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Moraes, C. , Michaelidou, N. and Meneses, R.W.

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The use of Facebook to promote drinking among young consumers

Dr. Caroline Moraes (Corresponding Author)
Reader in Marketing, Centre for Trust and Ethical Behaviour (CETEB)
Faculty of Business, Environment & Society
Coventry University
Priory Street
Coventry CV1 5FB
Tel: +44 (0) 7557425591
Email: caroline.moraes@coventry.ac.uk

Dr. Nina Michaelidou
Reader in Marketing, School of Business and Economics
Loughborough University
Leicestershire, UK
LE11 3TU
Tel: +44 (0)1509 222435
Email: n.michaelidou@lboro.ac.uk

Dr. Rita W. Meneses
Research Fellow, Católica-Lisbon School of Business and Economics
Universidade Católica Portuguesa
Rua Diogo de Macedo 5, Palma de Cima
Lisbon, Portugal
1649-023
Tel: +351 217 270 250
Email: ritawmeneses@gmail.com

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Authors' biographies

Dr. Caroline Moraes is a Reader in Marketing at the Centre for Trust and Ethical Behaviour (CETEB), Coventry University. Her research interests include marketing and consumer ethics, consumer activism, power issues in consumer culture, and ethical issues in consumer research. Caroline has published her work in various journals including the *Journal of Marketing Management*, *Journal of Travel Research*, *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, and the *Journal of Business Ethics*. Before embarking on her academic career, Caroline worked in market research and held international account management posts in the advertising industry.

Dr. Nina Michaelidou is a Reader in Marketing at the School of Business and Economics, Loughborough University. Her research interests encompass consumer behaviour including health behaviours such as healthy eating, living and physical exercise, antismoking messages and food choice behaviour and consumption. She is the leader of the Academy of Marketing Special Interest Group on Consumer Behaviour, and has published papers in various journals including *Journal of Marketing Management*, *European Journal of Marketing*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Travel Research*, *Journal of Consumer Affairs and Food Policy*.

Dr. Rita W. Meneses is a clinical psychologist and a researcher. Her research interests include mental health, psychotherapy, body-mind interactions, interpersonal relationships, social behaviour, communication and empathy. She has completed her PhD

on empathy at the School of Psychology, University of Birmingham. She has published papers on empathy, psychological attachment and coronary heart disease.

The use of Facebook to promote drinking among young consumers

Abstract

New media platforms including social networking sites (SNS) have changed the media landscape and enabled many-to-many communication practices that have increased youth exposure to pro-alcohol consumption messages exponentially, blurring the lines between content generated by alcohol brands, nightclubs and consumers. This study uses qualitative methods to explore the use of Facebook to promote drinking among young consumers. Focus groups with a sample of young adults between the ages of 18 and 24, and a netnographic study investigating alcohol brands, alcohol groups, and nightclubs on Facebook were conducted. Findings indicate that alcohol brands and nightclubs use Facebook as a tool to communicate, co-produce and generate alcohol-related content with young adults, which encourages drinking. Findings suggest that SNS such as Facebook are changing the roles of, and inter-relationships between, advertisers and how consumers process media content, including drinking-related marketing communications.

Summary statement of contribution

This research is the first to use netnography combined with focus groups to explore how alcohol brands and nightclubs co-promote drinking on Facebook. Given that research on alcohol promotions through SNS is still in its early stages, the research findings have important public policy implications for the regulation of marketing communication content on Facebook and other SNS.

Keywords

Alcohol brands; Facebook; Focus Groups; Netnography; Social Networking Sites

The use of Facebook to promote drinking among young consumers

1. Introduction

The use of Facebook to promote drinking among young adults caught our attention due to recent debates on minimum pricing for alcohol and the lack of advertising regulation on social media until March 2011 in the UK (BMA, 2012; Travis, 2012; Nicholls, 2012a). There are also gaps in the extant literature regarding the use of Facebook as a communication medium to promote brands, as well as recent data which suggests the development of 'binge drinking cultures' and that over half of young UK adults between 18 and 34 get injuries from nights out due to excess drinking (Campbell, 2012; Banister & Piacentini, 2006; Piacentini & Banister 2009).

Due to the issues associated with binge drinking, much research has been done in the area of modifying alcohol consumption among young adults, and the drivers of such behaviour (Banister & Piacentini, 2006; Piacentini & Banister 2009; Szmigin et al., 2007; Griffin, Bengry-Howell, Hackley, Mistral, & Szmigin, 2009; Hastings & Angus, 2009; Gunter, Hansen, & Touri, 2009; Gordon, Hastings, & Moodie, 2010; Gordon, Moodie, Eadie, & Hastings, 2010; Fry, 2010; McCarty & Kaye, 1984; Kuntsche, Knibbe, Gmel, & Rutger, 2005; LaBrie, Hummer, & Pedersen, 2007). Previous research also addresses the external drivers of alcohol consumption, which include situational contexts, sales promotions (including low prices) and advertising (Agostinelli & Grube, 2001; Gunter et al., 2009; Hastings et al., 2010; Hingson, Heeren, Winter, & Wechsler, 2005; Kuo, Wechsler, Greenberg, & Lee, 2003; Szmigin et al., 2007; Gordon, Hastings, & Moodie,

2010; Gordon, Moodie, Eadie, & Hastings, 2010; Anderson, de Bruijn, Angus, Gordon, & Hastings, 2009; Atkin, 1990; Aitken, 1989; Fox, Krugman, Fletcher, & Fischer, 1998; Goldberg, Niedermeier, Bechtel, & Gorn, 2006; Gunter et al., 2009; Jernigan, 2012a; Mart, 2011; Pasch, Komro, Perry, Hearst, & Farbakhsh, 2007; Russell, Russell, & Grube, 2009; Snyder, Milici, Slater, Sun, & Strizhakova, 2006; Robinson, Chen, & Killen, 1998; Russell et al., 2009).

However, additional research is needed to expand on existing theory and further explore the interplay of promotional drivers and key pro-alcohol actors, such as brands and nightclubs, in encouraging alcohol drinking specifically through Facebook. In the following sections the extant literature is reviewed, focusing particularly on such interplay between actors and promotional drivers through the lens of convergence culture theory (Jenkins, 2006).

2. The interplay between marketplace actors, new media and many-to-many communications

A number of studies have recently examined alcohol marketing through digital media. However, research on alcohol communications and usage discourses through social networking sites (SNS) is still in its early stages (Griffiths & Casswell, 2010; Nicholls, 2012b). Marketplace actors involved in the production, consumption and regulation of alcohol products may well remain the same (e.g. alcohol brand marketers, retailers, nightclubs, consumers, health organisations, policy makers and regulators). However, Mart (2011) suggests new products that appeal to young audiences have been launched

(e.g. alcopops and caffeinated alcoholic drinks) and the global alcohol industry continues to try and influence public health science and policy (Jernigan, 2012c). Also new are the new media platforms such as SNS, and Facebook in particular, which have ‘transformed the media landscape’ (Chester, Montgomery, & Dorfman, 2010, p. 6). SNS have enabled various types of what Hoffman and Novak (1996) call many-to-many communication practices; practices that Mart (2011) suggests have increased youth exposure to pro-alcohol consumption messages exponentially and blurred the lines between content generated by brands, nightclubs and users.

