respondents seemed not to get the joke or understand the connection with Smirnoff (or any drink). Among the remainder, the jokey high spirits seemed to be enjoyed for themselves, and there was no evidence that anyone was at all reflective about the implications.

The execution seemed to be taken as just a visual joke, rather than an example of hilarious (and therefore attractive) excess. The campaign as a whole was thought to be centrally about magnifying experience and only obliquely relevant to alcohol.

The humour of the campaign appeals strongly to anyone over about 14 and this should perhaps be a cause for concern. The campaign tone of voice (as with so much alcohol advertising) clearly does not foster moderation and presents a devil-may-care attitude as attractive (in the context of strong liquor).

#### **2.14 Crack Ice Irish Potcheen: *Cartoon***

*A cartoon man/dog sits in an alleyway. "Drinking is the vertical expression of a horizontal desire."*

This was not an appealing ad and not one likely to attract much attention from young people. It seemed not to target the young, and was not understood, either in detail or as a whole, by most respondents: they did not get the jokes, did not know what potcheen is, and found the overall look strange and unattractively seedy.

*"The Crack Ice sounds like a drug and it reminds me of a drug the way it is written out . . . It looks like a dingy alleyway in America where they deal drugs."*  
Paired depth 4: female, C2DE, year 7, occasional drinkers, south

*"That one, the Cracked Ice one, is really rubbish."*  
Group 4: male, BC1, year 7, non-drinkers, south

Some older respondents saw the association with crack/cocaine and a few were a little shocked and perhaps had their curiosity aroused. One or two suggested that using a cartoon character might target the young, but most comment suggested the ad as a whole is clearly intended for adults.

## Appendix B: Composite Collages

Soft drink advertisement:



Alcohol advertisement:



## Appendix C: Research materials

ITC/BBFC449	2003	MARCH
<b>RECRUITMENT QUESTIONNAIRE</b>		

Name:

.....  
.....

Address:

.....  
.....

.....  
Tel:.....

Sex:            Male ( )      Female ( )

Age:            10 ( ) 11 ( ) 12 ( ) 13 ( ) 14 ( ) 15 ( ) 17 ( )

School year: Year 6 ( ) Year 7 ( ) Year 8 ( ) Year 9 ( ) Year 10 ( ) Year 11 ( )  
                  Not in school ( )

Occupation (HoH):

.....

SeS:            B ( ) C1 ( ) C2 ( ) D ( ) E ( )

-----  
-----HELLO, I WORK FOR A MARKET RESEARCH COMPANY AND WE ARE CARRYING OUT SOME RESEARCH ON ADVERTISING. MAY I ASK YOU A FEW QUICK QUESTIONS? I'D LIKE TO REASSURE YOU THAT ANYTHING YOU SAY WILL BE COMPLETELY CONFIDENTIAL. YOU NEED NOT GIVE YOUR NAME, BUT IF YOU DO, IT WILL NOT BE PASSED ONTO ANY THIRD PARTY.

QA    Does anyone in your family, work in any of the following occupations or industries? (READ OUT)

Advertising	( )
Journalism	( )
Public relations	( )
Marketing	( )
Market research	( )
Manufacture, distribution or sale of alcoholic drinks	( )

Pubs/bars ( )  
 Off-licence ( )

CLOSE IF YES TO ANY OF THE ABOVE, OTHERWISE GO TO Qb.

QB Have you ever been to a market research group discussion or interview?

Yes ( ) TO QC No ( ) TO Q1

QC How long ago was the last time?

WRITE IN \_\_\_\_\_  
**CLOSE IF ATTENDED WITHIN THE LAST TWELVE MONTHS.**

QD What subject(s) was/were the group(s)/interview(s) on?

WRITE IN \_\_\_\_\_  
**CLOSE IF RELATED TO THIS RESEARCH TOPIC. OTHERWISE TO Q1.**

Q1 When did you last do any of the following, if at all? SHOWCARD A.

	Longer than	Within the	Within the	Within the	
	months ago/	last month	last 4	last 6	6
	never been		months	months	
Go to a swimming pool	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Go to the cinema	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
Visit a museum	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

ALL RESPONDENTS SHOULD HAVE BEEN TO THE CINEMA IN THE LAST 3 MONTHS. TO Q2 IF APPROPRIATE.

