

Young people, alcohol and the media

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This report presents findings of a mixed-method study exploring how alcohol is represented in media consumed by young people, young people's own interpretations of these representations, and the influence of the media and celebrities on young people's attitudes to alcohol and their alcohol consumption. It also examines the views of media professionals on the production of alcohol-related content, the potential influence of the media on young consumers, and the role of the media in health promotion.

The report:

- provides an overview of the differing ways alcohol is portrayed in TV programmes, magazines and social networking sites (SNS) consumed by young people aged 11–18;
- offers insight into young people's attitudes towards, and interpretations of, media representations of alcohol;
- discusses the relationship between young people's media use, attitudes towards and attachment to celebrities, and drinking behaviours; and
- presents the perspectives of media professionals on the production of alcohol-related content, the influence of the media on young consumers, and the potential role of the media in providing alcohol-related advice and information to young people.

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Executive summary

Background

The media is of great importance in the lives of young people, who have high levels of access to a variety of media devices and content. Through their media use, young people consume a range of alcohol depictions which may influence their attitudes to alcohol and subsequent consumption. Little is known about the non-advertising alcohol depictions young people are exposed to, and the influence of exposure on alcohol consumption. Moreover, despite speculation that media representations of celebrity alcohol use influence young people's drinking behaviour, there is a lack of evidence to support such claims.

The aim of this study was to explore how alcohol and drinking are represented in media (TV programmes, magazines and social networking sites) consumed by young people aged 11–18. Young people's perspectives and interpretations of the various ways in which alcohol is depicted in the media were also explored, as was the influence of the media and celebrities on young people's attitudes to alcohol and their alcohol consumption. The study also aimed to gain insight into the views of media professionals on the production of alcohol-related content, the potential influence of the media on young consumers, and the potential role of the media in health promotion regarding alcohol use.

Methodology

A mixed-method approach was adopted and both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. Initially, a content analysis was conducted to examine the extent and nature of alcohol depictions in TV programmes (n=10), magazines (n=23) and social networking sites (n=4). The depiction of alcohol on leading alcohol brand websites (n=14) was also examined, as was the effectiveness of age verification devices aimed at restricting underage access to such websites. To explore how young people interpreted and made sense of media depictions of alcohol, focus groups (n=15) were conducted with school and college pupils (n=114). Alongside the qualitative research, a survey questionnaire was undertaken with young people (n=941) to gain evidence of the relationship between a number of factors, including media use, attachment to celebrities and alcohol consumption.

In the final stage of the research, interviews were conducted with professionals (n=12) working within a range of media industries (e.g. the news media and TV industry) to provide insight into the production of alcohol-related content. This stage of the research also explored media professionals' perspectives on earlier research findings (e.g. the influence of media depictions of alcohol on young people) and the potential role of the media in health promotion regarding alcohol.

Key findings

How is alcohol portrayed in media consumed by young people?

The normalisation of alcohol and drinking

Alcohol was the most prominent substance and beverage portrayed in media consumed by young people. Drinking alcohol was predominantly presented as a normal social activity. Reasons for alcohol use were mostly pro-social, although a minority were related to alcohol dependence and personal crisis management (e.g. 'Dutch courage' and self-medication of anxiety). When effects of alcohol were shown, they tended to focus on acute intoxication (i.e. drunkenness) and extreme adverse effects such as violence and alcohol dependence.

Celebrity alcohol use, particularly by female celebrities, was frequently depicted in female-targeted magazines; in these it was depicted as a glamorous aspect of celebrity events and day-to-day activities, and as a problematic activity for a small minority.

The gendering of alcohol use

Alcohol representations in magazines were highly gendered in nature. Specific alcoholic drinks appeared to hold symbolic meaning in that some were portrayed as more masculine or feminine than others. In female-targeted magazines, drinking was portrayed as glamorous in the context of celebrity, yet at the same time the consumption of alcohol was depicted as harmful to stereotypical feminine ideals such as beauty, appearance and women's role as mothers. In men's magazines, female drinkers were portrayed as unfeminine (e.g. 'ladettes'), vulnerable and emotional, and as individuals engaging in sexual activity when drunk; for men, however, the consumption of alcohol, particularly beer within the pub context, was presented as a key aspect of masculine identity.

Alcohol advertising

Young people were viewing alcohol advertisements both pre and post the TV watershed of 9pm. Alcohol advertising in magazines and TV commercial breaks not only directly advertised alcoholic beverages, but also depicted alcohol in the promotion of non-alcoholic consumer items and the sponsorship of leisure activities such as football and music festivals. Alcohol brands were both officially and unofficially represented on social networking sites (SNS).

How do young people interpret media representations of alcohol?

Young people as critical consumers of celebrity content

Young people were critical media consumers and were aware that some sections of the media might have an economic or editorial agenda in focusing on celebrity alcohol use. The media were viewed as exaggerating the extent and nature of celebrity drinking, with extensive media coverage giving the impression that celebrities drank more than they really did. Young people were also critical of celebrities who were depicted drinking to intoxication, and it was these celebrities that young people tended to dislike. Images of casual drinking by celebrities were regarded as unproblematic, suggesting that drinking must be seen to be extreme and excessive to be labelled problematic.

Alcohol on television

Young people believed that alcohol use was included in TV programmes in order to reflect real life. However, they also felt that drinking provided a way for TV programmes to exaggerate and dramatise characters and situations. Soap operas were highlighted as programmes that regularly depicted alcohol use. Young people felt that the more subtle negative effects of alcohol use were rarely depicted on TV, and suggested that less attention should be given to extreme effects such as violence. For example, everyday effects such as hangovers were regarded as important aspects of drinking that TV often omitted.

Drinking by young people was felt to be rarely shown on television. When young people's drinking was shown on television, it was felt that TV tended to portray it as excessive, stigmatising all young people as binge drinkers. Young people felt that these portrayals did not realistically reflect the drinking experiences of all young people.

Alcohol, gender and the media

Young people felt that images of intoxicated celebrities in both magazines and the tabloid press tended to predominantly involve females. Some young people discussed drinking by female celebrities negatively and in ways which suggested that they were viewed as transgressing stereotypical gender-appropriate behaviour. For example, drinking within the public sphere was seen as inappropriate in relation to their roles as mothers. However, it was also argued that these images reflected unequal attitudes towards men's and women's drinking in general.

Young people also believed that in real-life drinking situations men felt pressured to drink alcohol, and that the portrayal of alcohol as a key element of masculine identity in men's magazines may add to this pressure. Some participants were critical of the way that men's magazines tended to portray women who were drinking as sexual; they viewed such messages as problematic in that they suggested that women were more willing to have sex with men when intoxicated.

Perceived media influence

Most young people felt that media portrayals of alcohol and the reporting of celebrity drinking might influence young people's attitudes and behaviour (i.e. they may encourage or prevent young people from drinking alcohol). A 'third-person effect' was found, with participants deeming younger people (i.e. those younger than themselves) and 'others' (irrespective of age) as being more susceptible to media influence than themselves. Young people also felt that the media and celebrities were less influential than other factors that influence young people's initiation into alcohol use; peer pressure and parents were highlighted as being the most influential factors, with parents seen as being the main source of information on alcohol. Young people did regard the media as having a role to play in providing alcohol information to young people, but the media was viewed as essentially having an entertainment function.

Alcohol and sports sponsorship in the media

Young people reported that, in general, they did not pay attention to alcohol sponsorship, and did not associate brand labels on football shirts with alcohol. However, alcohol brands' sponsorship of football was regarded as reflecting a longstanding cultural association between alcohol – particularly beer consumption – and football, and as such was felt to provide a way of targeting fans with alcohol advertising. Thus, cultural association, rather than direct advertising, might be an important means by which young people are exposed to, and influenced by, alcohol marketing.

Social networking sites (SNS), alcohol advertising and online drinking culture

Alcohol adverts were a regular feature of young people's online activities, particularly on SNS. SNS also appeared to form part of young people's drinking culture, with the uploading and 'tagging' of alcohol-related images providing a way for young people to document the events of a night out, and a way of portraying particular identities.

