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The Media and Alcohol Consumption Among Young Adults: A Case Study of Ghana Institute of Journalism

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of television alcohol advertising on drinking behavior and perceptions among university students in Ghana. Using a survey of 200 students at the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ), the research employed a descriptive quantitative design to assess exposure to alcohol commercials, self-reported alcohol consumption, and attitudes toward alcohol use. Results indicate that television advertising exerts a notable impact on students' alcohol consumption patterns and brand preferences. All respondents were aware of alcohol ads on TV, and among those who drink (70% of the sample), two-thirds reported purchasing alcohol because of a TV advertisement, while over 80% acknowledged that ads at least sometimes increased their alcohol intake. Advertisements featuring appealing elements such as catchy slogans, humor, and music were especially effective in attracting youth attention. Many students perceived alcohol advertising as having predominantly negative effects on young people's behavior, citing links to increased drinking frequency, brand switching, and indulgence in drinking for social or recreational purposes. Although a majority (55%) believed these ads negatively influence youth, most respondents opposed a complete ban on alcohol advertising, favoring stricter regulation instead. In sum, the findings suggest that television alcohol advertising plays a significant role in shaping young adults' drinking behaviors and perceptions, reinforcing pro-drinking norms while downplaying risks. The study concludes with recommendations for policymakers to strengthen alcohol advertising regulations and for health communicators to counteract seductive media messages with education on alcohol's harms.

Keywords: Alcohol Advertising; Youth; Television; Media Influence; Ghana; University Students; Drinking Behavior

1. Introduction

Excessive alcohol consumption among youth is a growing public health and social concern in Ghana and worldwide. Young adults are frequently exposed to pro-alcohol messages through various media channels, with television being a dominant source of alcohol advertisements. The World Health Organization reports that global per capita alcohol consumption has risen in recent decades (*WHO Global status report on alcohol and health 2018*), and alcohol use is increasingly normalized in popular culture. In Ghana, alcohol is readily available, and its use is often culturally accepted, but rising consumption among young people has prompted concern from public health authorities (The Republic of Ghana, 2008). College and university students represent a vulnerable group as they navigate social pressures, new freedoms, and targeted marketing from the alcohol industry. Studies have identified factors such as family influence, peer pressure, and media exposure as key drivers of youth drinking behavior. Among these, media and advertising are thought to significantly shape youths' attitudes toward alcohol and their drinking practices.

Prior research in other contexts has demonstrated a link between alcohol advertising exposure and youth alcohol use. A systematic review of longitudinal studies concluded that greater exposure to alcohol marketing is associated with

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earlier initiation of drinking and higher levels of consumption in adolescence (Anderson et al., 2009). Similarly, a review of prospective cohort studies found that alcohol advertising and portrayals can influence young people's drinking behaviors over time (Smith & Foxcroft, 2009). Snyder et al. (2016) reported that youth who saw more alcohol advertisements were more likely to increase their drinking, suggesting a dose-response effect. The influence of advertising is often explained through theories of social learning and cultivation: repeated exposure to attractive depictions of drinking may lead young viewers to internalize pro-drinking norms and expectations. For example, Bandura's social cognitive theory posits that individuals (especially impressionable youth) can learn behaviors by observing models in media (Bandura, 1977). In the context of alcohol, ads frequently present drinking as fun, glamorous, and socially rewarding, which can encourage imitation or create the perception that alcohol use is a normal, even desirable, part of everyday life (Grube & Wallack, 2014).

At the same time, researchers caution that the relationship between advertising and youth drinking is complex. Adolescents are not merely passive recipients of media messages; factors such as individual differences, peer environments, and family contexts mediate how advertising affects behavior (Grube & Waiters, 2015). Nonetheless, the alcohol industry continues to invest heavily in marketing: in the United States, for instance, alcohol companies spent nearly $2 billion on advertising in 2012 alone (Anderson et al., 2009), with television accounting for the largest share. In developing countries like Ghana, alcohol advertisements are common on TV, often airing during sports events, music shows, and prime-time slots with youth viewership. Regulatory oversight of alcohol marketing in Ghana is comparatively lax, with no comprehensive ban on alcohol advertising; youth thus constitute an important target market for brewers and distillers. The possible impact of this advertising on young Ghanaians' drinking behavior has, however, received limited scholarly attention.

This study addresses that gap by focusing on students at the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ) as a case study to explore how television advertising influences alcohol consumption among young adults, particularly looking at behavioral outcomes and perceptual effects. GIJ provides a relevant context as a university where students are training in media and communication, potentially making them both consumers and future creators of advertisements. The research was guided by the following specific objectives:

Determine whether alcohol advertisements entice young adults to consume alcohol. This includes assessing if students attribute their drinking initiation or continuation to exposure to TV alcohol ads.

Examine the relationship between alcohol advertising and student behavior, such as alcohol brand preferences, purchase decisions, and drinking frequency among those who consume alcohol.

Assess the perceived effects of alcohol advertising on youth behavior and perceptions. This involves understanding students' views on whether alcohol ads have positive, negative, or no effects on young people, and how these ads shape norms around drinking (e.g., perceptions of drinking as acceptable or risky).