For example, Gordon and colleagues (Gordon, Hastings et al., 2010; Gordon, Moodie et al., 2010) suggest that young people are aware of, and involved with, alcohol marketing found in several media, including the Internet. The authors suggest that online marketing content created by alcohol brands appeals to young adults and exposure to such content influences their alcohol brand attitudes. On the other hand, researchers have found that young people who display their alcohol use and intoxication on Facebook are more likely to score high on problem-drinking and to report drinking-related injuries (Moreno, Christakis, Egan, Brockman, & Becker, 2011). Hastings et al. (2010) argue that new media such as SNS, emails and mobile marketing (e.g. texts) are growing media channels not only for alcohol advertising, but also user-generated content. This is because digital media (e.g. the internet, social media) are less regulated and policed than traditional media (e.g. TV, radio, print). Such media are interactive and allow for creativity, which engages audiences with the brand’s promotional content that has the potential to go viral

and generate positive word-of-mouth for alcohol consumption and brands (Hastings et al., 2010; Schultz, 2000; Nicholls, 2012b; Chester et al., 2010; Mart, 2011).

Alcohol promotions on the internet are rapidly growing (Jernigan, 2012b; Chester et al., 2010). A relatively recent advertising deal between Facebook and Diageo has given rise to increased concerns about the extended exposure of young adults to online alcohol advertising (Boseley, 2011). Nicholls (2012b) argues that there is ample evidence of increased alcohol marketing spend on social media. Indeed, SNS such as Twitter and Facebook have become major players in alcohol promotions over the last 7 years. Yet Facebook policies, for example, avoid direct responsibility for alcohol-related advertising and other drinking-related content (Mart, 2011). A report by the House of Commons' Health Select Committee (House of Commons, 2009) identifies digital media as an area in which alcohol companies have focused their marketing practices and recommends that alcohol promotion be banned on SNS. Indeed, Mart (2011) also calls for a similar ban in the US. Therefore, it is important to understand how alcohol promotions, key pro-alcohol marketplace actors and young adults engage in drinking-related content co-creation through SNS such as Facebook.

3. Engagement marketing, blurred roles and fluid identities

The discussion above highlights that the global alcohol industry has been quick to capitalise on digital media developments such as SNS, on the potential of engagement marketing techniques that rely as much on brand-generated as on user-generated content, and on the regulatory gaps regarding increased youth exposure to alcohol drinking

messages. Engagement marketing can be seen as marketing activities that involve SNS users in content creation, rather than treating them as passive audiences of marketing communications. Chester et al. (2010) overview a range of digital marketing techniques employed by major US alcohol brands and suggest that most alcohol brands are involved in integrated marketing communication strategies (Kliatchko, 2008). Such strategies seek to increase consumer engagement, collect data, target behaviour and reach consumers across online and offline media landscapes through 360-degree communications. Chester et al. (2010, p. 13) identify and explore alcohol-related content (e.g. apps, games, polls, virtual gifts, free samples, contests and viral videos) in a range of platforms where such 360-degree strategies are used (e.g. social media, online video platforms, mobile phones and even virtual worlds) and where 'contextual and commercial boundaries are highly permeable'. We suggest such platforms present further challenges as legal drinking age, identities and viral exposure to content are difficult to control, track and ascertain through online media. Also, Chester et al. (2010) argue that the impact of such marketing activities are even more intense than exposure to traditional alcohol advertising, as they displace the brand as the only communicative source and almost subliminally become part of consumers' socialisation practices in digital spaces. Although relevant, Chester et al.'s (2010) study focuses on the US market and the impact that such activities can have on underage consumers.

Further, Nicholls's (2012b) work on major UK alcohol brands focuses specifically on brand-generated content on SNS. The author suggests that alcohol brands use a number of marketing communication strategies which seek to normalise daily consumption of

alcohol and embed brands in the everyday SNS conversations and lives of consumers. He argues this is done through ‘real’ branded events promoted through SNS, via games, competitions, sponsorships of cult shows and the re-conceptualisation of drinking occasions (Nicholls, 2012b). Although the author tries to separate brand-generated from user-generated content, the way in which his findings are reported make it evident that such an attempt is problematic because brands rely on user-generated content to engage with consumers. Indeed, some of Nicholls’s (2012b, p. 3) findings are underpinned by dualistic framings, which encourage the maintenance of binary, oppositional theorising about the relationships between market actors and alcohol-related communication.

Griffiths and Casswell’s (2010) study on how young people in New Zealand articulate and reproduce alcohol-related content through Bebo, a SNS attracting a large number of teenage users, is also relevant to this discussion. Griffiths and Casswell (2010, p. 525) argue that alcohol marketing and consumption messages are openly shared through peer-to-peer communications via forum comments, photographs, personal information and quizzes. This results in the (re)production and proliferation of what they term ‘intoxigenic’ social identities and spaces, which facilitate the normalisation of alcohol consumption among young people. In their research, Bebo is seen as a new space for symbolic meaning transference, where positive value is attached to alcohol brands and messages that in turn are communicated in a viral manner through peer-to-peer and, as Hoffman and Novak (1996) would argue, many-to-many communications. Although the authors make a brief reference to convergence culture theory, they fail to develop its relevance to their study. Therefore, there is a need to further explore the interplay of

various alcohol-related SNS promotions and the key actors involved in such content-generation and reproduction processes.

4. Convergence culture theory

Although relevant, the studies reviewed above have two major shortcomings. Firstly, the role played by nightclubs on SNS alcohol-related communications is largely ignored. This is an issue because nightclubs represent an influential class of stakeholders in alcohol communications and are important intermediaries between producers and young consumers. Secondly, those studies are *atheoretical*, which is a gap we seek to address. Jenkins's (2004; 2006) convergence culture theory can be used to frame the present theoretical elaboration not only on how alcohol brands use promotional techniques in new ways to penetrate multiple media channels (including SNS) to communicate with young people, but also on how various marketplace actors, including nightclubs, brands and young people, engage with and (re)produce such media content, as well as contribute to the promotion and normalisation of drinking among young Facebook users.