What influence do the media and celebrities have on young people's alcohol use?

Alcohol advertising

Sixty per cent of respondents were exposed to alcohol advertisements on a daily basis; 11–12-year-olds (our youngest participants) were exposed at this level of frequency just as much as older age groups. One third of young people also reported seeing online alcohol advertisements on a daily basis. Our analysis showed though that self-reported frequency of exposure to alcohol advertising, through TV, magazines, the Internet and/or cinema, did not predict individual alcohol consumption. However, there was a small but statistically significant correlation between the age of alcohol initiation and frequency of TV advertising recall.

Alcohol use and the influence of significant others

Older respondents tended to be more likely to believe that significant others (e.g. teachers, parents, friends, celebrities) would think it was acceptable for them to drink. Apart from the views of their friends, they reported that they did not care what adults thought about their drinking. In general, respondents tended to overestimate the amount of alcohol their friends drank, and perceived celebrities to drink to a similar extent as their parents.

Young people were clear about which celebrities they did not like, and these tended to be the celebrities perceived to drink the most. Young people thought that, in general, celebrity alcohol behaviour was likely to influence the drinking behaviour of young people. Although there was a small but statistically significant association with indicators of how celebrities inspired their behaviour (e.g. whether the respondent had tried to change aspects of their personality, physical appearance, or attitudes and personal values to emulate the

celebrity; and whether the celebrity's lifestyle had ever persuaded them to pursue a particular activity (alcohol use)), (incorrect) estimates of friends' drinking and perceived acceptability of drinking by friends were much better predictors of respondents' actual drinking.

Media use itself (i.e. the number of hours spent using a particular form of media) was not an accurate predictor of alcohol consumption when the effects of other influences were controlled for. No clear pattern emerged to support a conclusion that attachment to celebrities (and, in particular, celebrities who drank alcohol) was a risk factor for personal alcohol use. However, a small number (n=28) of young people showed both high celebrity attachment and high levels of alcohol-related harm.

What are the perspectives of media professionals?

The production of alcohol-related content

Media professionals viewed alcohol-related content as a stable feature of most media. The reasons for its inclusion varied, from political or social commentary, supporting policy and generating debate (the news media), through to representing social interactions and providing dramatic impact (television) or providing alcohol-related information to young people (youth magazines). For the news media in particular, a variety of factors were regarded as important in creating newsworthy alcohol-associated content. These included the use of visual images, case studies, credible sources such as doctors or scientists, and the reporting of behaviour perceived to be negative, new and novel. Young people's and women's drinking was discussed as providing the 'shock factor' required for reports to be newsworthy. It was also suggested that the news media rarely reported positive stories about young people, and that this may help reinforce negative stereotypes.

Media influence

Although media professionals recognised that the relationship between media use, attitudes to alcohol, and alcohol consumption was highly complex, the majority of participants believed that the media, including media depictions of celebrity drinking, might play a role in influencing attitudes to alcohol and alcohol use. This influence was seen as working in two ways: firstly, the repetition of alcohol-related content was felt to potentially reinforce alcohol use as a cultural 'norm'; secondly, it was suggested that the media may deter young people from drinking by reporting alcohol use negatively.

The media's role in providing alcohol advice and information to young people

News media journalists did not feel that providing alcohol-related advice and information was within their remit. Some participants did suggest that the news media could contribute to health promotion by reporting the views of certain interest groups/campaigns, or by advocating the public health perspective. Providing realistic representations of alcohol use on TV was felt to be difficult within an industry that primarily aims to entertain. Participants asserted that providing educative information on alcohol with the aim of health promotion would never be the main aim of TV and that entertainment would always be prioritised. However, youth-targeted media (e.g. youth magazines and youth soaps) were viewed as having a responsibility to convey educational messages to audiences and raise awareness about issues such as alcohol use.

Conclusions and implications of the research

Alcohol and drinking were common features in media consumed by young people. Young people were sophisticated media consumers and had good insight into how particular representations of alcohol were constructed. Subsequently, celebrities, who are often blamed for providing 'bad examples' of behaviour to young people, appear to have less of an impact on behaviour than peers. Indeed, subtle and selective representations of alcohol use and its consequences, or the transmission of simplistic messages about the effects of alcohol, might be an important yet hitherto under-researched issue. Young people were exposed to these types of alcohol representations more frequently than they were to direct advertising. Although this study was not intended to be an in-depth analysis of alcohol marketing, it was clear that young people were frequently exposed to alcohol adverts through their media use.

A lack of official educative information on alcohol use within media consumed by young people suggests that the mass media is not currently being used to a great extent in the promotion of alcohol-related health messages. Teen magazines did feature alcohol-related advice and SNS were being used by alcohol campaigns in the promotion of 'sensible drinking' messages. However, such content was relatively scarce compared to other pro-normative and advertising messages. Overall, health-related drinking messages were deemed not to be newsworthy or of entertainment value by both young people and media professionals.

The research identifies a number of considerations for policy and practice:

- Media in all its forms is just one of many influences upon young people's drinking behaviour. Adopting alcohol policies solely based on media regulation is unlikely to completely prevent alcohol use and related harm.
- There are limits to the extent to which current alcohol advertising regulations can prevent underage people from being exposed to alcohol advertising.
- Online alcohol advertising and representations of alcohol in user-generated online content pose particular challenges to policy-makers and the alcohol industry.
- Young people are active media consumers and often reject and critique simplistic messages about harm caused by alcohol and normative images of celebrity intoxication. Teaching and building upon existing critical media literacy skills in primary and secondary schools will therefore support young people in thinking critically about media representations of alcohol.
- The media can have an important role in health promotion, but this requires the rethinking of existing strategies. Inserting public health messages into entertainment media is also unlikely to be effective while they are countered by predominantly pro-normalisation messages and alcohol advertising.
- Discussion is required regarding the way in which the media respond to, and depict, alcohol use. To this end, it is important that there is discussion between media producers, health and social care professionals, regulators, the alcohol industry and young people, to establish whether it is feasible and acceptable to change the nature of alcohol content in media, and whether there is common ground to develop new and innovative media-based alcohol campaigns.

Introduction

While alcohol-related health and social problems among young people are increasing internationally, both consumption and associated harms are particularly high in the UK (Hibell, *et al.*, 2009). There has been increased concern regarding alcohol consumption in recent years, with the drinking behaviour of young people in particular becoming a key public health and policy priority (e.g. Department of Health, 2007; Department for Children, Schools and Families, *et al.*, 2008; Home Office Government 2010). Although the proportion of young people drinking seems to be decreasing, those who do drink appear to be consuming more (Fuller, 2009; Hibell, *et al.*, 2009; Smith and Foxcroft, 2009a). The possible reasons for this are multi-faceted, and involve a complex mix of socio-cultural, economic and biological determinants. For example, young people acquire knowledge, attitudes, cognitive expectations and intentions to drink partly through the process of socialisation, in which multiple factors such as the family, peers, school, advertising, cultural context and the media play an influential role in shaping understanding of what is normal and acceptable drinking behaviour (Brody, *et al.*, 2000; Yanovitzky and Stryker, 2001; Perkins, 2003; Borsari and Carey, 2006; Fossos and Larimer, 2007; Spijkerman, *et al.*, 2007; Velleman, 2009; Moreira and Foxcroft, 2010).

Over the last decade, there has been speculation that particular media representations of alcohol have been an influence on changes in young people's drinking, leading to a normalisation of harmful consumption patterns. Lay commentators, the media itself and senior health professionals have also argued that depictions of celebrity lifestyle, in which alcohol and other substance use is central, not only present a bad example to young people, but may cause changes in consumption-related behaviours (House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2004; International Narcotics Control Board, 2007; Martin, 2007; Children's Society, 2008; Donnelly, 2008; Independent Advisory Group on Sexual Health and HIV, 2007; Smith, *et al.*, 2009; *The Guardian*, 2010; HollywoodLife, 2010; Scottish Government, 2010). However, there is a lack of research investigating this presumed relationship.