By investigating these questions, the study aims to shed light on the role of media in shaping alcohol-related behaviors in a Ghanaian university setting. The findings will contribute to media studies scholarship on advertising effects and offer evidence to inform alcohol control policies and health communication strategies targeting youth.

2. Methods

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The research utilized a descriptive survey design to quantitatively assess the interplay between media (television advertising) and alcohol consumption among young adults. The case study for this research was the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ) in Accra, Ghana. The target population was defined as all undergraduate students at GIJ from first year (level 100) through fourth year (level 400). At the time of the study, the total student population was approximately 4,000. From this population, a sample of 200 students was selected to participate in the survey. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit respondents. This sampling approach was chosen to intentionally include students across different year levels and academic programs who had exposure to television and were aware of alcohol advertising, ensuring relevant insights could be gathered. The final sample had representation from each level (23% freshman, 18% sophomore, 26% junior, 33% senior). The sample was 60% female and 40% male, with ages ranging from late teens to late twenties (the plurality age group was 21–23 years, comprising 39% of respondents). Students were drawn from two main academic streams – Journalism (58% of the sample) and Public Relations (42%).

2.2. Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed by the researchers (see Appendix in original dissertation). The questionnaire was divided into sections covering personal demographics, exposure to alcohol advertising, alcohol consumption behavior, and perceptions/attitudes regarding alcohol and its advertising. Key items in the questionnaire included: (a) exposure to TV alcohol ads (e.g., "Have you ever seen alcohol advertisements on TV?" and frequency of seeing such ads), (b) alcohol use patterns (e.g., whether the respondent drinks alcohol, age of initiation, frequency and quantity of consumption, occasions for drinking), (c) influence of advertising on behavior (e.g., questions asking if ads prompted them to purchase alcohol or increased their desire and consumption, and which aspects of ads were appealing), and (d) attitudinal questions (a series of Likert-scale statements on perceptions of alcohol's role in student life, peer norms, and whether advertising has effects on youth and should be regulated). The survey instrument was reviewed for content validity and clarity, and a brief pilot test was conducted with a few students to ensure the questions were understandable. Minor adjustments were made based on feedback.

2.3. Procedure

The 200 selected students were approached on campus and invited to participate in the study voluntarily. After obtaining verbal informed consent (with assurances of confidentiality and that data would be used for academic purposes only), participants filled out the self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaires were completed in English, which is the language of instruction at GIJ. To encourage honest responses, the survey was anonymous – students were not required to write their names or identifying information. Researchers were available to clarify any questions for participants during the survey administration. The data collection took place in mid-2019 over a period of several weeks.

2.4. Data Analysis

Completed questionnaires were collected and checked for completeness. The data were then coded and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 16) for analysis. Both descriptive and inferential analyses were performed in line with the research objectives. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used to summarize respondents' characteristics, advertising exposure, alcohol consumption behavior, and attitudinal measures. Results are presented in tables and figures for clarity. For the Likert-scale attitude items, mean scores (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 indicating strong agreement) were calculated to gauge the level of agreement with various statements about alcohol and its advertising. No complex multivariate analyses were undertaken, as the study's aim was exploratory and descriptive. However, results were stratified or cross-tabulated in some cases (for instance, analyzing certain responses among those who drink alcohol vs. those who do not) to draw relevant insights.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical protocols for research with human subjects. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and that their participation was voluntary. They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality – no personal identifiers were collected. Given the topic's sensitivity (alcohol use among youth), participants were free to skip questions or withdraw at any time. The research was conducted in accordance with the institutional guidelines of GIJ for student project work, and the final proposal was approved by an academic supervisor prior to data collection. No monetary or course credit incentives were provided; participation was based on willingness to contribute to the research.

3. Results

3.1. Exposure to Alcohol Advertising and Prevalence of Alcohol Use

All respondents (100%) reported that they had seen alcohol advertisements on television. Television exposure to alcohol marketing was thus nearly universal in this student sample. A majority (59%) indicated that they see alcohol ads weekly, while 24% see them monthly and 17% report viewing such ads daily as shown in Table 1. This confirms that alcohol advertising is a regular part of the media consumption landscape for GIJ students.

Table 1 If yes, How Often

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	34	17%
Weekly	118	59%
Monthly	48	24%
Total	200	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

In terms of alcohol consumption, 70% of respondents (n = 139) acknowledged that they drink alcohol, whereas 30% said they do not drink. Thus, about two-thirds of the student sample are current alcohol users. Among those who drink, patterns of use varied: 44% described their drinking frequency as "occasional," 38% as "rare," and 18% as "regular" (habitual). When asked about their most recent drinking occasion, half (50%) of the drinkers had last consumed alcohol at a party, 34% did so at an outing (casual social gathering), and 16% had a drink on a normal day without a special occasion. This suggests that social events are a primary context for alcohol use among the students, although a notable minority also drink outside of special occasions. The typical types of alcoholic beverages consumed included beer, spirits, and wine; beer was the most commonly reported drink (29% of drinkers primarily consumed beer), followed by spirits (27%) and wine (20%). Another 14% indicated they consumed all three forms (beer, spirits, wine), and 9% drank a combination of beer and spirits.