Jenkins (2006) suggests that convergence culture represents a corporate as well as a consumer opportunity, which re-shapes and re-configures media power, aesthetics and economics, and poses new challenges to marketers (Jenkins, 2004). Convergence embodies a cultural change in which consumers are nudged into searching for information and making links among scattered media content. This, in turn, produces a new form of work-through-play ethic performed by consumers in this new media order (Jenkins, 2006). Intrinsic to convergence culture are the interrelationships between three

main phenomena, namely media convergence, participatory culture and collective intelligence. Firstly, according to Jenkins (2004, p. 37) media convergence 'is both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process', in which content flows 'across multiple media platforms, with the cooperation between multiple media industries' (Jenkins, 2006, p. 2). Media consumers are now more actively involved with specific media (e.g. social media); they actively search for the media experiences and the content they want across different media platforms (Jenkins, 2004). Thus, media convergence refers to a process that challenges and changes how media companies and advertisers operate, and how consumers process and reproduce media content including news, entertainment and marketing communications (Jenkins, 2006). Indeed, this is what we are currently witnessing through new digital media such as SNS and their use by alcohol brands, nightclubs and consumers. This also has implications for how alcohol-related drinking messages are (re)produced on platforms such as Facebook.

Secondly, participatory culture opposes old ideas which regard media consumption as a passive activity; rather than separating the roles of media content, consumers and producers, participatory culture emerges out of the social interactions between various participants, that are based on new norms that are yet to be fully understood (Jenkins, 2006). Participatory culture enables consumers to create, store and re-circulate content (Jenkins, 2001). It also contributes to a media environment where media consumption involves the production of content through participation, co-creation and collaboration with companies (Deuze, 2007). This is evident in the case of SNS such as Facebook and the content created by young alcohol consumers as discussed by Griffiths and Casswell

(2010), Nicholls (2012b) and Chester et al. (2010). However, Jenkins (2006) also acknowledges that power imbalances between various actors still occur in this new culture, as some market players are more capable of taking part in this rising culture than others. Also, global corporations still exercise more power in the marketplace than individual consumers (Jenkins, 2006). Evidently, the power exercised by the global alcohol industry continues to put pressure on policy makers and scientists (Jernigan, 2012c). As suggested by Jernigan (2012), such pressure is exercised through the industry's ability to fund lobbying activities and distorted pro-alcohol research studies. This, in turn, keeps away regulation that would prevent alcohol-related engagement marketing on SNS. In this way, the alcohol industry continues to capitalise on the power of new digital marketing techniques (Nicholls, 2012b; Chester et al., 2010), and their ability to engage young consumers in alcohol-related content, co-creation and reproduction on Facebook (Chester et al., 2010; Griffiths & Casswell, 2010).

Finally, Jenkins (2006, p. 4) argues that media consumption (or co-creation) has become a collective intelligence process, which depends on our ability to 'pool our resources and combine our skills' to create alternative sources of knowledge, power and media content. This means that convergence culture has altered relationships between consumer audiences, producers and content generation (Jenkins, 2006). This, in turn, forces corporations to re-think their assumptions about the role of the consumer, now termed 'prosumer' (Toffler, 1981; Kozinets, Hemetsberger, & Schau, 2008; Xi, Bagozzi, & Troye, 2008), media consumption and what it means for media programming and marketing communication decisions more generally (Jenkins, 2006). In the case of SNS

such as Facebook, alcohol companies and nightclubs share their content with consumers and allow them to participate in their sites. This is done through pages or groups, by posting comments, sharing their brand experiences with other consumers as well as the company, and by reproducing drinking-related and alcohol brand messages. Young adults are engaging with alcohol brand and nightclub pages and groups on SNS such as Facebook in such a way, and research examining how SNS such as Facebook are being used by such actors in a co-creative manner is still in its infancy.

This study therefore aims to explore the interplay of promotional drivers and key pro-alcohol actors, such as brands and nightclubs, in encouraging alcohol drinking among young adults aged 18 to 24, who are users of Facebook. Facebook is a particularly relevant platform given that over 24% of Facebook users are aged 18 to 24 (www.checkfacebook.com/). Thus, as Pratt (2009) suggests, this research seeks to elaborate on existing theory, and the following sections discuss the methodological approach and findings of the research.

5. Methodology and methods

A qualitative approach is appropriate for this study due to the exploratory nature of its aim (Creswell, 2007; Carson, Gilmore, & Gronhaug 2001; Denzin & Lincoln 2005; Lass & Hart, 2004). Focus groups were initially conducted to explore a direction for, and complement, a netnographic study (Kozinets, 2002; 2009).

5.1. Stage 1: focus groups

Three offline focus groups (table 1) were conducted with young Facebook users, aged between 18 and 24, living in the UK. First, focus groups participants were recruited through an online call announced via a web portal and participation incentives (i.e. book vouchers) were offered to encourage attendance. Second, fifteen participants attended their respective group sessions and discussions followed a discussion protocol. Such small, purposeful sample sizes are common in qualitative research (Patton, 1990; Kuzel, 1999; Bock & Sergeant, 2002; Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). They are useful for interpretive studies that seek, as we do, to explore the meanings and/or experiences of participants (Spiggle, 1994). They are also appropriate where the aim is to gain more understanding about a specific phenomenon (Thompson & Tian, 2008; Üstüner & Thompson, 2012; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). Also, most groups' participants were female and higher education students. This reflects the fact that females between the ages of 18-34 outnumber males as the most active social networkers, and make up the majority of visitors on SNS and blogs (Nielsen, 2011). Additionally, students are generally interested in alcohol consumption and therefore expressed interest in participating in the study. Previous research funded by Alcohol Research UK found that 83% of the students surveyed classified themselves as drinkers, while 80% reported that they 'binge drink' regularly (Penny & Armstrong-Hallam, 2010). Participants received an information sheet containing details about the study, and were asked to fill in consent forms outlining confidentiality and anonymity clauses as required by our institutions' ethics committees.

Table 1: Focus groups participants' profiles

	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Education	Employment	Income/Year
FG 1	Martha	Female	22	Postgraduate	Part-time	Up to 5K
	Robert	Male	21	Undergraduate	Part-time	6-10k
	Sophie	Female	21	Undergraduate	Part-time	Up to 5K
	Danielle	Female	22	Postgraduate	Self-employed	Up to 5K
	Kate	Female	19	Undergraduate	Unemployed	N/A
	Karen	Female	23	Postgraduate	Self-employed	6-10K
FG 2	Molly	Female	20	Undergraduate	Part-time	6-10k
	Ted	Male	20	Undergraduate	Part-time	Up to 5K
	Ivan	Male	22	Postgraduate	Self-employed	Up to 5K
	Leah	Female	21	Undergraduate	Undisclosed	Undisclosed
FG 3	Norah	Female	22	Undergraduate	Undisclosed	Undisclosed
	Linda	Female	23	Postgraduate	Undisclosed	Undisclosed
	Claudia	Female	20	Undergraduate	Undisclosed	Undisclosed
	Agatha	Female	19	Undergraduate	Undisclosed	Undisclosed
	Irene	Female	20	Undergraduate	Student loan	Up to 5K

5.2. Stage 2: netnography

Netnography ‘refers to the approach of ethnography applied to the study of online cultures and communities’ (Kozinets, 2009, p.6). As Kozinets (2002, p. 62) suggests, it entails the use of ethnographic research methods ‘to study the cultures and communities that are emerging through computer-mediated communications’. It also encompasses the observation of online textual discourse to gain an understanding of the symbolic meanings, attitudes, and consumption discourse patterns of online groups (Kozinets, 2002; 2006; 2009; Jayanti, 2010; Hamilton & Hewer, 2010). As such, it is a useful methodology to examine how nightclubs and alcohol brands interact to promote themselves and drinking through SNS, what marketing techniques are being used, and how such promotions may engage young adults in co-creating and reproducing Facebook content about drinking. The netnographic study reported here took place on Facebook between March and June 2011.