Media representations of alcohol

Media representations of alcohol are ubiquitous in contemporary society and are present in many forms, including the entertainment and information media. Alcohol advertisements and government health campaigns concerning alcohol also appear on TV and in the print and 'new' media (i.e. digital forms of communication, including the Internet), such as *Know Your Limits* and *Hollyoaks: The Morning After the Night Before* (Bennett, *et al.*, 1991; Department of Health, 2007; E4, 2009; Atkinson, *et al.*, 2010). Research examining the nature and effects of media portrayals has tended to focus on alcohol advertising displayed within films, television, magazines, newspapers and the Internet (Aitken, *et al.*, 1988; Lipsitz, *et al.*, 1993; Grube and Wallack, 1994; Unger, *et al.*, 2003; Garfield, *et al.*, 2003; Jernigan, *et al.*, 2004; Chen *et al.*, 2005; Ellickson, *et al.*, 2005; CAMY, 2007; Dal Cin, *et al.*, 2008; Anderson *et al.*, 2009; Science Group of the European Alcohol and Health Forum, 2009; Smith and Foxcroft, 2009b; Brooks, 2010; EUCAM, 2010; Gordon, *et al.*, 2010a, 2010b).

Other research has examined non-advertising images of alcohol portrayed in film (Dal Cin, *et al.*, 2008; Engels, *et al.*, 2009), television (Smith, *et al.*, 1988, Wallack, *et al.*, 1990; Pendleton, *et al.*, 1991; Furham, *et al.*, 1997; Hansen, 2003; Blair, *et al.*, 2005; Cumberbatch and Gauntlett, 2005; Van den Bulck, *et al.*, 2009; Van Hoof, *et al.*, 2009), music lyrics/radio (Robinson, *et al.*, 1998; Roberts, *et al.*, 1999; Wingood, *et al.*, 2003; Van den Bulck and Beullens, 2005; Daykin, *et al.*, 2009), magazines (Anttila and Kuussaari, 2005; DEPI, 2005; Lyons, *et al.*, 2006) and the news media (Lemmens, *et al.*, 1999; Myhre, *et al.*, 2002; Torronen, 2003; Day, *et al.*, 2004; Hansen and Gunter, 2007; Jackson and Tinkler, 2007; Smith, *et al.*, 2009; Nicholls, 2009, 2010).

An emerging body of research has also examined the extent and nature of alcohol-related content in new media consumed by young people. For example, research has examined the use of social networking sites (SNS) in alcohol advertising (Brooks, 2010; EUCAM, 2010; Hastings, *et al.*, 2010) and the display of alcohol-related behaviour online (Moreno *et al.*, 2009a, 2009b; Nicholls, 2009; Griffiths and Caswell, 2010).

Media influence

The media is of great importance in the lives of young people, who have high levels of access to and usage of a variety of media devices (Miles, 2000; Drotner and Livingstone, 2008; Ofcom, 2009, 2010). Through their media use, young people are exposed to a range of information on alcohol which may influence their alcohol-related attitudes and behaviour. Alcohol use by young people is closely related to the volume of marketing consumed, and representations of use in specially edited films and TV programmes have been shown to increase contemporaneous drinking (Rychtarik, *et al.*, 1983; Kotch, *et al.*, 1986; Aitken, *et al.*, 1988; Robinson *et al.*, 1998; Grube and Waiters, 2005; Sargent, *et al.*, 2006; Synder, *et al.*, 2006; Anderson, *et al.*, 2009; British Medical Association, 2009; Engels, *et al.*, 2009; Harewinkel and Sargent, 2009; Science Group of the European Alcohol and Health Forum, 2009; Smith and Foxcroft, 2009b; Van Hoof, *et al.*, 2009; Gordon, *et al.*, 2010a, 2010b). Although non-advertising media may not directly change behaviour, by offering particular representations of alcohol use and associated lifestyles the media plays an important (albeit not exclusive) role in reinforcing and (re)affirming alcohol-related norms and values (Gerbner, *et al.*, 1986; Aitken, *et al.*, 1988; DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1989; Giddens, 1991; Baillie, 1996; Montonen, 1996; Perkins, 2003). However, audiences are often presented with a manufactured and selective reality of alcohol use (Baillie, 1996; Roberts, *et al.*, 1999; Hansen, 2003; Perkins, 2003). For example, research shows that alcohol is the most depicted beverage and substance on British entertainment television but is mostly portrayed without negative effects (Cafiso, *et al.*, 1982; Hansen, 1988; Wallack, *et al.*, 1990; Pendleton, *et al.*, 1991; Hansen, 2003; Van den Bulck, *et al.*, 2009), whereas the news media tend to focus on the negative aspects of alcohol use (Nicholls, 2009, 2010). It has also been suggested that media discussions of alcohol may sometimes be used as a substitute for public consultations in forming policy (Hansen and Gunter, 2007; McCombs, 2004; Torronen, 2003; Yanovitzky and Stryker, 2001; Casswell, 1997; Montonen, 1996). The mass media may therefore contribute towards common understandings of alcohol use, while reinforcing the normative messages transmitted through advertising. The news media in particular may help set the agenda for alcohol policy, and in turn influence public understanding of alcohol-related issues.

It must be acknowledged, though, that there is conflicting evidence of a direct effect of alcohol depictions on alcohol-related beliefs and behaviour (Rychtarik, *et al.*, 1983; Kotch, *et al.*, 1986; Sobell, *et al.*, 1986; Hansen, 1988; Baillie, 1996; Robinson, *et al.*, 1998; Grube and Waiters, 2005). The relationship between alcohol-related messages transmitted by the media and young people's alcohol-related attitudes, beliefs and behaviour may be significant, yet should not be considered as straightforwardly causal. Factors such as sex, differences in cognitions, and socio-cultural influences often mediate this relationship. Early research on media effects assumed that audiences were passive in their media consumption, with effects operating like a 'hypodermic syringe' injecting audiences with information and creating uniform responses (Baillie, 1996). However, theory in this area has developed: modern understanding suggests that the media reinforces existing attitudes and that audiences are active in their media consumption, with the capacity to reject, negotiate and modify the messages they consume (Morley, 1993; Buckingham, 1993, 1997; Byrant and Zillman, 2002; McQuail, 2005). Alcohol-related attitudes, beliefs and behaviour are also acquired through an accumulation of media messages over time (Glover, 1985; Gerbner, *et al.*, 1986; Montonen, 1996; Roberts, *et al.*, 1999; Roberts and Christensen, 2000). As such, media messages do not always produce uniform effects and are interpreted differently by individuals.

Celebrity alcohol use in the media

Young people are also exposed, through the media, to images of celebrity alcohol use which may potentially influence their own attitudes and behaviour.¹ One proposed mechanism leading to acceptance of underage

drinking by young people is social learning. In its simplest form, this theory suggests that people can learn from one another in a social context through observational learning, imitation and modelling (Bandura, 1977, 1986). According to this model, learning can occur without an immediate change in behaviour, but instead affects attitudes towards particular behaviours and expectations about the consequences of that behaviour. One important social learning determinant of alcohol use behaviours is social norms. A social norms approach to alcohol consumption suggests that individuals draw on the behaviour of significant others (e.g. peers, parents, siblings, role models) as a guide to what are normal drinking practices, which then reinforces socially acceptable behaviour. However, individuals tend to overestimate the amount of alcohol consumed by significant others, and these false perceptions can have an influence on personal alcohol consumption. This influence is compounded by the belief (whether accurate or not) that significant others approve of this behaviour (Perkins and Berkowitz, 1986; Perkins and Wechsler, 1996; Yanovitzky and Stryker, 2001; Perkins, 2003; Berkowitz, 2005).