The age of initiation into drinking varied among respondents. Alarmingly, a subset of students began consuming alcohol at a very early age: 14% reported having their first drink between the ages of 10–15 years. The largest group (33%) started between 16–21 years, closely followed by 41% who started between 21–26 years (typically during late adolescence or early adulthood, which likely corresponds with their time in tertiary education). Only 12% said they began drinking after age 26. These findings indicate that a considerable portion of students were exposed to alcohol in their mid-teens, well below the legal purchasing age (18 years in Ghana), highlighting early initiation as an area of concern.

3.2. Influence of Television Advertising on Alcohol Consumption Behavior

One of the key questions for this study was whether exposure to TV alcohol commercials entices young people to consume alcohol. A substantial number of respondents indeed linked their own drinking behavior to alcohol advertising. Among the 139 students who drink alcohol, 67% reported that they have purchased a particular alcoholic beverage as a direct result of seeing its television advertisement (Table 2). In other words, about two-thirds of drinkers could recall a time they bought alcohol because an ad prompted them to do so. This suggests a strong persuasive impact of advertising on product choice and purchase behavior in this group. The remaining 33% of drinkers did not attribute any alcohol purchase to advertising influence.

Table 2 Purchase of alcohol as a result of television advertisement (drinkers only, N = 139)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	93	67%
No	46	33%
Total	139	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Beyond influencing one-time purchases, advertising also appeared to affect ongoing consumption levels. When asked if seeing alcohol advertisements had led to an increase in their overall alcohol intake, over four-fifths of the drinking respondents answered affirmatively to some degree. Specifically, 29% said "Yes" (advertising increases their alcohol consumption), and an additional 55% said "Sometimes" (advertising sometimes increases their consumption). Only 16% asserted that alcohol advertising does not increase their intake (Table 3). These self-reports imply that for a majority of student drinkers, exposure to alcohol commercials tends to encourage either more frequent drinking or higher quantities consumed on some occasions.

Table 3 Increase of Alcohol Consumption through Advertisement

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	40	29%
No	22	16%
Sometimes	77	55%
Total	139	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Those respondents who admitted to advertising-induced increases in drinking were further asked to estimate by how much their intake rose. Among the 40 individuals who answered this follow-up (the ones who said "Yes" in Table 3), the majority (58%) indicated that ads led them to drink an extra 2–4 bottles of beer or servings of alcohol than they otherwise would. Another 28% said their consumption increased by 1–2 bottles due to advertising influence, while 14% reported an increase of more than 4 bottles on occasions influenced by ads. Although this question was only relevant to a subset of participants, it provides insight that for some students, the magnitude of advertising's effect on drinking quantity can be quite significant (e.g., several extra drinks).

It is worth noting that television advertising's influence was not limited to simply encouraging any drinking, but also extended to shaping brand preferences and choices. Students were asked whether the type of alcohol advertisements they see on TV determine the brand or type of alcohol they prefer to consume. The responses (measured on a Likert scale) showed moderate agreement with this idea: the mean score for "Alcohol TV advertisements determine the brand and type of alcohol I will go for" was M = 3.48 (SD = 1.24) on a 5-point scale (with 5 = strongly agree). This mean above the neutral midpoint indicates that, on average, students tended to agree that advertising influences their brand choices. In practical terms, this was reflected in the specific brands or categories students found most enticing. Among those who stated that some alcohol advertisements are enticing (n = 52), a majority (56%) pointed to beer advertisements as the most enticing, followed by 32% who chose advertisements for spirits, and 12% who favored wine ads (Table 4). Beer ads likely have high appeal due to their prevalence and perhaps their thematic content (e.g., depicting friendship and refreshment which resonate with youth), aligning with beer also being the most consumed beverage in the sample.

To delve deeper into what about the advertisements attracted the youth, the survey asked these 52 respondents what aspects of alcohol ads they found appealing. Notably, the vast majority (60%) reported that a combination of slogan, humor, and music in the advertisements was appealing to them.

Table 4 Appealing About Alcohol Advertisement

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Slogan, Humour and Music	31	60%
Model and Story Line	9	17%
Slogan and Humour	12	23%
Total	52	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

These elements often work together in memorable beer and liquor commercials: a catchy tagline or jingle, comedic scenarios, and upbeat music can create an enjoyable and persuasive message. Another 23% said they were especially drawn to the slogan and humor of ads (emphasizing the role of witty catch-phrases and comedic content), while 17% cited the models/actors and the storyline of the adverts as the main appealing feature. This breakdown highlights that creative content in advertisements, particularly humor and music, plays a critical role in engaging young viewers. It aligns with prior research indicating that youth are attracted to fun and entertaining aspects of alcohol commercials (Chen et al., 2005; Waiters et al., 2001). Indeed, GIJ students, being communication majors, might be especially attuned to these creative features. One respondent noted informally that a humorous beer ad jingle "stuck in my head and made drinking seem so much fun," illustrating how these elements can leave a lasting impression.

