

# Marketers Responsibility for the Way their Products are Used : A Case Study of Alcohol Advertising Targeting Youth

**Fabrice WENZE MUDIANDAMBU**

University of Kinshasa

## Abstract

Should marketers be responsible of the way their products are used by consumers? This article tries to answer this question by analyzing marketers' responsibility for the way their products are used by consumers and the way they advertise them. The article focuses on beer or alcohol beverages advertisements targeting youth. Since it has been proven that alcoholic beverages advertisements are targeting young people, the responsibility of the marketers is engaged. But at the same time respondents mentioned the key role of the Government as regulator, before talking about families as the first educators of youth and the responsibility of the youth themselves as consumers, with the latest purchase decision. It is thus a shared responsibility in some way. This article has the advantage to suggest a number of measures to be taken at different levels to stop the gangrene and bring the young people away from any abuse or danger of alcohol.

**Keywords:** Youth, Alcohol, Advertisement, Marketers, Responsibility, Consumers.

## Résumé

Les marqueteurs devraient-ils être responsables de la manière dont leurs produits sont utilisés par les consommateurs? Cet article tente de répondre à cette question en analysant la responsabilité des marqueteurs pour la façon dont leurs produits sont utilisés par les consommateurs et la manière dont ils font la publicité desdits produits. L'article se concentre sur la publicité de la bière ciblant les jeunes. Dès lors qu'il a été démontré que les publicités des boissons alcoolisées ciblent les jeunes, la responsabilité des marqueteurs est engagée. Mais en même temps, cet article reconnaît aussi bien le rôle clé du gouvernement en tant que régulateur de tous les secteurs de la vie publique, que celui des parents en tant que premiers éducateurs de la jeunesse en famille ; puis enfin la responsabilité des jeunes eux-mêmes en tant que consommateurs ayant la dernière décision d'achat. La responsabilité est donc partagée entre plusieurs acteurs en présence. Cet article a l'avantage de proposer un certain nombre de mesures à prendre à différents niveaux pour stopper la gangrène et mettre les jeunes à l'abri du danger que présente l'alcool pour eux.

**Mots clefs:** Jeunes, publicité, alcool, marqueteurs, responsabilité, consommateurs.

## I. Introduction

All over the world, more and more voices are raising up to criticize the misdeeds or abuses caused by the high consumption of alcohol by both adults and youth. Marketers are pointed as the main responsible for

this misfortune. Many authors believe that the responsibility lies with marketers because of their strategic position in the company, without which no business can achieve its goals. This article tries to answer to the following main question, as shown by the title: should marketers be responsible for the way their products are used by consumers? To answer this question, information was collected from several research and books, published by universities, NGO and institutions such as World Bank, International Monetary Funds (IMF)...

By reading all the publications about alcohol advertisement, it seems that marketers are responsible of the way their products are used by consumers especially, when their advertisements target youth. This article recognizes also that it is not only marketers' responsibility but the responsibility must be shared between different actors such as: the marketers, the government, the family and the consumers themselves.

Indeed, when drinking alcohol at any circumstance, people raise glasses or cups toasting, and wishing each other "cheers" "to your happiness" etc. for English people and "A la santé" etc. for French, which means "for the health", is it really for their healthiness? This is a great contrast between consumers' beliefs and the reality. Are they really drinking for their wellbeing?

This is the importance of this essay, trying to find out what to do in order to shrink or minimize alcohol advertising and consumption among people, specifically for youth. To better illustrate the topic, some examples will be given with Congolese beers or breweries companies, such as: Primus, Doppel, Turbo, Nkoy, Petite ya quartier, Bralima, Bracongo.

This is an exploratory study, which tries to explore the way marketers advertise their products mainly alcohol beverages. The author use observation to understand different behaviors from producers and users view point. This paper covers four main parts namely, the introduction, the literature review and current situation of alcohol advertising, analysis of different responsibilities, and strategies to reduce alcohol bad effects among people.

## **II. Alcohol advertising practices.**

A growing body of literature shows that alcohol advertising is an important factor influencing alcohol consumption among youth. Several researches have established that most of alcohol advertisements are targeting youth; and as result, alcohol consumption rate is increasing, on top of morbidity and mortality. According to the Center of Alcohol Marketing and Youth of Georgetown University for example, alcohol companies spend more than \$2 billion every year on advertising in the United States. And there are more than 2 million television ads and 20,000 magazine ads for alcoholic products. This heavy advertising effort leads to significant youth exposure (AAFP, 2012).

According to the same Center, although the alcohol industry maintains that its advertising aims only to increase market share but not to encourage underage persons to drink, alcohol advertisements connect consumption of alcohol with attributes particularly important to youth, such as friendship, prestige, sex appeal and fun, and also by using cartoon and animal characters with frogs, lizards and dogs, which are overwhelmingly admired by youth. Many statistical and economic analyses show the relationship between alcohol advertising and consumption (Pan American Health Organization, 2007).

