

Effect of alcohol in the media on drinking behaviour



- Tim Johnson

Engels, Rutger C. M. E., Hermans, R., van Barren, R. B., Hollenstein, T., & Bot, S. M. (2009).

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Introduction:

- Background: Previous studies have measured correlations between exposure to alcoholic stimuli (i. e. commercials) and alcohol interaction. Other studies have measured the influence of well-known products and people have on a consumer and how it creates desire to have or emulate even if desire is subconscious. This study illustrates the effect of alcohol exposure in entertainment on an individual's drinking behavior.
- Problem Studied: The researchers attempted to find whether alcohol exposure in media has an influence on immediate drinking behavior.
- Importance: At a large level the government could have more strict policies on when and where alcohol exposure which could lead to decreased substance abuse in the overall population. At a smaller level parents/guardians could take measures to limit their children's exposure to alcohol on television, which could lead to less underage consumption and possibly prevent any long term health implications as a result to alcohol use.

- Hypothesis: The researchers believed that exposure to alcohol via television has a direct and immediate influence on an individual's alcohol consumption behavior.

Methods:

- The independent variable was the movie condition in which the participants were randomly assigned to and it was operationalized by the participants being placed in a comfortable setting that was equipped with alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. The four conditions were: alcoholic movie with neutral and alcoholic commercials, alcoholic movie with neutral commercials, non-alcoholic movie with neutral and alcoholic commercials, and non-alcoholic movie with neutral commercials.
- The population was made up of 80 male, Dutch students that attended an undisclosed university and the average age was 21.45 years old. This population represents the demographic in which alcohol is most predominantly used and the demographic that manufacturers of alcohol target.
- Procedure:
 - The participants were sent to the bar laboratory at Radboud University Nijmegen for the experiment. The experiment took place in the afternoon in order to simulate average television viewing time and the setting was furnished in a manner that promoted comfort for the participants. The room was equipped with a camera for observing the participants during the

experiment. The students were informed to view the film as they would at home and they could drink/smoke throughout the film at their leisure.

- The room consisted of a large couch, a chair, refrigerator, coffee table, snacks, an ash tray, and a large TV for viewing the controlled program. The refrigerator was stocked with beer and wine as the alcoholic drinks as well as cola and orange soda as the non-alcoholic drinks.
- When the experimenter left the room the film would begin, but each pair was assigned one of two movies clips that lasted approximately one hour. Those movies were *American Pie 2* and *40 Days and 40 Nights*. The movie and the commercials were assigned depending on the condition the participant was to be exposed to. The
- After the movie clip, the participants had to complete a survey that contained questions about their typical drinking behavior, film including commercials, and their status with the other participant in the pair.
- This is an experiment because the researchers were able to meet all three criteria necessary to be considered an experiment. The researchers manipulated the independent variable because they randomly assigned which one of the four conditions the participants were exposed to. The researchers controlled confounding variables such as the type of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks they were provided for consumption, they controlled the setting of the

experiment, and they removed all individuals except the pairs of participants.

- The dependent variable is the participants' drinking behavior during the exposure to their assigned movie condition and is measured by the total alcohol consumption during the film.
- The researchers measured and analyzed four areas: general attitude about film, exposure to film prior to study, average alcohol drinking behavior, and actual observed alcohol consumption. The attitude towards the film and whether or not they have seen the film prior were used to distinguish if these areas would affect drinking behavior (not significant difference found).

Results and Discussion:

- The researchers concluded that male individuals when exposed to alcoholic entertainment consumed on average 1.5 more alcoholic beverages compared to their counterpart. Their data supports their hypothesis because exposure to alcoholic television directly influenced the drinking behavior of the participants. The limitations observed in this study were the drinking behavior when with a companion and the study was based around young men. Although drinking in companion pairs promoted a comfortable environment, it also promoted drinking behavior that may not be regular when drinking alone. Also, this study only focused on young men rather than a male/female population of this age group. The information in this study is not applicable to other demographics, because only a specific demographic was tested.

Within that last five years a study was published that finds evidence to support the idea of exposure to alcoholic entertainment can directly affect immediate drinking behavior. The experiment took place at a university in the Netherlands that had a bar laboratory in which they could use to observe the drinking behavior of the four conditions. For the experiment, male companions were to watch a majority of a film that contained two segments of commercials. While the male pairs were viewing the film, they were told to view the film as if they were at home. The lab had a refrigerator that was stocked with alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks and there was an ashtray for the students to feel comfortable to smoke. The four conditions tested were viewing a film that was an alcoholic movie with neutral and alcoholic commercials, an alcoholic movie with neutral commercials, a non-alcoholic movie with neutral and alcoholic commercials, and a non-alcoholic movie with neutral commercials. The movies chosen were ranked by the students and that information was used to illustrate that alcohol consumption was not attributed to the student's attitudes towards the film. From the gathered results researchers were able to support their hypothesis that exposure to alcohol related content can immediately and directly influence drinking behavior. Their results show that a young adult male drinks on average 1.5 more glasses of alcohol when exposed to alcohol related content when compared to their counterpart. Although there may be limitations in this study, the researchers were able to find a direct relationship between alcoholic content and drinking behavior.