Despite young people's high degree of exposure to celebrity culture, little is known about how they interpret it, particularly in relation to whether celebrities are viewed as significant others, thus influencing alcohol consumption (Turner, 2004; Evans and Hesmondhalgh, 2005; Young, 2007). To the best of our knowledge and despite much speculation about celebrity influence, there is an absence of research examining celebrity culture's ability to influence audiences with regards to health-related behaviour such as alcohol use. The influence of celebrity alcohol use on young people's drinking is frequently suggested by academics, policy-makers and the media itself. However, it is unlikely that the influential role of celebrity is as simple or deterministic as is commonly reported. Suggesting that images of celebrity drinking are causally linked to young people's alcohol use assumes the traditional 'hypodermic syringe' approach to media effects. Factors such as popularity, time investment and level of attachment to a celebrity will affect the degree of influence (Greene and Adams-Price, 1990; Boone and Lomore, 2001; Maltby, *et al.*, 2002, 2004; Giles and Maltby, 2004), as well as the interplay of other influential factors, such as family and peers, in young people's alcohol use.

Purpose of the study

Many factors are known to influence young people's alcohol-related beliefs and behaviour. This research explores the role of the media in this relationship. For the purpose of this study, the word 'media' is used to describe entertainment and digital media including television, magazines and social networking sites (SNS). When discussing 'alcohol depictions' this report is referring to media representations of both alcohol in general and its consumption (i.e. drinking). Alcohol advertisements appearing within these media sources were also examined, although this report does not focus on alcohol marketing per se. Young people are defined as individuals aged 11–18 years, an age range in which young people begin to experiment and initiate alcohol use (Hibell, *et al.*, 2009; Fuller, 2009).

While a significant body of research on the media and alcohol has accumulated in recent years, there still exist important gaps, particularly in terms of how alcohol and its use are depicted in media specifically consumed by young people. Few studies have examined alcohol images on the Internet, although research findings in this area are slowly accumulating. There is also a lack of qualitative research exploring young people's attitudes towards media portrayals of alcohol, and a lack of research on the production process involved in the creation of alcohol-related content. Furthermore, little is known about how young people interpret celebrity alcohol culture and the possible influence of celebrities on young people's attitudes to alcohol and their alcohol consumption. This study therefore aimed to examine how alcohol was represented in a number of media sources consumed by young people aged 11–18. Young people's own interpretations and attitudes towards the dominant ways in which the media represent alcohol were also explored. The research further examined how young people's identification with prominent individuals in the media (i.e. celebrities) may influence alcohol consumption. Consideration was also given to the views of professionals working in the media industries on the production of alcohol content, the influence of the media on young people's alcohol use and the possible role of the media in health promotion regarding alcohol.

The research objectives were to:

- determine what media sources young people aged 11–18 regularly consume;
- identify the extent to which young people are exposed to representations of alcohol through their media use, and the nature of these representations;
- examine the extent and nature of celebrity alcohol use depictions in media consumed by young people;
- explore young people’s attitudes towards, and interpretations of, alcohol-related content they are exposed to through their media use;
- explore how young people define ‘celebrity’ in relation to alcohol use and intoxication;
- examine the nature of the relationship between young people’s media use, attachment to celebrities and their alcohol use;
- gain insight into the opinions of media professionals on how and why alcohol is represented in particular ways in the media;
- establish the views of media professionals on the potential influence of media representations of alcohol on young consumers;
- explore the views of media professionals on the potential role of the media in disseminating alcohol-related advice and information to young people.

Methodology

To achieve the research objectives, a mixed-method approach was used, adopting both qualitative and quantitative methods (see [Appendix I](#) for a full description of the methodological approach). Three stages of sequential data collection were conducted, with each stage informing the next. The first stage of the project involved an examination of alcohol depictions in media consumed by young people aged 11–18 ([Chapter 1](#)). A qualitative and quantitative content analysis was conducted to examine the different ways alcohol was portrayed in TV programmes, magazines and SNS. This informed the second stage of data collection, which involved research with young people themselves. To explore how young people interpret and make sense of media depictions of alcohol, focus groups were conducted with school and college pupils ([Chapter 2](#)). Group discussions were used to provide a variety of views on the same subject and to gain insight into young people’s shared meanings and understandings of the ways in which alcohol is portrayed in the media. A representative selection of media content (e.g. magazine articles, TV programme clips) depicting alcohol was used in the focus groups in order to instigate conversation and gain an understanding of young people’s interpretations. Alongside the qualitative research, a survey questionnaire was conducted with young people to gain quantitative evidence of the relationship between a number of factors, including media use, attachment to celebrities and alcohol consumption ([Chapter 3](#)). In the final stage of the research, interviews were conducted with professionals working within a range of media industries (e.g. the news media and TV industry) to provide insight into the production of alcohol-related content. This stage of the research also explored media professionals’ perspectives on earlier research findings (e.g. the influence of media depictions of alcohol on young people) and the potential role of the media in health promotion regarding alcohol ([Chapter 4](#)). Finally, the results of each stage are synthesised and the implications of the research are considered ([Chapter 5](#)).

1 How is alcohol portrayed in media consumed by young people?

This chapter provides an overview of the differing ways in which alcohol was portrayed in media consumed by young people aged 11–18.² It does so by presenting the findings of a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of alcohol depictions in TV programmes, magazines and social networking sites (SNS) (see [Appendix I](#) for an overview of the methodological approach adopted). This chapter provides insight into the extent and nature of alcohol representations that young people are exposed to through their media use, and highlights how young people consume not only media targeted at their own age group, but also media aimed at the adult market.

Magazine representations of alcohol

Alcohol and drinking were common features in magazines (n=23) read by young people. There were 1,699 discrete pieces of text across the magazines (e.g. articles, interviews), of which 8.1% (n=138) contained at least one reference to alcohol. Compared to the portrayal of other substances, alcohol was depicted to a greater extent, with illegal drugs being depicted in 1.7% (n=29) and cigarettes 0.5% (n=8) of articles. Of the 2,472 magazine pages analysed, 15.4% (n=381) contained alcohol-related references. A total of 397 individual alcohol-related references were counted. These included both those referring to an individual's drinking (51.1%, n=203) and those related to alcohol use in general, such as alcohol advertising and sponsorship of sport (48.9%, n=194). There was an almost equal number of alcohol-related references in male- (52.1%, n=207) and female- (47.9%, n=190) targeted magazines. However, there were few references to alcohol in youth-targeted publications (5.5%, n=22). When alcohol did feature in magazines targeted at young people, this included alcohol sponsorship on football strips, and substance use advice hotlines and problem pages. There was a relative absence of references to underage drinking (n=1) and official and educative information (i.e. government campaigns) on alcohol in the sample (n=7).

Alcohol use was portrayed as a frequent and natural part of social interaction. For example, drinking occurred most often in groups (65%, n=132) and reasons for drinking were mostly pro-social (e.g. party, celebration) (see [Table 14](#) in Appendix II). Effects and consequences of drinking were portrayed in 30.5% of the alcohol-related references (n=116); the most common effect portrayed was intoxication (34.5%), followed by violence/aggression (12.9%) and alcohol dependence (8.6%) (see [Table 15](#) in Appendix II). Little reference was made to responses to alcohol use and related harms. Responses were referred to on five occasions and involved criminal justice intervention (n=4) and alcohol treatment (n=1). Magazines also offered and predicted possible remedies or solutions to alcohol use (n=11); for example, suggesting a celebrity required rehabilitation for their alcohol use.

Celebrity alcohol use

Celebrity drinking was the most predominant theme in the magazines' portrayal of alcohol and drinking, and appeared in 65.2% (n=90) of the articles and 72.9% (n=148) of drinking references. Celebrity drinking references tended to involve women (83.8%) and were more likely to feature in female-targeted publications. Reflecting this finding, drinking was most often located at a celebrity party (34.1%, n=63) (see [Table 1](#) in this chapter). A variety of categories of celebrities (n=150) were depicted with reference to alcohol/drinking, most often actors/actresses (25.3%) and singers/musicians/bands (21.3%) (see [Table 2](#) in this chapter).