Despite the strong impact of advertising on their behaviors, most students did not personally identify with or "relate to" the lifestyles or images depicted in alcohol ads. When asked if they relate to the alcohol advertisements they see on TV,

only 35% said Yes, whereas 65% said No. This suggests that while the ads are persuasive and affect their choices, many students still recognize a gap between the glamorous portrayals in commercials and their own lives. They may enjoy the ads' entertainment value and be influenced by them, but they do not necessarily see the characters or scenarios as reflections of themselves. This point might indicate a level of media literacy or skepticism – students can be influenced by ads without fully buying into all the narratives presented.

3.3. Perceptions of Advertising Effects and Alcohol-Related Behaviors

The survey also explored students' perceptions of how alcohol advertising affects youth in general, as well as some specific consequences of alcohol use potentially tied to media influence. When directly asked about the overall effects of alcohol advertising on the youth, just over half (55%) of all respondents felt that alcohol ads have a negative effect on young people. These respondents often mentioned that such ads encourage underage drinking, excessive consumption, or the adoption of unhealthy lifestyles. A significant minority (39%), however, believed that alcohol advertising has no effect on youth – this group might think that other factors (like personal choice or upbringing) are far more important determinants of behavior than advertising (Table 5). Only 6% of students viewed alcohol advertising as having a positive effect on youth. Those who saw a positive effect sometimes reasoned that ads could promote responsible drinking messages or that the economic and entertainment value of advertising outweighed potential harm. Nonetheless, the dominant view was that the net impact of alcohol commercials on young people is harmful, aligning with public health perspectives.

Table 5 Effects of Alcohol Advertisement on the Youth

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Positive Effect	13	6%
Negative Effect	109	55%
No Effect	78	39%
Total	200	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Students' own experiences shed light on what some of these negative effects might be. Even within this relatively high-achieving sample (university students), alcohol use had interfered with academic responsibilities for a portion of respondents. Among those who drink, 15% admitted that they had missed lectures/classes at least once as a result of getting drunk, and an additional 28% said they "sometimes" missed lectures due to hangovers or intoxication. The remaining 57% maintained that they had never missed class from drinking (Table 6). While the majority manage to attend classes, the fact that over 40% have occasionally or frequently skipped academic commitments due to alcohol indicates a tangible negative behavioral outcome associated with drinking. This outcome cannot be solely attributed to advertising, of course, but it reflects the broader influence of alcohol in student life that advertising might help to normalize. It's notable that of those who had missed lectures from drinking, two-thirds said it happened "occasionally" rather than frequently, hinting that these are sporadic events (perhaps after major parties or celebrations).

Table 6 Missed Lectures as a Result of Drunk

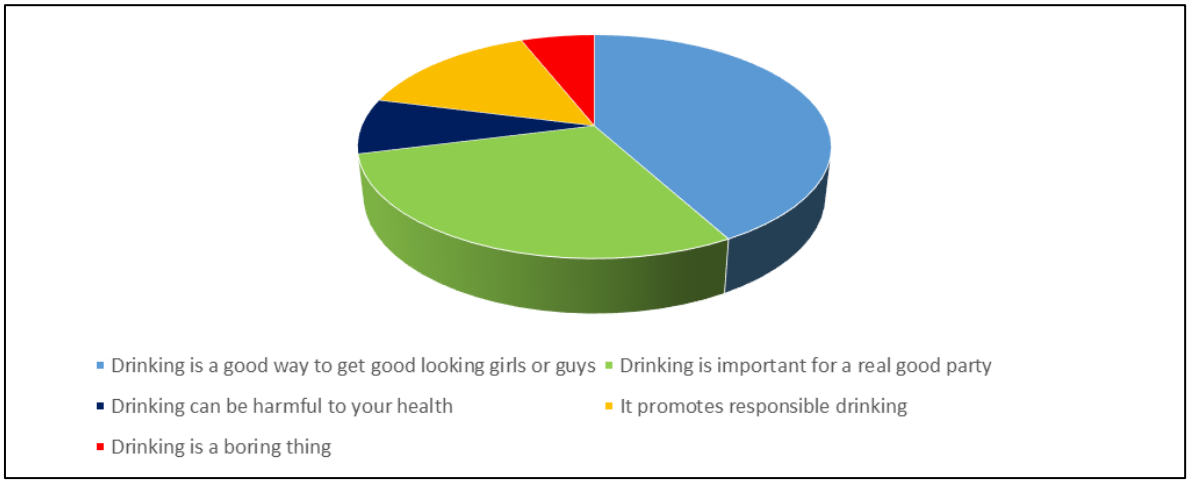
Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	21	15%
No	79	57%
Sometimes	39	28%
Total	139	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Interestingly, despite these negative experiences, most student drinkers did not express personal regret about their drinking episodes. When asked about "hangover effects" specifically, whether they regret their actions when they get drunk, 76% responded that they do not regret it, whereas 24% said they do feel regret after getting drunk. This lack of regret among the majority could imply that drinking (even to the point of drunkenness) is considered a normal, accepted

part of their social life, one that they do not feel particularly guilty about. It may also suggest that any negative consequences (like missed lectures or next-day discomfort) are seen as a tolerable trade-off for the social enjoyment gained. However, the 24% who experience regret likely recognize more serious downsides to their alcohol use (such as embarrassing behavior or health effects).