We followed Kozinets's (2002; 2009) guidelines for designing and conducting netnographic studies rigorously. Firstly, the cultural entrée stage involved familiarising ourselves with the characteristics of relevant alcohol-related groups, nightclub groups and pages, and official alcohol brand pages in order to screen the most appropriate for this study. Second, we defined sampling criteria according to groups and pages relevance to the research topic, number of members, level of traffic, number of posts, interactions between members, relevance of interactions given the research aim, and richness of the data (Kozinets, 2009). In addition, alcohol-related Facebook pages and groups were screened according to whether they were generally characterised as public pages with more than 1,000 members or fans. Also, further screening entailed selecting only the pages and clubs that were communicating with, and offering sales promotions to specifically targeted young, British, Midlands-based consumers. This decision was due to the information provided by our focus groups' participants about such nightclubs and brands, so the most cited club page ('Club1'), club events page ('Vodka-Energy'), and two club groups ('Club2' and 'Club3') were observed, as they also met the other criteria outlined above. Further, in the case of brands, we also considered the position of cited alcohol brands in Millward Brown's BrandZ 2010 top brands annual report. Therefore, only the top 10 BrandZ 2010 alcohol brands which had also been mentioned by Midlands-based focus groups participants were shortlisted for the final sample of alcohol brand pages and alcohol brand groups ('Vodka', 'Lager1', 'Alcopop', 'Lager2', 'Lager3' for England).

Additionally, given that focus groups participants also mentioned generic, drinking-related groups created by Facebook users, and due to the number of such Facebook groups (a total of 2,517 were identified using the words ‘alcohol’, ‘booze’, ‘beer’ and ‘vodka’), we decided to include the top 2 generic alcohol drinking groups (‘Consuming Alcohol’ and ‘Alcohol Rules’), due to their fit with the sampling criteria described above. Overall, this sampling strategy resulted in the selection of 11 relevant, drinking-related Facebook groups and pages (table 2).

Table 2: Sampled Facebook groups' and pages' characteristics

Pseudonym	Type	Target market	Facebook category	No. of members/fans	Promotion references (yes/ no)
Vodka	Spirits Brand Group	International	Common interest – Food & Drink	42,067	No
Lager1	Beer Brand Group	International	Common interest – Food & Drink	10,700	No
Consuming Alcohol	Generic Group	International	Common interest - philosophy	2,379	No
Alcohol Rules	Generic Group	UK	Business - Marketing & Advertising	1.127	No
Alcopop	Spirits Brand page	UK; Youth	Brand product	103,274	Yes
Lager2	Beer Brand page	UK	Business Company	18,728	Yes
Lager3 for England	Beer Brand page	UK	Business Company	16,422	Yes
Club1	Club page	UK; students	Club	4,472	Yes
Vodka-Energy	Club page	UK; students	Entertainment & Arts – Nightlife	1,084	Yes
Club2	Club group	UK; students	Business Company	2,362	Yes
Club3	Club group	UK	Entertainment & Arts – Nightlife	1,962	Yes

6. Data analysis and research ethics

This section outlines the analytical process and ethical considerations of the qualitative studies.

6.1. Stage 1: analysis of focus groups data

Focus groups transcripts generated 16,340 words and were the first data set to be analysed. First, we adopted the principles of template analysis, as we used insights derived from the literature that was read prior to the primary research. Template analysis permits the consideration of theoretical concepts from the very start of the research

project and accepts the adaptation, rearrangement, and addition of codes and themes as they emerge through the analytical process (King, 1998; Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Template analysis requires the preparation of a coding template containing key codes, which can be determined prior to the start of the analysis and organised in a logical manner (King & Horrocks, 2010; King, 1998; Crabtree & Miller, 1999).

Second, we generated an initial template with broad *a priori* codes (i.e. ‘familiarity with alcohol brand pages and groups on Facebook’, ‘attitudes toward drinking’, ‘drinking contexts/situations’, ‘types of alcohol promotions recalled’, ‘perceived influence of alcohol promotions’). Third, codes were then broadly organised, reorganised and categorised using NVivo9. The researchers ensured interpretive quality by respecting the worldview of participants, providing evidence to support the emerging interpretations and considering the contributions to extant theory (Pratt, 2009). Fourth, preliminary findings were used to inform the analytical process of the netnographic study as discussed below.

6.2. Stage 2: analysis of netnographic data

Facebook downloads and field notes generated over 63,000 words of textual data. First, we adopted the template analysis approach for netnographic data analysis in order to keep it consistent with the approach used for the focus groups data; indeed, template analysis has been used previously by ethnographers (see Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Second, we adapted and built on the focus groups coding template to analyse the netnographic data. Netnographic *a priori* codes (i.e. ‘attitudes toward drinking’, ‘drinking contexts/situations’, ‘types of alcohol promotions’, ‘consumer-page/group interactions’)

and their respective 'chunks of text' were then organised and reorganised using NVivo9 (table 3). Textual segments were read and re-read to make the final, interpretive connections between data segments (Crabtree & Miller, 1999).