Table 1: Location of drinking depicted in magazines read by young people

Drinking setting	n	%
Celebrity party	63	34.1
Night-time environment (e.g. bar, nightclub)	62	33.5
Pub	32	17.3
Restaurant	14	7.6
Art gallery	7	3.8
Home	5	2.7
Outside/street	2	1.1
Total	185	100.1

Table 2: Categories of celebrities portrayed drinking in magazines read by young people

Category of celebrity	n	%
Actor/actress	38	25.3
Singer/musician/band	32	21.3
General celebrity (e.g. WAG ³ , reality TV star, celebrity chef)	29	19.3
TV presenter	15	10.0
Model	15	10.0
Writer, journalist, fashion designer, artist, food critic	9	6.0
Sports person (e.g. footballer, rugby player, boxer)	8	5.3
Comedian	4	2.7
Total	150	99.9

Alcohol use was portrayed as both a normal and glamorous aspect of celebrity events and day-to-day activities. For example, magazines printed photographs of celebrities posing while holding drinks (n=23), and quotes from celebrities who casually discussed their own drinking (n=31). Drinking was also portrayed as a key feature of music culture and band lifestyles in gig and band reviews in *NME* (n=5). A small number of articles referred to celebrities not drinking alcohol; these tended to involve females. Reasons for not drinking included pregnancy, work/professionalism and a desire to live a healthier lifestyle (n=11).

Alcohol use was also portrayed as a problematic activity for a small minority of celebrities (n=16). Such articles portrayed drinking in a negative manner, with disapproval and concern, and took a judgemental tone towards consumption. These articles tended to involve females. Female celebrities reported as having problems with alcohol were discussed in the context of mental health, relationship strains and weight issues. A language of vulnerability and control was also used when discussing female celebrity alcohol use. For example, their drinking was discussed as having 'spun out of control', and they were described as 'fragile' and 'erratic', with magazines asking and predicting how such individuals could be 'saved' (*Closer, Heat, OK!*). However, there appeared to be contradictions between the magazines' depictions of celebrity drinking and celebrities' own accounts, with some celebrities denying their alcohol use and related problems (*OK!*).

The gendering of alcohol depictions

Specific alcoholic drinks appeared to be invested with symbolic meaning, in that some were portrayed as more masculine or feminine than others. There were clear differences in the types of drinks women and men were portrayed as drinking. The choice of alcoholic beverage depicted also differed between male- and female-targeted publications. Males were quite clearly constructed as beer drinkers in male magazines, yet depicted as drinking similar drinks to women in female publications. Beer was the most frequently depicted distinguishable alcoholic beverage in men's magazines (72%, n=149) and champagne in female-targeted magazines (31.1%, n=59). In terms of the actual consumption of specific beverages (n=136), women were most often portrayed as drinking wine/champagne (69.4% n=59) and men beer (39.1%, n=27). Both women

and men were therefore portrayed in female-targeted magazines as having a variety of alcoholic beverages to choose from, yet in men's magazines the consumption of beer was portrayed as the only drinking practice available to men. As such, men's magazines appeared to be presenting beer consumption as a normal and expected feature of masculine culture and lifestyle. This message was further transmitted through associations between the consumption of beer and other popular masculine activities such as football fandom and spectatorship, pub culture and male bonding. In contrast, female-targeted magazines frequently presented champagne and cocktails as an aspect of glamorous lifestyles.

In female-targeted magazines, drinking was associated with health, diet and beauty, most often with reference to celebrities (11.6% of articles, n=16). For example, regular articles assessed celebrity health and diet via questions relating to their alcohol consumption, in which celebrities were keen to express that they rarely drank and justified this in relation to healthy lifestyle messages. Women's drinking was also framed as interfering with the expectation that women should conform to feminine ideals of beauty and diet. Celebrity weight gain and loss were referred to in the context of drinking, with magazines defining them as either too fat or too thin as a product of their alcohol consumption. Moreover, readers were provided with diet tips and encouraged to drink less alcohol in order to lose weight and achieve celebrity-like bodies. Alcohol-related lifestyles were also related to premature ageing and negative effects on female facial appearance. With the exception of a reference to the calorie content of alcohol and a female musician abstaining from drinking (*Zoo*, *NME*), references to health were exclusively a feature of female-targeted publications. The only reference to drinking little in the men's magazines provided male celebrities marks out of ten on a 'scale of masculinity' in the *FHM* 'Bloke test', with celebrities reporting stories of intoxication rated as being more of a 'bloke' than those drinking little.

Alcohol was presented as a key aspect of masculine identity in men's magazines (10.2% of the articles analysed, n=14). Moreover, the pub was portrayed as a male space where masculine rituals and stereotypes are enacted. For example, magazines present the pub as a site for male bonding, sports fandom and an environment in which to impress male friends. Such male pub culture was expressed through articles offering items of knowledge for males to use in conversation when drinking in single-sex groups. For example, articles providing 'Pub Ammo' (*Nuts*) and 'Pub Facts' (*Zoo*) appeared as regular features and provided information to 'impress friends without having to go to the bar' (*Zoo*). While female-targeted magazines depicted mixed-group drinking (i.e. women drinking with men) and referred to women within the pub context, men's magazines portrayed drinking as a single-sex activity (i.e. men drinking with men). Women were thus excluded from the pub drinking context.

While men were portrayed as drinking in similar ways to women in female-targeted magazines, women's drinking was clearly differentiated from men's in male-targeted publications (18.8% of articles, n=26). In men's magazines, female drinking was portrayed in relation to sexual facilitation, and alcohol was framed as a tool in social interaction with the opposite sex. For example, glamour models⁴ expressed how buying them a drink would be a way to impress them and instigate conversation in the drinking environment. Alcohol was also framed as an integral component of sexual encounters within readers' letters, and glamour models' sexual experiences and 'confessions' were reported in relation to alcohol use (e.g. 'Real girls confess', *Zoo*). Alcohol was also framed within a sexual context more explicitly, with alcoholic drinks being used as props in naked photo shoots.

In men's magazines, female drinking and intoxication were also discussed in relation to vulnerability and emotion, which helped to differentiate women's drinking from men's. For example, *FHM* labelled 'Asking a drunk woman why they are crying' as one of the '15 things that always end badly'. Women's alcohol-related behaviour on nights out was discussed in a problematic manner, and, through a discourse on the 'ladette', their behaviour on nights out was framed as transgressing from feminine ideals (e.g. behaving in a masculine manner). For example, *Zoo* magazine presented 'need-to-know nuggets about ... lairy scouse ladettes', which discussed 'drunken' women as 'foul-mouthed' and 'violent', and drew on official statistics to label women from Liverpool as being the 'worst-behaved girls'. Women drinkers were therefore portrayed as unfeminine, vulnerable and emotional, and were excluded from participating in drinking unless engaging in sexual activity when drunk.

Direct and indirect alcohol advertising

The high prevalence of alcohol-related content within the magazines appeared to provide sympathetic environments for the advertising of alcohol. Direct (n=6) and indirect alcohol advertising (n=34) were a common feature of the magazines and appeared in 17.4% of the articles analysed. Indirect alcohol advertisements depicted alcohol use in the promotion of non-alcoholic consumer items such as computer games, and in the sponsorship of sports. These advertisements were solely a feature of magazines targeted at an adult market and, as such, absent from teen magazines. However, the alcohol industry's sponsorship of football strips was present in magazines targeted at young males (e.g. Carlsberg beer, n=14).