To gauge how television advertising might shape perceptions of alcohol, students were asked about the messages they perceive from alcohol ads and media portrayals. Figure 1 summarizes how respondents felt alcohol is portrayed on television. The overwhelming impression is that TV promotes a very positive, fun-oriented image of drinking. Approximately 42% of respondents said that, according to television ads, "drinking is a good way to get good looking girls or guys," making it the most cited portrayal (Figure 1). In other words, many students see that alcohol commercials link drinking with sexual or romantic success, a common trope in beer advertising where the drinker is often surrounded by attractive peers. Another 29% of students observed that TV advertising suggests "drinking is important for a real good party," reinforcing the idea that alcohol is a necessary ingredient for social celebrations. Only a small fraction of ads, according to students, convey any cautionary or negative messages: a mere 8% said TV shows that "drinking can be harmful to one's health," and 6% felt ads make drinking look "boring." Meanwhile, 15% did note that some messages promote "responsible drinking," such as moderation or "drink responsibly" disclaimers. These findings illustrate that from the students' perspective, the balance of messaging in televised alcohol advertising is skewed heavily toward glamorizing alcohol use (social and sexual rewards) rather than warning of its risks. This glamorized portrayal can contribute to shaping young viewers' perceptions that drinking is normative, desirable, and largely without serious consequence – perceptions that can encourage them to drink.



Source: Field Survey, 2019

Figure 1 Portrayal of Televised Alcohol

Corroborating this, students also recalled the specific content of alcohol advertisements that stuck with them. When asked *"What do you remember most about alcohol ads you've seen?"* the top responses were: that the ads show drinking as a great way to meet people (33% remembered this theme) and that the ads were funny (30%). Additionally, 21% remembered "the people in the advertisement looked attractive," and 14% noted "the people had strength and vigor" in the ads. A negligible 3% recalled that ads showed romantic attraction between actors (e.g., implying sexual chemistry when drinking). These recollections emphasize that students internalize the fun, social, and aspirational cues from alcohol advertising – the humor, attractiveness, and sociability are what stick, rather than any responsible-drinking messages.

The study also examined whether students felt alcohol ads might encourage indecent or inappropriate behavior among youth. Table 7 showed a combined 75% believed that alcohol advertising does promote indecent behavior at least some of the time 42% said Yes, definitely, and 33% said Sometimes.

Table 7 Alcohol Advertisement and Indecent Behaviour

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	83	42%
No	49	25%
Sometimes	68	33%
Total	200	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

The remaining 25% did not think so (responded No). Here, "indecent behavior" was understood broadly as behavior contrary to societal or moral norms (e.g., violence, sexual misconduct, rowdiness) that could result from alcohol consumption. Many students opined during informal debriefs that flashy ads make reckless drinking seem "cool," potentially leading young people to act out or engage in misconduct under the influence, an effect they deemed indecent. The fact that three-quarters see a link between ads and such behavior underlines their awareness that advertising-driven drinking can have social consequences.

Finally, respondents expressed their views on policy measures regarding alcohol advertising. Interestingly, despite acknowledging negative effects, a large majority of students opposed a total ban on alcohol advertisements. When asked if alcohol advertising should be banned entirely, 80% responded No, with only 20% in favor of a ban (Table 8).

Table 8 Ban of Alcohol Advertisement

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	41	20%
No	159	80%
Total	200	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Many students likely appreciate the commercial and entertainment aspects of alcohol ads (some might aspire to create such ads in their careers, given their field of study). However, there was strong support for regulation of alcohol advertising: 84% agreed that alcohol ads should be more strictly regulated, while 16% thought additional regulation was not needed (Table 9). This suggests that students prefer a middle-ground approach – they want limits on marketing practices (such as not targeting minors, or airing ads at appropriate times) rather than an outright prohibition of alcohol ads. They recognize the need to protect vulnerable audiences even as they defend the presence of alcohol advertising in the media landscape.

Table 9 Regulate Alcohol Advertisement

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	161	84%
No	39	16%
Total	200	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Taken together, the results paint a comprehensive picture: television advertising has a tangible influence on GIJ students' alcohol-related decisions and attitudes. The ads succeed in attracting attention and encouraging consumption (both in initiation and in brand choice/quantity), largely through entertaining and aspirational content. However, students are also cognizant of the broader negative implications, even if they personally continue to partake in drinking. The findings on perceptions show that advertising contributes to a social environment where drinking is viewed as glamorous and normative, possibly diluting perceptions of risk among youth.