Table 3: Final coding template

Emerging themes	Higher order codes / Categories	Codes
Co-promoting drinking through context association and good deals	Situations and contexts. Alcohol drinking is associated with specific situations such as going out with friends or with specific events as well as contexts such as places, music and the weather.	Weather; Sports; Social events; Places; Music; Happiness; Food; Diet; Celebration, Parties.
	Search for, and promotion of good deals. Alcohol brands promote drinking through sales promotions including both monetary and non-monetary promotions.	Encouraged by brand/club administrators; Liked generally; Liked by young people; Effort involved.
Fluid interactions, roles and identities in promotional content co-creation	Lucky Winner's Hope. Young adults are prone to engage in sales promotions by alcohol brands in the hope that they will win. Also, some promotions involve minimal effort on the part of the consumer and therefore are seen as attractive and beneficial.	Competitions attract high numbers; Winning hope; Encouraged by brand/club administrators; Winners provide feedback; The importance of prizes; Want to know who wins; Influencing the jury.
	Consumer-brand-club interactions. Alcohol brands attempt to engage consumers through shaping and creating discussions on various themes (i.e. context) as well as maintaining a two-way communication.	Administrators' feedback; Administrators' mails; Consumers' questions; Administrators' general posts; Encouragement of drinking.
Attitudes toward drinking co-promotions and the influence of convergence culture	Types of drinking-related promotions. Such promotions are varied and include price cuts, competitions, VIP offers and premiums such as free gifts.	Competitions, promise of prizes; Free entry; Free gifts; Cheap drink prices, price cut-off, 2 for 1, free drinks; Club membership benefits; Auctions.
	Attitudes toward drinking-related promotions. Promotions are instrumental in shaping attitudes towards alcohol drinking and the co-creative promotions themselves. Young adults are actively taking advantage of and co-creating such promotions.	

In this step of the research process, and as suggested by Kozinets (2009), there was an emphasis on trustworthy interpretation of textual communications by alcohol brands, nightclubs and young adults. In this way, the unit of analysis is not the individual brand manager, nightclub promoter or consumer as such, but the communicative acts performed

by such agents (Kozinets, 2009). Furthermore, the analytical process and data interpretation were discussed amongst all of the researchers involved in this project (Crabtree & Miller, 1999).

6.3. Research ethics

This project underwent a complete ethical committee review. Given that netnography is a relatively new methodology, there are ethical issues that are difficult to address, namely consent and the issue of what is public or private in cyberspace (Kozinets, 2002; Whiteman, 2012). Nevertheless, the researchers fully disclosed their presence on Facebook, as well as their roles, affiliations, and intentions to the sampled Facebook groups and pages. Observation permission was sought throughout the research process. Data has been kept confidential and anonymous through the use of pseudonyms. Due to ethical committee recommendations, brands' real names were anonymised and direct quotes from Facebook posts were deliberately eschewed to avoid direct traceability of data. Additionally, all textual data (i.e. postings) from users outside the 18-24 age range were excluded from data analysis and interpretation. In this way, we complied with Facebook requirements regarding research conduct. Further, a first draft of the data analysis was emailed to participants to give them an opportunity to provide feedback to the researchers. The findings are discussed below.

7. Emerging themes

7.1. Co-promoting drinking through context association and good deals

Young adults display wall comments, drinking-related group memberships, events, photographs and other social communications on Facebook, which leave digital footprints with social cues that contribute to the normalisation of alcohol consumption among young people (Griffiths & Casswell, 2010). Indeed, young adults associate alcohol consumption and specific drinks to particular socialisation contexts and situations (Szmigin et al., 2007; Gunter et al., 2009):

'I like white wine, but that's mostly for when I meet friends at home. The times we drink most are when we go out with the basketball team. The sports nights socials are crazy, I can't keep up with it.' [Karen, FG1]

'Tomorrow we have a big event, a national [sports] competition. We're sponsored by a bar in Digbeth, so in the evening we'll go back to them, have a load of food and discounted drinks. And the team'll go out to a nightclub.' [Ted, FG2]

According to focus groups' participants, the events application is one of the most valued Facebook features and Vodka-Energy, for example, sends emails to users through the events section of Facebook in order to advertise their parties, which in turn indirectly promotes their site and alcohol deals. Drinking-related 'tie-ins' (Nicholls, 2012b), that is,

'real life' social events around drinking, are indeed promoted by brands as well as nightclubs:

'There are certain pages for nights out. Here, on a Thursday night in Club1, you have Vodka-Energy... I think that's quite a big advertising ploy that works really well.' [Ted, FG2]

'There's that [vodka brand] nightlife exchange project that comes up [on Facebook]. It talks about the [vodka brand] events in your area, and if you vote for your city you can get it to come to you. What's the prize? They let you go to it. They only let a certain amount of people in. You can't go unless they invite you to. They let you, and your friend, go. Not sure how it works. Apart from that, clubs just tend to advertise a certain brand that's cheap, like Lager3.' [Irene, FG3]

Thus, both brands and nightclubs capitalise on the consumer-led, contextual and situational cues left on Facebook spaces to co-creatively re-conceptualise drinking occasions and situations (Nicholls, 2012b). They also reinforce their positioning in the minds of young consumers. Themes used by alcohol brands on Facebook included the weather, places, varied types of music and music venues, moods, eating, celebrations and parties. By linking such themes to specific promotions that nudge consumers into generating content (i.e. auctions, membership benefits, cheap drinks, price cut-offs, two-for-one deals, free drink offers, free entry offers, free gifts, competitions and prize draws; see table 4), both brands and nightclubs embed themselves in the everyday conversations

and lives of consumers (Nicholls, 2012b). For instance, ‘Alcopop’ taps into its ‘sweet and summer’ taste, while ‘Lager2’ draws on the lager-music and lager-sports association to post messages and create promotions on Facebook. Observed examples of Lager2’s promotions include a competition to win CDs, and another to win tickets for sports matches (table 4).

Table 4: Alcohol promotions on Facebook

Promotion type	Facebook Pages/ Groups with promotions (pseudonyms)	Facebook Section with Promotional Information				Overall description
		Information section	Wall section	Events section	Discussion section	
Competitions and prize draws	Lager2; Alcopop; Lager3; Club1; Club3; Vodka-Energy	Lager2	Alcopop; Lager2; Lager3; Club1; Club3; Vodka-Energy	Lager2; Lager3	Alcopop	Prizes include holidays/ trips, shopping vouchers, tickets for sports matches, music albums, drink supplies, t-shirts, glassware, headphones, film tickets, VIP party tickets (drinks included), festival tickets. Participants have to perform all sorts of tasks including dancing, taking quizzes, participating in games, writing slogans, voting or signing in to a particular group. Lager2 organises many competitions.
Free entry; free gifts	Club2; Alcopop; Club1; Club3	Club2; Club3	Alcopop; Club1; Club2; Club3			Free t-shirts (Alcopop offer seems fake); Free entry in clubs, by asking to be in the guest list or in exchange of appearing at the door in a particular manner; free shuttles to clubs
Cheap drinks; price cut-offs; 2 for 1; free drinks (*targeted at students)	Club2*; Vodka-Energy*; Alcopop; Club1;; Lager3	Club2*; Vodka-Energy*	Alcopop; Club1; Club2	Lager3		Clubs often offer 2-for-1 drinks, free drinks through vouchers or happy hours, or have special nights with very cheap drinks (e.g. 80p in Club1). Some of these are specifically targeted at students. An example is ‘The Vodka Project*’, which takes place every Wednesday in Leeds, with £1.50 drinks. Also, there are club ticket offers and the same mojito voucher offer in several club pages.
Membership benefits	Vodka-Energy	Vodka-Energy				Benefits were not specified.
Auctions	Vodka		Vodka			Links to eBay auctions of vodka bottles.