Female-targeted magazines featured direct advertisements for alcohol (wine) (n=6). The nature of alcohol advertisements in female-targeted magazines included supermarket price cuts and alcohol being framed in the context of socialising with friends. There was no direct advertising of alcohol in male-targeted magazines. However, alcohol was advertised indirectly via sports sponsorship (e.g. *Nuts* magazine's football awards) and images of alcohol in the promotion of music festivals and non-alcoholic commodities (e.g. the *Guitar Hero* video game). Although links to the alcohol industry's alcohol advice website Drinkaware.co.uk were displayed within direct adverts and alongside some sports sponsorship (e.g. *Nuts* magazine's football awards), such references must be interpreted in the wider context of the magazines, where drinking was most often presented as a normal and desirable social activity.

Alcohol representations in TV programmes viewed by young people

The findings presented are from an analysis of alcohol depictions in the top ten television programmes viewed by young people aged 11–18 (see [Appendix I](#) for the list of programmes and a description of the methods employed). Programmes were analysed over a one-week period in April 2009, generating 22 hours of TV footage. The TV programme episodes analysed (n=41) were broadcasted on BBC1, ITV, Channel 4 and E4 channels, between 6pm and 11pm. Thus, young people were viewing TV programmes both pre- and post-watershed (9pm). During this period, no programmes specifically about alcohol or related issues such as crime and disorder were broadcast. The programmes were analysed for any visual references to alcohol such as unattended drinks, beer pumps, spirit bottles, alcohol advertising on football shirts, and implied and active drinking references. Through qualitative analysis, the nature of those portrayals was examined.

Frequency of alcohol-related references

The prominence of alcohol in TV programmes viewed by young people is highlighted by the finding that alcohol featured in all the programmes analysed. Of the coded TV scenes (n=1,236), 23.2% (n=287) contained at least one reference to alcohol (n= 318). Alcohol was depicted slightly more often than non-alcoholic beverages and other substances. Of the total scenes, 22.5% contained references to non-alcoholic drinks, 4.9% (n=60) to illicit drugs and 3.1% (n=38) to smoking/cigarettes. Although alcohol featured prominently in all genres, soap operas contained the largest proportion of scenes depicting alcohol (see [Table 16](#) in Appendix II).

Drinking acts were the most prominent category of alcohol reference depicted, with 70.8% (n=804) of references showing either implied or active drinking. Visual references to alcohol (e.g. alcohol sponsorship of sports, beer pumps) accounted for 29.2% (n=331) of the references (see [Table 17](#) in Appendix II). Despite a lower number of visual references to alcohol than drinking acts, such subtle images of alcohol are significant as they reflect the importance of drinking establishments as a key setting within TV programmes and reinforce an association between alcohol and sport. Verbal references to alcohol were made in 9% (n=102) of depictions and tended to include subtle references such as requests to purchase alcohol rather than discussion of alcohol use by characters.

The normalisation of alcohol use

Alcohol use was predominantly portrayed as a key aspect of social interaction, with 78.5% of drinking acts portraying group drinking. Drinking as a social activity is also reflected in the finding that alcohol use most often

occurred in public drinking environments (e.g. pub, bar/club) (see [Table 18](#) in Appendix II). Reasons for drinking (N=1,188) were mostly pro-social and included drinking for general socialising (52%) and celebration (18.3%) (see [Table 19](#) in Appendix II). The centrality of celebrating and partying within the one-week sample was significant as it brought with it the consumption of alcohol. Alcohol was used to symbolise celebration in a number of special occasions, including traditional celebrations such as engagements (*Coronation Street*), birthdays (*EastEnders*) and anniversaries (*Hollyoaks*), as well as more specific events such as a character's release from jail (*Shameless*). Alcohol use also featured within TV narrative as a component of romance, dating and sexual facilitation. Drinking in couples and as part of love and romance tended to involve wine and champagne, which through qualitative analysis was revealed as a way of setting a romantic scene (e.g. *Hollyoaks*, *Friends*). Alcohol use was also represented as a source of 'Dutch courage' (i.e. as a social facilitator, for self-confidence) most often in relation to romantic and sexual encounters (e.g. *Friends*, *The Simpsons*).

Drinking was largely portrayed as a normal part of the lives and interactions of characters. The high number of characters drinking alcohol (n=208) reflects this normalisation. Despite the high prevalence of alcohol references in the sample, alcohol rarely featured in the storyline foreground or as a narrative in itself.⁵ As previous research in this area has suggested, alcohol and drinking were thus 'naturalised' within TV programmes, in that drinking was portrayed as a normal and most often unproblematic social activity (Hansen, 2003). This normalisation is reinforced by numerous visual cues to alcohol, such as alcohol appearing as a background prop, and by a relative absence of verbal references to characters not drinking alcohol in the sample. These normalised depictions of alcohol appeared to be used as a practical plot device (e.g. *EastEnders*, *Coronation Street*, *Emmerdale*, *Hollyoaks*, *The Bill*, *Shameless*). For example, drinking was used as a way of bringing characters together, either in the local community pub or within the home, to instigate interaction and conversation. The purchase of alcohol was also used as a mechanism in the movement or pause of a scene, and the drinking establishment was used as a means of introducing new characters to the programme.

Alcohol-related problems and consequences

The consequences/effects of drinking were shown in 10.2% (n=82) of the drinking acts and included both positive (e.g. laughing) and negative effects (e.g. alcohol dependence) (see [Table 20](#) in Appendix II). The comedy genre (52.3%, n=44) most often portrayed effects/consequences of alcohol use, yet this appeared to be for comedic effect. Alcohol use was portrayed as a way of forgetting one's troubles in times of crisis, and was used as a coping response to a number of troubles including relationship difficulties and work-related worries (e.g. *EastEnders*, *Skins*, *Shameless*). The consumption of specific alcoholic drinks was also used to symbolise a change in a character's mood (e.g. spirit use to express sudden stress and worry).

Alcohol dependence featured within particular programmes (e.g. *EastEnders*, *Coronation Street* and *Shameless*) and was the only form in which alcohol featured as a storyline narrative itself. Problematic alcohol use also tended to depict solitary drinking and spirit consumption. Alcohol dependence was framed in a negative light and as leading to negative consequences such as relationship strains, family problems, social work intervention and aggression. Moreover, alcohol dependence was associated with negative stereotypes such as homelessness (*The Simpsons*), and a certain degree of labelling also occurred in the portrayal of alcohol dependence, with reference being made to characters as 'alchies' and 'addicts' (e.g. *EastEnders*, *Coronation Street*).

Television advertisements depicting alcohol

Although the marketing of alcohol was not a key focus of the research, the study aimed to establish the amount of alcohol-related advertisements⁶ appearing immediately before, during and after the TV programmes analysed over the one-week data collection period (n=41, 22 hours of footage). During the sample week, alcohol-related advertisements appeared in 30.9% of the episodes analysed (n=13). Of the 769 advertisements broadcast, 3.8% depicted alcohol (n=29). Although young people were viewing advertisements for alcohol both pre- and post-watershed (9pm), the majority were broadcast pre-watershed (n=25). Within the adverts,

alcohol was represented as a key aspect of friendship, leisure and social interaction. Humour and gender alignment were also used in a number of alcohol advertisements. Adverts for other consumer goods (e.g. home furniture) also used alcoholic drinks as a means of associating desirable lifestyles with these products. Alcohol sponsorship of football teams (i.e. on football strips) and matches (e.g. billboard advertisements) regularly appeared within sporting programmes (17.3% of references, n=55), which reflects a cultural association between sports viewing and alcohol use. Of the seven alcohol advertisements, four (WKD twice, Kronenbourg and Carlsberg) presented a reference to Drinkaware.co.uk in small text at the bottom of the TV screen at the end of the broadcast. None of the supermarket advertisements displayed responsible drinking references.

Alcohol content on SNS, video file-sharing and alcohol brand websites

The display of alcohol-related content on social networking sites (SNS) is an important area of research due to their increasing popularity and youth appeal (Ofcom, 2008; Mart and Mergendoller, 2009; Youthnet, 2010). This element of the research aimed to provide a snapshot of alcohol representations and alcohol advertisements within the most popular SNS (Facebook, Bebo, Myspace) and video file-sharing sites (YouTube) consumed by young people (see [Appendix I](#) for a description of the methods employed). We also sought to examine whether industry-led guidance was being adhered to, and explored the effectiveness of the age verification system on SNS and a number of official alcohol brand websites. The use of SNS and YouTube by official alcohol information campaigns (e.g. Drinkaware, Talk to Frank) in the promotion of responsible drinking was also examined.