In the DR Congo case for instance, breweries companies and marketers are using orchestras to advertise and promote their products. Majority of those groups are sponsored by the brewery industry. And everywhere in the world, musicians are the most powerful able to attract fans, to change their beliefs and behavior...some fans can even become crazy of their icon. That is why all the breweries corporate use

musicians to advertise their product and they are increasing sells day by day. The very recent case is the advertising of a new product for BRALIMA one of the Congolese beer company, so called “Petite ya quartier” (“Little neighborhood girl”) by one famous Congolese orchestra. As consequence, consumers - youth and adults as well, are not only buying and drinking the “little neighborhood” (Petite ya quartier) but they are also really looking for the little girls in their neighborhood.

When advertising their brown beer such as Doppel, Turbo, they are showing that it is for strong and powerful man, for sport champions. Since youth are more interested by the sport, this is an appeal for them to become champions and strong by drinking such type of beer.

Congolese breweries cannot sell without orchestras which are using youth in majority and whose fans are in large part constitute by youth. Even though some may think the opposite, alcohol consequences are fatal for all the age groups.

When inspecting the transportation sector in the DR Congo, majority of traffic accidents in the public transportation are due to alcohol. “Supu na tolo” (Soup on the chest), which has already been sung by one orchestra (“soup on the chest of mom is ingredient”), then later people named one kind of alcohol beverage with the same words. Examples are legion.

To sum up, beers or alcohol are advertising by youth and for youth, whatever breweries and marketers can argue, evidences are there and simple to understand.

### **III. Responsibility analysis**

As mentioned previously, marketers, government, family and consumers are responsible for alcohol abuse. The following analysis tries to demonstrate this statement.

#### **III.1. Marketers responsibility**

In the above development, details show clearly that marketers are using youth to advertise their products. When using youth, they are also targeting them. Thus, marketers should be responsible of the way youth are using their products - even though some authors don't think so- since they are intentionally targeting youth by using youth themselves. Marketers are quite well informed that their action drives consumers' decision. It is even scientifically justified. Marketers can be compared to a soldier who gives a gun instead of a toy to his child; whatever the tips and warnings he will be made to the child; the danger remains standing. Marketing is a power tool to change people's behavior and trends. It has a considerable effect on the psychology of individuals. That's why marketers should be careful when they are promoting their products, they should not target children, and they must select a good time, appropriate channels and places to realize their actions or advertising.

To sum up, marketers have a big part of responsibility because of their position and their knowledge about the ads effects on individual psychology or behavior. They have to behave ethically and to take into consideration their social responsibility on their consumers. Without marketers no company or industry can sell or reach its goal. That's why it is very important for them to pay attention on the way they are promoting alcohol: the message content and the target market or consumers.

Along with marketers can be associated all the retailers and barkeepers who are selling alcohol to young. Peter Anderson's (2007, p.11) suggests that: “given that it is not easy to control youth moving, it is easy for each retailer, barkeeper to do it”.

#### **III.2. Government responsibility**

The most important role of the government is the regulation of all the population life sectors. To fulfill its mission, the government has all the tools and resources: Justice, Police, Parliament, and many other

partners. As the one who has the power to make rules and laws, Governments have also a part of responsibility. Because one of the government's major roles is to protect people (regal attribution). As such, the government shouldn't allow alcohol advertising targeting youth and by youth. It seems that the government doesn't protect people and youth particularly against alcohol abuse. The government has soft attitude towards breweries and alcohol retailers.

### **III.3. Family and consumers' responsibility**

People come to life in a family and the family is in charge of the first education, first care to their children. As such, they have to educate their children a good manner so that children can grow up with good moral. Family is the first responsible to show children what is right to do and what is wrong to avoid; what is good for their health and well-being and what is hazardous for them. In most of case, parents give up their duty to educate, to advice and to control their children life. Some parents are themselves always tanked, living under alcohol influence every day. They may prefer drinking than providing food to their families. When parents let children rambling all the day, all the night, whatever the raison, they should bear the responsibility for their children behavior. Parents have to take care of their own children, protecting them against whatever bad action or bad activity. Since some parents abandon their family, without fulfilling their parental duties, they have a part of responsibility.