The co-promotion of drinking through context association and good deals is also linked to young adults' concerns with their 'online images' and what is deemed acceptable by their peers regarding alcohol consumption:

'They have deals and this way they get to promote the event, and if more people come to the event they increase sales. So, I think this is their strategy anyway. Who's going to 'like' a bottle on Facebook? You're going to follow a series of events that happen every week. It just looks dodgy, 'Sophie likes Whisky'! Whereas if you like a night... Yeah, it's ok, she likes to go out; she doesn't like drinking per se.' [Sophie, FG1]

The quote above highlights how nightclubs and brands use social norms to encourage alcohol consumption through promotions tied to 'nights out'. This is in line with Griffiths and Casswell's (2010) view that SNS provide spaces for symbolic meaning transference, but for UK young adults on Facebook the positive value of drinking is attached to nights out rather than overt drinking. In this way group identity is still conveyed through drinking culture participation (Griffiths & Casswell, 2010; Szmigin et al., 2007). However, this is done in a way that is socially acceptable to young adults. The quote above also shows that, despite the netnographic evidence of how and what types of promotions alcohol brands use on Facebook (table 4), it is mostly nightclubs' promotions, rather than those of alcohol brands, that seem salient to our focus groups' participants. Nightclubs directly capitalise on young adults' interest in low alcohol prices and good deals such as free entry and free or cheap drinks:

'I don't remember any ads from the brands themselves. But I've got invites to events... Not sure whether they're sponsored by alcohol brands or the club nights are promoting certain brands. So, I've got an event coming up on the page, it'll say cheap drinks or something like that, and it's in the title as well... Yes, there are Vodka-Energy nights as well, that's the main thing I've seen.' [Leah, FG2]

'You get extra promotions if you join their Facebook group. Clubs say, 'if you text this number then you get free tickets or a free taxi'. So it's a special additional incentive to join the group... I only really see drinks offers when I get a message about events. That's when I see promotions about drinks.' [Claudia, FG3]

Nightclubs' group administrators (i.e. nightclubs' digital marketers) encourage and take part in content generation with consumers through Facebook wall posts, and are well attuned to the potential of Facebook spaces and good-night-out deals to foster increased alcohol consumption discussion among young adults. Thus, a key contribution of this study is that it shows that nightclubs, not just alcohol brands, are actively using Facebook to further engage with their target audiences, by fostering a co-creative relationship with their young consumers.

7.2. Fluid interactions, roles and identities in promotional content co-creation

Alcohol brands and nightclubs are marketplace actors who interact in a web of promotional strategies (table 4). Such strategies are based on commercial and contextual boundaries that are flexible and, therefore, displace the role of the brand as the sole communicative actor (Chester et al., 2010). Netnographic evidence shows that competitions attract a higher number of Facebook users than freebies, and that this is expressed by young adults either through ‘liking’ promotional posts or by fluidly commenting on walls and discussion spaces related to a particular promotion that they like. They partake in alcohol-related promotional activities that co-create content because they enjoy the tasks involved (i.e. quizzes and competitions), or simply to help their friends:

‘I even enter competitions for my friends. My boyfriend is a music producer, and I entered a sound engineering thing for stuff for him.’ [Sophie, FG1]

‘I enter competitions on alcohol websites... Not sure how I find them. I’ve definitely entered lots of competitions, like, Lager2 have lots for gigs and I do that a lot.’ [Molly, FG2]

We found that alcohol brands’ and nightclub pages’ administrators encourage competition-related posts, as they increase traffic, the amount of online content co-created, word-of-mouth and, thus, many-to-many interactions on their Facebook pages (Chester et al., 2010; Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Christodoulides & Jevons, 2011;

Christodoulides, 2009). In this way, young adults also perform the role of co-creators and reproducers of drinking-related promotional content, and both brands and nightclubs benefit from the (re)production and proliferation of ‘intoxigenic’ social identities and spaces on Facebook (Griffiths & Casswell, 2010).

Another interesting finding is that content co-creation interactions tap into young adults’ ‘lucky winner’s hope’, as young adults imagine what it would be like to win a prize. Winners’ feedback is possible via Facebook; by listing winners and their experiences of winning on Facebook, alcohol brands and nightclubs further reinforce that ‘lucky winner’s hope’ among young adults in a way that is not possible through traditional media. This also contributes to imbuing relevant alcohol brands and nightclub pages with a sense of authenticity, as Facebook promotions without information on previous winners do not seem genuine. For instance, ‘Alcopop’ had not announced previous prizes, which makes its competitions look dubious. More positive examples were found on Lager2’s Facebook page, where some consumers went to the extent of trying to manipulate competition ‘judges’ (users of the page, who would assess competition entries), in order to gain entry votes in a particular competition (table 4).

Therefore, nightclubs and brands purposefully foster fluid, user-generated content co-creation on Facebook, which indirectly encourages drinking among young adults (Nicholls, 2012b; Chester et al., 2010; Gordon et al., 2010). However, as pointed out by Chester et al. (2010), the issue is that legal drinking age, identities, and viral exposure to drinking-related content are still difficult to track and control online. At this point it is

important to highlight that, firstly, we came across several consumer posts on nightclubs' pages that were made by Facebook users who looked extremely young. Although this is a judgment made based on their Facebook profile photographs, online identities are problematic and difficult to ascertain. Facebook has controls which allow companies to manage permission settings based on legal drinking age restrictions by country (Nicholls, 2012b). However, companies cannot be sure of the ages of the individuals who choose to take part in Facebook competitions and promotions. Although Nicholls (2012b, p. 6) argues that 'there is limited value in misrepresenting one's age on Facebook', Jernigan (2012b, p. 867) indicates that 'a third of minors on Facebook are younger than 13 years of age and are online with a false age'. This means that there is the potential for young people, including underage consumers, to be exposed to such alcohol promotions via SNS such as Facebook, and companies do not always display responsible drinking messages or the legal drinking age on their Facebook pages (table 5).

Table 5: Communication of legal drinking age

Page/Group Pseudonym	Was Drinking Age Displayed?
Vodka	No
Lager1	No
Consuming Alcohol	No
Alcohol Rules	No
Whiskey	Yes
Alcopop	No
Lager2	Yes
Lager3 for England	Yes
Club1	Yes (when asked by FB users)
Vodka-Energy	Yes
Club2	No
Club3	No

Finally, it is important to highlight that the impact of such Facebook-based marketing activities may well be even more intense than exposure to traditional alcohol advertising (Chester et al., 2010). Indeed, focus groups participants stated that they make extensive use of Facebook through various platforms (e.g. mobiles, laptops, desktop), which in turn increases their exposure to drinking messages (Atkin, 1990; Aitken, 1989; Anderson et al., 2009; Fox et al., 1998; Goldberg et al., 2006; Gunter et al., 2009; Pasch et al., 2007; Robinson et al., 1998; Russell et al., 2009; Snyder et al., 2006). This also increases the fluidity of drinking-related content-co-creation across various media platforms (Jenkins, 2004; 2006).