4. Discussion

This study set out to investigate the impact of television media, specifically alcohol advertisements on the drinking behavior and perceptions of young adults in a Ghanaian university context. The findings provide evidence that TV alcohol advertising is a significant influence on youth drinking behaviors, consistent with prior research in other settings, while also highlighting nuanced ways in which students interpret and internalize these media messages. In this section, we discuss the implications of the key results in light of existing literature and theory, and consider the broader context and potential interventions.

The data clearly show that a large proportion of students credit alcohol advertisements with enticing them to consume alcohol. All respondents had been exposed to TV alcohol commercials, and among those who drink, about two-thirds acknowledged buying alcohol because of an advertisement. This aligns with the idea that advertising stimulates demand by creating desire for the product. The result is in line with Snyder et al. (2016), who found that greater exposure to alcohol ads was associated with higher likelihood of drinking among youth. It also echoes the conclusions of longitudinal studies that advertising hastens the onset of drinking and ups consumption levels in adolescence (Anderson et al., 2009; Smith & Foxcroft, 2009). In our sample, not only did many students start drinking in their mid-teens, but a considerable share of current drinkers said advertisements sometimes lead them to drink more than they otherwise would. This self-reported influence suggests a causative role, or at least a facilitating role, of media in reinforcing alcohol use. However, it is important to interpret these self-assessments with caution. As Grube and Waiters (2015) emphasize, the relationship between media messages and young people's alcohol behaviors is not straightforwardly causal – other factors like peer influence, personality traits, and socio-cultural context moderate the impact. For instance, a student with an already permissive attitude toward drinking or whose friends are heavy drinkers might be more receptive to alcohol ads, whereas a teetotaler or someone from a strict family might resist advertising appeals. Our finding that 39% believed advertising has "no effect" on youth could reflect some students' perception that personal choice or peer norms overshadow media effects. Indeed, the environment at GIJ, a mix of media-savvy individuals, might foster a belief that they can critically filter media influences, even if in practice their behavior shows otherwise.

The study also reveals that advertising's impact is not merely on the decision to drink or not to drink but extends to how and what students drink. The moderate agreement that ads determine their choice of alcohol type/brand (mean agreement score 3.48) suggests that many students gravitate toward advertised brands. This is understandable, as advertising raises brand awareness and associates products with attractive imagery. In Ghana, as in many countries, certain beer and spirit brands run frequent campaigns that become part of youth pop culture. Students in our survey singled out beer ads as particularly enticing – likely due to both frequency of exposure (beer ads are common during football matches, for example) and content (often humorous and youth-oriented). This finding is consistent with marketing research that younger audiences tend to be influenced by branding and product appeals in ads (Nelson, 2001). It also resonates with Chen et al. (2005), who examined what makes alcohol advertising attractive to youth, finding that elements like humor, music, and fun storylines significantly increase an ad's appeal to underage viewers. Our participants confirmed that humor and music in ads are key hooks for them. The fact that 60% of those answering found the combination of slogan-humor-music appealing is telling – these are precisely the creative strategies advertisers use to foster positive emotions and memorability. Waiters et al. (2001) similarly noted in focus groups that youth are drawn to alcohol ads that are funny or feature catchy music and youthful themes. Therefore, our study adds to evidence that creative content in alcohol marketing can effectively engage young people and potentially sway their consumer behavior.

Interestingly, while advertising influenced brand choice and quantity, it had less effect on initial initiation of drinking, according to our respondents. The statement "I started drinking because of alcohol TV advertisement" had a relatively low mean agreement ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.54$), indicating that most students did not directly attribute the start of their drinking to advertising. This suggests that initial experimentation with alcohol may be more strongly driven by other factors, such as peer pressure, curiosity, or family environment. Peer influence was highlighted qualitatively by many students and is well-documented in literature as a prime factor for youth drinking initiation (Miller et al., 2007). In the GIJ context, it was noted in the study's conclusions that peer influence is a major factor in alcohol use among students (as mentioned in the dissertation's abstract). Thus, while ads might not be the primary trigger for the first drink, they likely reinforce and maintain drinking by shaping a positive brand image and providing continuous cues to consume. This supports a nuanced view: advertising and peer/social factors work in tandem, where advertising cultivates a favorable perception of alcohol and suggests what to drink, and peers provide the opportunity and social reinforcement to do so.

One of the more striking aspects of our findings is how students perceive the portrayal of alcohol in media and how that correlates with their own attitudes. The majority recognized that TV advertising paints drinking in a highly favorable

light, as a way to have fun, be sociable, and attract others. This recognition is important because it shows students are aware of the persuasive intent and slant of advertising. However, simultaneously, many students in our sample exhibited permissive attitudes towards drinking, which align with the media portrayals. For example, a large proportion agreed (via Likert items in Table 26 of the original data) with statements such as *"Taking a drink or more is perfect for a weekend"* (mean ~3.8) and *"There is nothing wrong with students getting drunk occasionally or regularly"* (mean ~3.76). These high mean scores indicate that most respondents see regular or occasional heavy drinking as acceptable behavior for students. This kind of normalization of alcohol use is exactly what public health experts fear results from constant exposure to glamorous advertising (Smith & Foxcroft, 2009). In essence, even though the students know the ads are selling an image, many have nevertheless internalized the notion that drinking is a normal part of student life and a key to enjoyment, a classic case of cultivation effects where media messages over time shape one's worldview (Gerbner et al., as cited in Fourie, 2017).

