YOUTH ENGAGEMENT WITH ALCOHOL BRANDS IN THE UK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
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Alcohol consumption is believed to be linked to approximately 12,800 cancer cases annually in the UK\(^1\) and is linked to seven types of cancer, including two of the most common, female breast and bowel\(^2-3\). If current alcohol consumption trends continue, it will lead to an estimated 135,000 cancer deaths over the next 20 years and £2bn in cancer costs to the NHS\(^4\).

Levels of alcohol consumption in the UK for 15 year olds remain amongst the highest in the Western World\(^5\). In 2014, 38\% of 11-15 year olds in England reported ever trying an alcoholic drink\(^6\). Whilst the root causes of under-age drinking in Britain are undoubtedly complex, industry claims that their marketing merely influences switching between brands and do not affect overall consumption does not accord with the evidence\(^7-10\).

The aim of this study was to:

- Examine ways in which alcohol marketing influences teenagers

Qualitative focus groups were conducted with youths in Bristol and Scotland. Interviews with academics and public policy specialists were held to discuss current and future options for controlling industry marketing.

FINDINGS

YOUTH FOCUS GROUPS

- Young people indicated that some alcohol brands were better known, better regarded and consumed more frequently by youth than other brands.
- Brands with brightly coloured packaging and with high levels of added sugar were seen as particularly attractive.
- Ciders were consumed to relax and high strength spirits were used to get drunk.
- Gender, age and social class played a role in the way young people responded to different brands. For example, some drinks were seen as beginner’s drinks that thirteen year olds would drink, and others were perceived to be what their grandparents would drink.
- Price and accessibility play a role in what products young people buy.
- Although some alcoholic brands were perceived as appealing to some genders, such as beer for males and pre-mixed vodka for females, some ciders appealed to both genders.

POLICY AND PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Government should review the efficacy of current restrictions on when and where alcohol advertisements are shown and consider how best to minimise young people’s exposure to this marketing.

Government should take a comprehensive approach to reducing youth drinking in the UK. This should include measures to reduce the appeal of alcoholic drinks and reduce the affordability of these drinks.

Further research is needed to investigate further the links between brand-specific marketing activity and under-age drinking behaviour in the UK, preferably with a longitudinal survey.
**AUTHOR INFORMATION**

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**CANCER RESEARCH UK**

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**REFERENCES**