7.3. Attitudes toward drinking co-promotions and the influence of convergence culture

Nightclubs' and brands' pages were indeed very interactive and buttressed by our new culture entailing media convergence, participation and collective intelligence (Jenkins, 2006). Positive experiences were linked to consumers' ability to engage with enjoyable promotional tasks and to get good deals or prizes via club's and brands' pages on Facebook (table 4). This, in turn, generated positive attitudes toward such marketplace actors; attitudes that were further reinforced by Facebook's capacity to offer opportunities for what Jenkins (2006) and Deuze (2007) would call direct participation and co-creation of drinking content between nightclubs, alcohol brands, and the young adults who hoped to win. Page administrators allowed and indeed encouraged young adults to express their positive attitudes toward drinking and alcohol brands. For example, one Facebook participant tried to get sponsorship from 'Lager3' in exchange for tattooing their logo on his skin, which illustrates a form of consumer-led promotional activity that reflects positive attitudes toward a specific alcohol brand. Also, although the alcohol groups observed in our netnographic study had many members (each with over 1,000), such members mostly used the groups as means to express 'pro-alcohol attitudes' rather than as platforms for interaction and co-creation, which may well be due to the lack of drinking promotions on such groups. More relevant, however, are focus groups participants' perceptions that co-created promotional activities influence their behaviour as alcohol consumers:

'Do you think that these types of promotions affect what you buy?' [Interviewer]

'Yeah, I think so. You know what you like to drink. All the alcohol adverts on television are all about lifestyle, whereas when you're young you've got your lifestyle and it's more about saving money than anything else.' [Danielle, FG1]

'Yeah, if [Vodka] is £3.00 and lemon VK is £1, I'll go for the VK.' [Agatha, FG3]

Although most focus group 1 participants argued that they would go to a night out or a social event if it were something they wanted to do anyway, regardless of whether or not the night was linked to a promotion identified via Facebook, participants of the second and third focus groups suggested that Facebook promotions really do influence their attitudes and where they go:

On Mondays or Thursdays sometimes we have promotions, cheap drinks; that'll determine whether I go or not. Basically it's about the price of booze. [Ivan, FG2]

Also, as Facebook offers the possibility of many-to-many interactions (Christodoulides & Jevons, 2011; Christodoulides, 2009), and cross-media content co-creation (Jenkins, 2006), interaction and participation is essential; young adults are very critical of the number of emails and spam emails they receive through Facebook groups. Young adults are also very sceptical of the sponsored ads placed on the sidebars of Facebook, which use behavioural targeting to reach consumers:

'I never click on the side ads 'cos they have Adware or tracking cookies' [Kate, FG1]

'Sometimes they have applications, I don't like that. I get off. I don't want them having all my information.' [Molly, FG2]

Therefore, despite their negative views on sponsored Facebook ads, young adults share their positive attitudes toward alcohol brands, nightclubs and alcohol promotions with other young consumers, by expressing their enthusiasm for alcohol brands and drinking, and by co-creating content through alcohol-related promotions on Facebook. They also perceive to be influenced by such convergence culture-enabled Facebook promotions.

8. A brief discussion and implications

This study suggests that promoting drinking on Facebook through contextual association and good deals, fluid interactions between key marketplace actors, flexible roles and identities, as well as through the creation of positive attitudes toward drinking co-promotions, is underpinned by continuous participation, co-creation and media convergence, which are characteristics of our present culture (Jenkins, 2004; 2006; Deuze, 2007). However, particularly interesting is the finding that nightclubs, not just alcohol brands, are also actively using Facebook to further engage with their target audiences. This is done by fostering a co-creative relationship with young consumers, which enables a re-conceptualisation of drinking occasions and situations (Nicholls, 2012b). This, in turn, masks and further reinforces 'drinking as socialisation'. Therefore, nightclubs may

well be in as much need of regulation and control as the alcohol brands co-creating promotions on SNS such as Facebook.