Our respondents also largely did not stigmatize drinking: for instance, they moderately disagreed that "a lot of people in my school will think it's odd if I do not drink at all" (mean ~2.5, indicating many think abstaining is not viewed as strange), but they moderately agreed that "students who do not drink are no fun and have boring lives" (mean ~3.2), revealing an ambivalence but some pressure towards drinking as part of social fun. There was also agreement that drinking is ingrained in campus culture ("drinking is a major part of my school's way of life," mean ~2.84, slightly below neutral but indicating a noticeable presence) and that alcohol is not seen as a serious problem by many ("alcohol use is a problem in my school," mean ~2.70, implying many don't see it as a severe issue). These perceptions, combined with the low regret about drunken episodes, suggest a student culture that is quite permissive of alcohol. Advertising likely plays a role in reinforcing this culture by providing constant positive reminders and by failing to highlight consequences. In fact, only a small minority of students recall any health warnings in ads (8% recalled seeing harm in ads, as noted earlier), which means the protective messaging is drowned out by positive cues.

Even as the youth normalize drinking, they also acknowledge some negative outcomes both hypothetical (in the case of perceptions of advertising's effect on youth in general) and actual (in their own missed classes or hangover regrets). The consensus that alcohol ads have negative effects on youth (55% saying so) mirrors the findings of public health research that attributes underage and binge drinking partly to sophisticated alcohol marketing (Snyder et al., 2016; Anderson et al., 2009). Students citing "indecent behavior" promotion by ads indicate an awareness that alcohol advertising, by glamorizing intoxication, might indirectly encourage behaviors like aggression or sexual misconduct when youth mimic what they see without restraint. This demonstrates that the students are not oblivious to the dangers of alcohol; rather, they hold a kind of dual consciousness – they enjoy and are influenced by the ads, yet intellectually they understand these ads can lead to bad outcomes for society. This duality could be due to their education in media studies: they might critically analyze media effects in the classroom, but like any consumers, they are still emotionally persuaded by the ads.

The finding that most students oppose a total ban on alcohol advertising but strongly support regulatory measures is revealing of their balanced perspective. They likely see advertising as a legitimate business and communication endeavor (especially as communication students themselves), but want measures to mitigate harm – for example, limiting youth-targeted content or ensuring responsibility messages are included. This stance aligns with recommendations by global health bodies that advocate for tighter regulation of alcohol marketing (WHO, 2014) rather than outright prohibition, which can be difficult to enforce and may have economic downsides. The students' support for regulation could also stem from a sense of personal responsibility: as future media professionals, they might believe in ethical standards for advertising to prevent harm.

The outcomes of this study are broadly consistent with findings from other countries, reinforcing that the impact of alcohol advertising on youth is a global phenomenon. For instance, our participants' recall of humorous and fun content in ads is analogous to findings in the United States and Europe where youth remember entertaining alcohol commercials and these memories are linked to positive attitudes toward drinking (Austin et al., 2016; Morgenstern et al., 2011). The influence on brand choice and increased drinking after exposure has also been observed; in the U.S., one study found that for each additional alcohol advertisement a young person saw (above a certain threshold), they drank more (Snyder et al., 2016). What our study adds is a context from sub-Saharan Africa, a region underrepresented in media effects research. It shows that despite cultural differences, urban African youth (at least in Ghana) are equally susceptible to the lures of alcohol marketing.

One contextual factor of note is that our sample is drawn from a media institute – these students might differ from the general youth population. They are academically inclined and knowledgeable about media techniques, which could either make them more critical (thus less influenced) or, conversely, more appreciative of good advertising (thus more influenced in terms of purchase behavior). The data leaning towards influence suggests that creative appeals work even

on those who understand the craft of advertising. Another factor is that many of these students will go on to work in journalism, PR, or advertising; the ethical tension in their responses (recognizing harm but not wanting a ban) might reflect their future professional interests weighing in.

The findings have several implications. First, the strong influence of advertising on youth drinking behavior underscores the need for robust alcohol advertising regulations in Ghana. This could include restricting alcohol commercials to late-night hours when underage viewers are less likely to watch, banning content that explicitly or implicitly targets youth (for example, ads using cartoon characters or associating alcohol with youth-oriented activities), and mandating clear responsibility messages. The fact that 84% of students favor more regulation provides a mandate from the very demographic that such policies would protect. Policymakers and regulators (such as the Food and Drugs Authority in Ghana, which oversees alcohol marketing) should take into account young people's exposure levels – our study shows weekly if not daily exposure is common – and aim to reduce youth-targeted impressions. Additionally, given that students identified humor and music as hooks, regulators might consider guidelines on how alcohol can be portrayed (perhaps limiting overly lighthearted tones that trivialize consumption).