As mentioned above, consumers are responsible of their own behavior. A consumer is considered as someone who can make the decision whether to purchase an item or not, and someone who can be influenced by marketing and advertisements (Delbos C., 2009). However altogether, he must be free to choose what to consume, what is good and what is not good; what is harmful and what is healthful; what is useful and what is useless. Nobody will judge someone else because he did or not buy a product. "Take it or leave it". As soon as consumers know the harmful effects of the beer but decide to buy or drink it, it's not marketers fault or responsibility. Such consumers are comparable or similar to someone who is given a gun to shoot against oneself. Who may really do it? Some other people suggest that consumers must use or drink rationally. It is not right, because due to the different ways that alcohol can affect people, there is no amount of alcohol that can be said to be safe for everyone. People choosing to drink must realize that there will always be some risk to their health and social well-being. It is the same opinion that supports the Australian government (see the Australian government alcohol website).

It is important to mention the fact that the misdeeds of alcohol are not only experienced on young but even on adults. The Pan American Health Organization (2007) mentioned that: "Alcohol problems can extend beyond the drinker and have effects on those around him or her in areas such as domestic violence, marital problems, financial problems, child abuse, emergency room admissions, violent behavior, injuries and fatalities of passengers in cars or of pedestrians when people drink and drive. Alcohol consumption is also associated with high-risk behaviors, including unsafe sex and the use of other psychoactive substances."

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

This exploratory study has been conducted to explore marketers' responsibility for the way they advertise their alcohol products. Mainly for advertisement targeting youth. It assumes that responsibilities must be shared between different stakeholders. It has been clearly mentioned that except the government provision of rules and regulation concerning beer market and consumption for the health of the people, beer producers and marketers should be responsible of the way youth are using their products, as long as it is proved that they use advertisements to target youth. If consumers are harmed by

the product because of their negligence they will be responsible by themselves, the marketers should not be blamed. Then, it would be better for all beer sellers (retailers, barkeepers) to work in ethical way.

As for the recommendations, this paper is suggesting solution for the government, for the marketers (companies, marketers...) but also for families and consumers themselves.

### **For the government**

One of the government's major powers is to take measures or laws intended to protect people (regal attribution). Instead of multiply taxes, the government should take some measures for regulating commercial communications, such as legislation (rules), enforcement (action against violators) and adjudication (appropriate sanction), for both the consumers and producers (and sellers). This is also what Peter Anderson (2007) advised as solution to reduce youth alcohol consumption. The alcohol adverting must be banned in the DRC.

The government main interest should not be to collect taxes and other duties (VAT e.g.) but to care about people life and welfare, so it is better for the government to make sure that business men are taking into consideration consumers' interests also.

Another action to take is to introduce education to alcohol consumption in the Congolese educational system, whether in the formal and informal system. NGOs, churches and other social partners must be associated in this work or task.

### **For marketers, barkeepers and breweries companies**

They have to behave in ethical way when producing, advertising, and selling alcohol. Breweries should reduce alcohol volume in their products to 2% more or less. When producing low alcohol drink they will reduce also binge drinking rate. As for the retailers (barkeepers, and others) they should not sell beer to children or teenagers. Whatever and whoever pushes them to buy, the seller should refrain to sell alcohol beverages to youth. That will help families and the country as well to reduce so slightly the alcohol misdeeds for youth.

Since they have to care about the welfare of all the stakeholders, including consumers, marketers should work ethically and follow the corporate social responsibility rules or principles. It is not only by sponsoring activities for youth and teams or orchestras that will make them socially responsible. They have to care about other aspects such as what has been analyzed in this paper (consumers' health).

### **For the family and consumers**

The paper has demonstrated that family is the first responsible of the youth education, welfare and healthcare. Before the school to start educating youth or children it is the family duty to do so. That is the family must educate their child to avoid alcohol by showing them why is alcohol harmful for them. They have to control their child life, who is with them, doing what and going where, for what? Parents and other adults cannot use youth to buy, to sell or to carry alcohol beverages.

As for youth, they have to be aware of the danger of alcohol for their health and their future as well. They have to be prepared to avoid touching, tasting or promoting alcohol, whatever the salary they are getting from advertisers, retailers, etc. Nobody can decide in their place whether to drink or not. Since they will not walk around with their parents or seniors, they have to behave cautiously. Youth have to remember every time that life and alcohol are never friends.

## References

1. AAFP (2012). Alcohol Advertising.
2. American Academy of Family Physicians (2012), Alcohol advertising.
3. Australian Alcohol Office. (2012). <http://www.alcohol.gov.au/>
4. Delbos C. (2009). Marketing, éthique et Responsabilité sociale
5. Freidman M. (1970). The Social Responsibility of Business. New York Times, September 1970.
6. Pan American Health Organization (2007). Alcohol and Public Health in the Americas. A Case for Action. Washington DC, PAHO.
7. Peter A. (2007), Impact of Alcohol Advertising, STAP, Groningen.
8. Steurer, R. (2010): The Role of Governments in Corporate Social Responsibility: Characterizing Public Policies on CSR in Europe; in: Policy Sciences, 43/1, 49-72.
9. The concise Oxford Dictionary (9<sup>th</sup> ed.) (1995).