Q2 I'd like to ask you about watching TV.

Q2a How often would you say you watch TV on average in a typical week? SHOWCARD B.

on one or two evenings ( )  
 CLOSE  
 on at least three evenings ( )  
 TO Q2b

Q2b Do you see much television advertising? Which of the following statements is more true for you? SHOWCARD C.

*I mainly watch BBC so I do not see very many TV ads* ( )  
CLOSE

*I watch quite a lot of commercial TV so I see TV advertising often* ( )

TO Q3

Q3 Moving to newspapers and magazines, which of the following statements is most true for you? SHOWCARD D

*I never, or hardly ever, look at any magazines or newspapers* ( )

CLOSE

*I look at magazines and/or newspapers occasionally* ( )

TO Q 4

*I often look at magazines and/or newspapers* ( )

TO Q 4

Q4 Which of the following statements are true of you? SHOWCARD E.  
Just tell me the letter alongside the statement that is most true of you.

A *I have never been on holiday abroad*

( ) TO Q5

B *I have been on holiday abroad a few times*

( ) TO Q5

C *I have been on holiday abroad many times*

( ) TO Q5

Q5 And which of these statements apply to you? SHOWCARD F.

D *All my life we have had had at least one pet at home*

( )

E *We have had pets in the past but we don't have any now*

( )

F *We have never had any pets in our household*

( )

TO Q6

Q6 On this card (SHOWCARD G) are some statements about drinking alcohol. Please could you let me know which of these statements best describes you? Again, just tell me the letter alongside the statement that is most true of you.

G *"I have never drunk alcoholic drinks and I don't know anyone the same age as me who has"* ( )

non-user

- H      *"I have never drunk alcoholic drinks, but I know people of the same age as me who do"*      ( )  
non-user
- I      *"I have tried alcoholic drinks, but didn't enjoy it very much"*      ( )  
occasional
- J      *"I drink alcoholic drinks very occasionally"*      ( )  
occasional
- K      *"I drink alcoholic drinks most weeks"*      ( )  
regular
- L      *"I drink alcoholic drinks every week"*      ( )  
regular

RESPONDENTS IN **GROUPS 1, 2, 4, 7, 10, 16 AND PAIRED DEPTHS 2 AND 5** SHOULD BE NON-USERS OF ALCOHOL (MUST CHOOSE G OR H ABOVE).

RESPONDENTS IN **3, 6, 9, 11, 13, 18 AND PAIRED DEPTHS 1 AND 4** SHOULD BE OCCASIONAL USERS OF ALCOHOL (MUST CHOOSE I OR J ABOVE).

RESPONDENTS IN **GROUPS 5, 8, 12, 14, 15, 17 AND PAIRED DEPTHS 3 AND 6** SHOULD BE REGULAR USERS OF ALCOHOL (MUST CHOOSE K OR L ABOVE).

TO Q7 IF APPROPRIATE.

- Q7      Now I would like to ask you about smoking cigarettes. Please could you let me know which of these statements best describes you? Again, just tell me the letter alongside the statement that is most true of you. SHOWCARD H.

- M      *"I have never smoked cigarettes and I don't know anyone the same age as me who has"*      ( )
- N      *"I have never smoked cigarettes, but I know people of the same age as me who do"*      ( )
- O      *"I have tried cigarettes, but didn't enjoy them very much"*      ( )
- P      *"I smoke cigarettes very occasionally"*      ( )
- Q      *"I smoke cigarettes most weeks"*      ( )
- R      *"I smoke cigarettes every day"*      ( )

TO Q8 IF APPROPRIATE

- Q8      Finally, thinking about your school (if you still attend – add for 17 year olds) which of these statements best describes you? SHOWCARD J.

- S      *I usually enjoy school*      ( )



- |   |   |     |
|---|---|-----|
| T | <i>School is okay but I wouldn't say I enjoy it</i> | ( ) |
| U | <i>I find school boring</i>                         | ( ) |
| V | <i>I really dislike school</i>                      | ( ) |

RECRUIT AS APPROPRIATE.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **449: Discussion guide**

### *Background*

Name, age, household circumstances, interests etc

### *A game*

Lets imagine 'Planet Ideal' – a planet where everything works out as we would like.