Alcohol depictions on SNS

Alcohol brands were both officially (e.g. alcohol advertisements) and unofficially (e.g. user-generated content) represented on SNS. A total of 8,476 SNS pages, which referred to a number of leading alcohol brands, were retrieved (see [Table 21](#) in Appendix II). Many leading brands also had official Facebook pages, which they were able to create free of charge to promote and advertise their products. However, age verification regulations are increasingly being used on SNS to reduce the likelihood of users under the age of 18 accessing these official brand pages. Facebook, for example, requires alcohol companies to provide advertising that conforms to individual territory regulations, rather than release a global strategy (Facebook, 2010). After registering with Facebook using a fictitious age of 14, the researchers found that official alcohol brand pages were not accessible. However, only 40 (0.5%) of the SNS pages devoted to specific alcohol brands were clearly identified as official. Third parties, including young people, had created unofficial advertisements depicting product images, logos and links to official brand websites. As Facebook is based on a standardised design template, it appeared difficult to differentiate between official pages and those created by SNS users. Official pages differed slightly in that most, but not all, made reference to responsible drinking, included links to Drinkaware, and did not allow images of what might appear to be underage drinking. Unofficial pages omitted reference to responsible drinking and openly presented alcohol brands and drunkenness in a positive and celebratory manner.

Non-advertising depictions of alcohol and drinking were also prominent on SNS. The alcohol-related search terms generated a total of 8,312,281 result pages relating to alcohol (see [Table 22](#) in Appendix II). Due to the small number of search terms used (e.g. alcohol, drunk), alcohol-related content is likely to feature more frequently than the table suggests. Examining the top 120 results showed that alcohol and drinking featured on SNS in more subtle ways than in direct alcohol advertising, with user-generated pages related to alcohol consumption reflecting alcohol use as a popular leisure activity. This included fan groups created by users in celebration of drinking behaviour (e.g. 'being drunk') and interactive games relating to alcohol (n=79). For example, games allowed users to 'pass a [virtual] drink' to website friends. SNS also appeared to be an important element of young people's drinking culture in that they provided forums for young people to virtually express and discuss alcohol-related behaviour. Examples included users of SNS uploading and displaying images of themselves and others consuming alcohol (n=41).

Age verification on official alcohol brand websites

All the leading alcohol brand websites examined (N=14, see [Table 21](#) in Appendix II) used the age verification system to restrict under-18s from accessing the websites. Access was denied when attempting to enter the websites using our false identity of a 14-year-old. Some age verification pages (n=9) made reference to responsible drinking and also provided links to the industry-led alcohol information website Drinkaware.co.uk (n=6). Once access was denied, five websites automatically diverted the underage website user to the Drinkaware site. However, after accessing the websites with a declared age of 18, the user was able to subsequently access brand websites without further age verification. Most alcohol producers (n=11) were abiding by ASA regulations stating that reference to responsible drinking (e.g. Drinkaware.co.uk) should be made on the home pages of official alcohol-brand websites. The prominence of these references varied, with some websites providing the Drinkaware logo and additional information, while others depicted the Drinkaware web link in small text at the foot of the home page. Official websites were also being used to promote and link users to the brand's Facebook page.

Alcohol depictions on the video file-sharing website YouTube

The top ten most viewed YouTube video clips at two time intervals (June 2009 and June 2010) were screened for alcohol content (N=20). Of these, three video clips contained references to alcohol, including drinking on reality TV programmes, within music videos and clips of celebrity drinking. A total of 6,254 videos relating to leading alcohol brands appeared on YouTube (see [Table 23](#) in Appendix II). A brief observation to determine the nature of such clips showed that alcohol advertisements were being uploaded by YouTube users, including those banned by the Advertising Standards Agency (ASA), and these clips could be viewed by users of any age. YouTube users also presented their own remakes of official alcohol advertisements (e.g. WKD robot advert, 'Do the Lambrini'). Videos also depicted individuals drinking specific alcohol brands (e.g. WKD) and participating in drinking games (e.g. After Shock, Jägermeister). Alcohol brands were also displayed within videos through the sponsorship and branding of sports and music events (e.g. Carling, Jägermeister and WKD).

The use of SNS and YouTube for the display of official alcohol information

Official alcohol information campaigns such as Drinkaware and Talk to Frank (which are UK government funded) had a SNS and YouTube presence. Both campaigns have created SNS pages providing alcohol advice and information and YouTube channels for the display of video campaigns to promote the idea of 'responsible' drinking. However, SNS and YouTube also provide consumers with an opportunity to comment on and challenge official alcohol messages through the uploading of video 'spoofs'⁷, mimicking official campaigns. SNS users were also posting humorous comments on the official campaign SNS pages. Overall, responsible drinking information was less prominent compared with the amount of amateur and unofficial alcohol content promoting alcohol use.

Box 1: Key findings from the content analysis

- Alcohol was the most prominent substance and beverage portrayed in media consumed by young people, and it featured in all the sources analysed.
- Young people were viewing not only alcohol depictions in entertainment media targeted at a youth audience, but also those aimed at the adult market and those that were aired after the TV watershed (9pm).

- Young people were viewing alcohol advertisements both before and after the TV watershed. Alcohol advertising in magazines and TV commercial breaks not only directly advertised alcoholic beverages, but depicted alcohol in the promotion of non-alcoholic consumer items and the sponsorship of leisure activities such as football and music festivals.
- Magazines targeted at a youth audience rarely depicted alcohol-related content. When alcohol was portrayed in youth-targeted magazines, it included alcohol sponsorship on football strips and substance use advice hotlines/problem pages. Young people (underage drinkers) were rarely shown drinking in magazines and TV programmes.
- Alcohol was predominantly presented as a normalised social activity. Reasons for alcohol use were mostly pro-social, although a minority reflected alcohol dependence and personal crisis management. When effects of alcohol were shown, they tended to focus on intoxication (i.e. drunkenness) and extreme effects such as violence and alcohol dependence.
- Celebrity alcohol use, particularly alcohol use by female celebrities, was frequently depicted in female-targeted magazines. Alcohol use was portrayed as both a normal and glamorous aspect of celebrity events and day-to-day activities, and as a problematic activity for a small minority of celebrities. Alcohol representations in magazines were highly gendered in nature. Specific alcoholic drinks were portrayed as being more masculine or feminine than others. In female-targeted magazines, drinking was portrayed as glamorous in the context of celebrity, yet at the same time the consumption of alcohol was depicted as harmful to stereotypical feminine ideals such as beauty, appearance and women's role as mothers. In men's magazines, female drinkers were portrayed as unfeminine, vulnerable and emotional, and as individuals engaging in sexual activity when drunk. In men's magazines, the consumption of alcohol, particularly beer within the pub context, was presented as a key aspect of masculine identity.
- Alcohol brands were both officially and unofficially represented on SNS. Users of SNS were indirectly marketing alcohol products on behalf of the alcohol industry by creating unofficial advertisements depicting product images, logos and links to the brands' official websites. Young people's drinking culture also appears to be represented online, with young people uploading drinking-related photographs and videos to SNS such as Facebook.

2 How do young people interpret media representations of alcohol?

This chapter presents young people's (N=114) perspectives on media representations of alcohol and drinking. It provides an account of young people's understanding of celebrity culture and their attitudes towards media reporting of celebrity alcohol use. Young people's attitudes towards media representations of alcohol that are highly gendered in nature (e.g. alcohol use as a symbol of femininity and masculinity; alcohol and female sexuality) are also discussed, as are their views on the sponsorship of sport (e.g. football) by the alcohol industry and the related images that frequently feature in the media (e.g. magazines and TV). The chapter also presents young people's opinions on the depiction of alcohol use on TV and how images of alcohol feature as part of their online activities (e.g. their experiences of online alcohol advertising). The chapter concludes by discussing young people's preferred sources of alcohol information and their views on the potential role of the media in disseminating alcohol-related advice and information to young people. Details on the study sample (e.g. demographics, ages corresponding with school years, and alcohol use) are provided in [Appendix I](#).