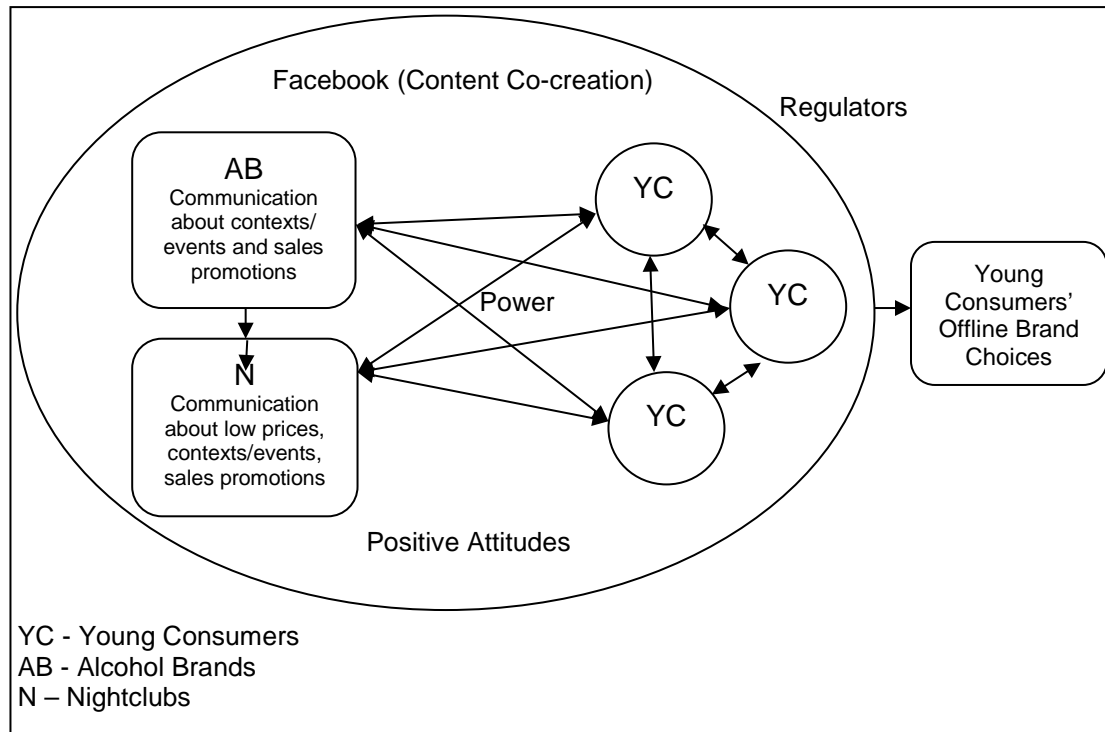
8.1. Theoretical implications

In line with convergence culture theory (Jenkins, 2006), Facebook is a new medium that has changed the roles of, and interrelationships between, advertisers (i.e. nightclubs and brands) and how consumers process (i.e. co-produce) media content, including drinking-related marketing communications. But it has also changed the ways in which regulators must address the promotional activities of potentially harmful products such as alcohol. Facebook converges with other digital platforms (i.e. what is shared on Facebook can also be posted on various other social media and vice-versa) and has proven an effective medium through which to co-create alcohol promotions with ‘prosumers’ (Toffler, 1981; Kozinets, Hemetsberger, & Schau, 2008; Xi, Bagozzi, & Troye, 2008). Therefore, in line with previous literature (Atkin, 1990; Aitken, 1989; Fox et al., 1998; Gunter et al., 2009; Pasch et al., 2007; Russell et al., 2009; Snyder et al., 2006), Facebook enables the extended media exposure of young adults to co-created promotional content, which is even more engaging than offline content due to Facebook’s interactive, participatory and co-creative nature.

In addition, as suggested by Jenkins (2006), power imbalances between various actors still occur in this new culture. Indeed, the power exercised by the global alcohol industry continues to pressure public health policy makers in this new media order (Jernigan, 2012c), which in turn capitalises on engagement marketing techniques that rely on the co-

creation and reproduction capabilities of young users of Facebook (Chester et al., 2010; Griffiths & Casswell, 2010; Nicholls, 2012b). Hence, the discussion above can be illustrated as outlined in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Co-creation of sales promotions on Facebook



8.2. Policy implications

Alcohol company Diageo’s decision to send nearly a thousand of its marketers to Facebook ‘boot camps’ to optimise their social media capabilities has led to significant increases in their ROI (Boseley, 2011). This means that, unless advertising regulators and public policy makers are able to dedicate the same amount of expertise and resources into regulating such marketing communication efforts appropriately, the harms caused by alcohol brands’ promotions targeted at young adults on social media such as Facebook

are very likely to be significant. Although the Advertising Standards Authority in the UK expanded their remit to online media such as SNS in 2011 (Plunkett, 2010), digital media are still only mildly regulated when compared with traditional media. Therefore, there is a need to rethink the appropriateness of alcohol brands' use of marketing communications and sales promotions across social media tools, and particularly SNS such as Facebook. More significantly, nightclubs may require the same regulations and controls as alcohol brands. Therefore, in line with the House of Commons (2009), Hastings et al. (2010) and Nicholls (2012b), we would suggest a complete regulatory ban on drinking promotions through SNS such as Facebook. This is due to the interactive and collaborative nature of such co-created communication activities, and due to the impact that they can have on young adults' attitudes toward alcohol brands and drinking.

However, if advertising regulators and governments are to take on the challenge of managing the effects of nightclubs' and alcohol brands' promotions on Facebook without a ban, we would recommend regulatory restrictions on alcohol advertising (Mart, 2011), coupled with significant investments in public health research and dissemination (Jernigan, 2012c), as well as additional investments in social marketing interventions that encourage responsible drinking behaviours. Only with such significant investments would public health science and policy be empowered to counteract the financial and lobbying pressures of the global alcohol industry, which seek to avoid such marketing bans (Jernigan, 2012c).

Also, the framework depicted in figure 1 can be a useful tool in conceptualising potential policies. It can help policy makers to devise responsible alcohol advertising in more participatory and integrated ways (Hawkins, Bulmer, & Eagle, 2011), and in a manner that can cater for the collaborative flow of ‘responsible drinking’ marketing communications content across various marketplace actors and multiple media platforms, including SNS.

9. Conclusion

In this study we explore the interplay of promotional drivers and key pro-alcohol actors, such as brands and nightclubs, in encouraging alcohol drinking among young adults specifically through Facebook. Our literature review focuses particularly on the interrelationships between alcohol industry actors through highly participatory new media (SNS), as well as on the blurred roles and fluid identities that underpin the co-creation of engagement-based SNS marketing communications. We draw on convergence culture theory (Jenkins, 2006) to frame our primary research. Focus groups and netnography findings highlight that alcohol brands as well as clubs promote drinking on Facebook and that this is achieved via contextual associations and good deals, fluid interactions between marketplace actors, flexible roles and identities, as well as through generating positive attitudes toward drinking co-promotions. Alcohol brands and clubs encourage the continuous participation of young consumers in Facebook promotions and co-creation of SNS conversations, which are characteristics of our present convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006). These findings have serious public policy and regulatory implications. They highlight the need for advertising regulators and policy makers to

draw on convergence culture theory in order to devise further regulatory frameworks and more effective interventions for responsible alcohol promotion on SNS and social media.

This study contributes to literature in that it focuses on an original, topical issue that has significant brand communications and advertising policy implications; it is a relevant study given that research looking at SNS as promotional platforms is still in its infancy, and additional research in this area is still needed in order to inform advertising regulation on SNS. Additionally, this study contributes to theory by extending our understanding of how alcohol brands and clubs attempt to promote drinking on Facebook through message co-creation, continuous participation in SNS conversations with young adults, and also through ‘shaping’ those SNS conversations by linking alcohol with topics such as partying in an attempt to attract young adults’ attention. This approach on the part of alcohol brands and clubs is likely to extend to other SNS and social media such as Twitter and YouTube. Therefore, this study raises a key issue that must be further examined in view of the power of social media to act as platforms for promoting ‘questionable’ behaviours such as binge drinking, and the significant public policy implications that such behaviours raise in the UK.

Finally, in terms of research limitations, this is a qualitative study which presents intrinsic issues with regards to generalisation. However, it provides numerous insights into how alcohol brands and particularly nightclubs are interacting, and taking advantage of the loose regulations around SNS to subtly market drinking to young adults. Areas for future

research include a content analysis specifically focused on the SNS promotional activities of UK nightclubs, quantitative examinations and modelling of young consumers' attitudes toward alcohol-related promotions on Facebook or other SNS. Additional studies could also carry out observations of young consumers' surfing and co-creative behaviours to identify the types of drinking-related sponsored adverts that are targeted at them in real time on Facebook or other SNS, and experiments to test whether permission settings based on legal drinking age restrictions by country really do prevent young adults and even teenagers being exposed to pro-drinking content on Facebook and other SNS. Finally, further research is urgently needed to examine the appropriateness of, and any potential enhancements for, age verification technologies in alcohol marketing contexts (Chester et al., 2010; Jernigan, 2012b).

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