- what will it be like?
- houses—what do they look like
- cars, trains, etc
- what are schools like
- what sort of jobs do people do for a living
- what do people do in their spare time? older people, young people
- what do people eat
- what drinks would there be on Planet Ideal—for adults, for people their age
- how would people celebrate
- what would adults do that children did not (apart from have sex)
- what is there on TV
- what are films like
- magazines
- is there advertising; what type (TV, cinema, magazines, billboards)
- what is the advertising for
- what is the typical TV commercial break on Planet Ideal
- what might be advertised in the cinema
- what ads in the magazines they read

What about 'Planet Rubbish' – how does this compare?

USE SIMILAR PROMPTS FOR PLANET RUBBISH

*What are ads for alcoholic drinks like; how do they differ from ads for soft drinks?*

RESPONDENTS WOULD BE GIVEN A SET OF PHOTOS AND WORDS CUT FROM MAGAZINES AND ASKED TO CHOOSE WHICH THEY FEEL AN ADVERTISER MIGHT WANT TO USE FOR, FIRST, AN AD FOR A SOFT DRINK, AND SECOND, AN AD FOR AN ALCO-POP (OR A LAGER). THEY WOULD OF COURSE BE ASKED TO EXPLAIN THE THINKING BEHIND THEIR CHOICES.

*Attitudes to and experience of alcohol*

What do they think of when they think of alcohol? who do they think of? what situations and what drinks?

What is the extent of their exposure to alcohol? who do they know that drinks? on what occasions? what conclusions have they made about alcohol? to what degree does this depend on the person/occasion/quantity/nature of the drink etc?

Do they drink? when, with whom?

Why do they feel they drink? do they think there are pressures on them to drink? if so, where do they think these pressures come from? (probe: older family, same age friends, opposite sex, older acquaintances, advertising, film, television etc)?

how do they see advertising breaking down?

how do the associations differ between, eg alco-pops, lager, spirit mixes, wine?

what drinks do they associate with their peers, their parents, other adults?

*Alcohol advertising*

Can they remember any alcohol advertising? Probe for: TV commercials, cinema commercials, press, poster, internet etc.

How do they describe the advertising? what do they remember about it? why do they think remember the ones that they do?

Does it appeal to them personally? if so, what is it about the advertising that they find appealing (probe: funny, sexy, irreverent etc)

If it does not appeal to them, who would it appeal to?

Who do they see as the target for this advertising? If they include themselves, what makes them say this, given that they are under the legal age?

How does what they see in advertising fit with their own perceptions of drinking? do they think that alcohol advertising shows alcohol in a positive light? Is this fair? do they have any reason to dispute the truth of what they see?

*Show selected advertising material: cinema, TV, print*

A DECISION HAS YET TO BE MADE ON HOW MUCH MATERIAL WILL BE AVAILABLE. CLEARLY IT WOULD BE UNWISE TO SHOW A LONG SEQUENCE OF COMMERCIALS. OUR FIRST THOUGHT IS TO SHOW, IN EACH GROUP, ONE CINEMA COMMERCIAL, ONE TV COMMERCIAL AND THREE PRINT ADS, USING DIFFERENT MATERIAL IN DIFFERENT GROUPS

What do they like about this advertising? Are there things they dislike about it? Who is it aimed at? Does this differ between the ads? What are the clues that tell you what age of person the advertisers have in mind? What in the advertising might make people buy the drink? Who—what age and type of person—would be most influenced by the various ads shown?

If advertising for alcoholic drinks was banned, what would the effects of this be? Imagine there had been no advertising for any alcoholic drink for five years, would there be any differences—in their house, amongst their friends, at their parties, in pubs?

*Back to the Planets*

Let's revisit 'Planet Ideal' with the drinks advertising we have seen in mind. We've just seen these ads and maybe they have given us new ideas about the ideal and rubbish planets—how people celebrate; what they drink; the difference between grown-up and children's parties, etc. If the advertising gives us second thoughts on any of this, what are they?