Second, the results suggest a role for counter-advertising and health education. While ads glamorize drinking, health authorities could run counter-campaigns highlighting the downsides (for instance, short TV spots or social media videos showing the consequences of excessive drinking, or debunking the myths that alcohol makes one more attractive or popular). Previous research indicates that well-designed counter-advertising can shift attitudes (Agostinelli & Grube, 2002). Our participants' recognition of negative effects indicates they might be receptive to factual, hard-hitting messages about alcohol's risks if delivered effectively. The university itself could integrate alcohol education into student orientation or health services, emphasizing the very points that ads omit, for example, how alcohol impairs academic performance (as seen with missed lectures) and health. Peer-led interventions might also be effective, considering the strong peer context; students could be encouraged to create their own messages or skits that satirize alcohol ads and point out their manipulations, as a form of critical media literacy exercise.

Third, for the alcohol industry and advertisers, these findings highlight a need for social responsibility. If many young consumers are saying ads prompt them to drink more and choose particular brands, companies should be cognizant of their influence. The fact that youth started drinking at very early ages (some as young as 10) and later identify with ads suggests that marketing codes (which often say "we don't target under-18s") may not be sufficiently enforced or effective. The industry could proactively include clearer "Not for minors" disclaimers and avoid themes likely to resonate with children (for instance, using very youthful actors or linking alcohol with cartoon imagery). Although the primary motive of advertising is to increase sales, there is an ethical consideration when the audience includes vulnerable groups. Engaging with regulators to develop stricter self-regulation codes, like those advocated in the ICAP (2016) workshop on self-regulation in Africa, could be a step forward.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The use of a non-random sample from a single institution (GIJ) means the results may not be generalizable to all young adults in Ghana or elsewhere. GIJ students might have unique characteristics (e.g., higher media literacy, possibly different drinking culture) that do not reflect other student populations. Future research should include students from multiple universities, including perhaps more rural or non-media-focused institutions, to see if the patterns hold. Additionally, our study relied on self-reported data, which can be subject to biases such as social desirability or recall error. While anonymity likely improved honesty, some under-reporting of negative behaviors (drunkenness, etc.) or over-attribution (blaming ads for one's own choices) could have occurred. Longitudinal research would be valuable to better establish causality – for instance, tracking students' drinking habits alongside their ad exposure over time to see if increased exposure leads to increased consumption, controlling for other factors.

Another area for further study is the content analysis of Ghanaian alcohol advertisements to complement this survey. Our respondents gave us insight into what they see and remember; it would be useful to systematically analyze the themes and appeals used in local TV alcohol ads (as Buijzen & Valkenburg (2014) did for youth advertising content in general) to see how they align with what youth find attractive. This can inform future interventions – e.g., if music is ubiquitous in ads, maybe health campaigns can also use music to capture attention but deliver a different message.

The role of digital and social media advertising also warrants exploration. Our research focused on television, which in 2019 was still a major medium for alcohol marketing in Ghana. However, young people are increasingly consuming media online (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube). Alcohol brands have a presence there too, sometimes with even less regulation. Future surveys could examine how social media alcohol promotions influence youth, and whether those effects are similar or stronger than traditional TV ads. Since GIJ students are likely heavy social media users as well, this is a pertinent extension.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that television alcohol advertising has a meaningful impact on university students' drinking behaviors and perceptions in Ghana. Advertisements entice many young adults to initiate purchases of alcohol and to increase their consumption, primarily through appealing content that associates drinking with sociability, fun, and charisma. At the same time, students are aware that these ads contribute to a culture of heavy drinking and can have negative repercussions on youth behavior. The voice of the respondents, who simultaneously enjoy ads and call for more regulation, underscores the complexity of the issue.

Based on the findings, several recommendations emerge. Policymakers should enact and enforce regulations to restrict alcohol advertising content and placement, ensuring it does not unduly influence underage and youth audiences. This might include setting watershed times for TV alcohol ads and prohibiting advertisements that glamorize excessive drinking. Educational institutions (like GIJ and others) should incorporate media literacy programs that dissect alcohol ads, helping students critically understand persuasive intent and resist unhealthy influences. They should also provide support for students facing alcohol-related problems, as a fraction clearly experience academic impairment from drinking. Public health agencies and NGOs should run counter-advertising campaigns that highlight the risks of alcohol abuse and present realistic consequences, to counterbalance the rosy picture painted by commercials. Such campaigns could leverage the same channels popular among youth (TV, social media) and even involve youth in their creation for better resonance.

Finally, it is recommended that further research be conducted on alcohol consumption patterns on other university campuses in Ghana and the role media plays, as well as research into other factors (peer networks, economic factors, etc.) that drive youth drinking. A broader evidence base will bolster efforts to design effective interventions. The government's draft National Alcohol Policy (2008) could be revisited and updated with these research insights in mind, aiming to reduce alcohol-related harm among the youth. In the words of one student respondent: *"Alcohol ads make drinking look cool, but at the end of the day we, the youth, face the consequences."* It is incumbent on stakeholders in media, education, and health sectors to work together to minimize those consequences while fostering a media environment that supports healthy choices for young people.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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