Celebrity culture and alcohol use

Defining celebrity

Participants differentiated between two types of celebrity. The first type included those believed to have achieved success through talent and hard work; characteristics required to be labelled a celebrity in this category included being 'unique' and 'talented'. It was this category of celebrity that young people liked and discussed positively.

I class someone famous as having a very unique talent; they've got to have something that's different and like people who make their own ways up, and not have to have other people like doing it for them ...

Female, Year 12

The concept of celebrity was regarded as ambiguous, however, in that many famous individuals were not necessarily regarded as having achieved characteristics worthy of being 'celebrated'. This included individuals viewed as lacking talent or uniqueness, such as those known for their participation in reality TV⁸. Individuals known for their inherited wealth or those 'born famous' were also discussed as being less worthy of their celebrity status. Although these celebrities were classed as being 'famous for being famous', young people still labelled them as 'celebrities', suggesting that young people's definition of celebrity is broad and inclusive. Participants talked negatively about this category of celebrities and regarded them as maintaining fame and income through selling access to their private lives, including alcohol-related behaviour.

Well, Kerry [Katona, former singer and reality TV star] was on drugs and she drinks a lot. But then she got better and went back on them again. That's what she does in her personal life, but then that's what we all know her for now really. She'll get money for exposing it ...

Female, Year 9

Favourite and unpopular celebrities

Most young people were willing to name their favourite celebrity, although males were more reluctant to do so. A variety of famous individuals was named, including footballers (most often cited by males), musicians, actors and models. Young people provided a number of reasons for liking their favourite celebrity, including the celebrity's talent, character traits such as being a 'nice person' (Female, Year 9) and attractiveness (e.g. 'They're just gorgeous', 'She's fit', Female and Male, Year 8). Most young people did not reveal disliking their favourite celebrity in any way. However, when asked if there were any aspects of their favourite celebrity's lifestyle they did not like, 'drinking' and 'partying' were mentioned by participants. As in the survey data (see [Chapter 3](#)), specific celebrities were unpopular among young people, including those who had received negative media reporting in relation to their alcohol and drug use (e.g. Katie Price, Amy Winehouse). A number of reasons for not liking particular celebrities were discussed, including being wealthy, relationship history, (perceived) attention-seeking behaviour and alcohol and drug use.

Celebrity lifestyles, personal lives and alcohol use

Participants were shown a number of non-drinking photographs of celebrities who had been identified consuming alcohol in the magazines analysed (see [Chapter 1](#)). Young people were initially asked whether they knew who the celebrities were and then asked what they knew about their lifestyles and personal lives. Young people showed a high degree of familiarity with the celebrities and were more knowledgeable about female celebrities than male celebrities.⁹ Media stories relating to celebrities' home lives, relationships, wealth, alcohol/drug use and alcohol-related events (e.g. violence, driving under the influence of alcohol) were commonly recalled by participants.

Once participants had discussed alcohol and drug use as an aspect of celebrity lifestyles, they were shown a selection of images of the same celebrities, this time drinking alcohol. Again, young people were knowledgeable about celebrity alcohol use through stories in magazines, the Internet and the news media (particularly the tabloid press). Participants initially spoke negatively about the celebrity drinking images, although some did recognise the positive and 'fun' aspects of drinking depicted in the images. Young people were critical of images showing excessive drinking and intoxication, yet viewed images of mundane and casual drinking styles as less problematic. Most participants suggested that they did not find the images particularly appealing, yet some did regard the wealth associated with celebrity drinking lifestyles as desirable.

They look like they are in trouble ...

Female, Year 9

They can have a good time and have a drink and stuff but then if it gets out of hand then that's just bad ...

Female, Year 7

Yeah but everyone wants that lifestyle, don't they? Everyone wants loads of money and like live how they wanna live and spend how much they want to spend ...

Female, Year 9

Overall, the idea that celebrities drank to a great extent was regarded as a media creation. Young people suggested that the media exaggerates the extent and nature of celebrity drinking, with extensive media coverage giving the impression that celebrities drank more than they actually do. Celebrities were also viewed as consuming alcohol to the same extent as the rest of the population due to them essentially being 'normal people'. Others felt that celebrities drank less than the general public due to professionalism and a need to maintain the right image. Sports stars in particular were discussed as drinking less, or abstaining from alcohol, due to the need to train and maintain fitness and strict diets. However, sports stars were discussed as drinking on 'special occasions' or to 'celebrate'.

Maybe they just wanna get like in the papers and stuff so they get caught drinking, like the reality [TV] people and stuff to get money ...

Female, Year 8

I think sometimes it's blown out of proportion as well though. Because in the end, they are just normal people and they're the ones who get photographed, whereas we don't ...

Female, Year 12

Celebrity wealth was one of the main reasons given by participants to explain why celebrities might drink to a greater extent than other people. For example, alcohol and drugs were regarded as items that celebrities could purchase in order to spend their vast amounts of money. A number of participants suggested that everyone would drink to the same extent as celebrities if they themselves were as wealthy. Participants also thought that being reported drinking in the media was a way of maintaining celebrity status. This was seen to be particularly relevant to those celebrities without 'talent', who relied on media coverage of their personal lives to gain income. Moreover, problematic alcohol use was discussed as an outcome of the added pressure and stress celebrities were subjected to as a result of media attention. An interesting cycle of alcohol use was suggested by participants who thought that some celebrities relied upon media coverage of their alcohol-related lifestyles to maintain public interest, yet subsequently drank alcohol to deal with the added stress related to consistently receiving negative media coverage.

Celebrity influence

Participants were divided as to whether they believed that media representations of celebrity alcohol use influenced young people's attitudes towards alcohol and their alcohol consumption. Media reporting of celebrity alcohol use was seen as conveying the idea that drinking alcohol was an acceptable and normalised activity. Many thought that young people would be influenced by celebrities and described them as 'role models'.

Yeah, like with celebrities they're like saying it's cool to drink ...

Female, Year 8

If you're seeing people drinking all the time in papers and magazines, and they're the people who you like, then the more likely you're gonna drink, not drink more but like you know, just drink, it's normal ...

Male, vocational training class, aged 17

However, participants believed that they themselves were not susceptible to influence. A 'third-person effect' was evident in discussions, with most participants suggesting that celebrities influenced 'other' young people or 'kids', but not themselves. They also suggested that they had the ability to select particular positive behaviours to emulate while ignoring the more negative behaviours.

Because other people might like, kids might like see them and think it's right to do it. Because they may not have had a drink or know about it like older people do, like us, you know it's not OK from like your parents, but kids might not know that ...

Male, Year 8

When you look at your role model, it's usually what, you know, their talent is that you wanna be. It's not usually negative stuff. We are able to pick the good bits and ignore the bad bits ...

Female, Year 9

While a number of participants acknowledged a potential influence of celebrity drinking on young people and labelled them as role models, most did not feel that celebrities had a responsibility to prevent themselves from

being photographed drinking alcohol. The reason for this was that they were viewed as 'normal people', and as such should be free to drink alcohol without being scrutinised. Some participants disagreed that celebrities would influence young people's drinking and were keen to highlight that depictions were 'only a picture' (Males and Female, vocational training class). It was also noted that the influence of celebrity drinking would differ depending on the nature of the image. For example, portrayals of intoxication and related negative behaviour were viewed as having the ability to deter young people from alcohol use. Overall, young people felt that factors such as peers, parents and family were more influential on young people's alcohol use than the media and celebrities.

But like if there's horrible pictures of them on the floor and that, like drunk and stuff, then it makes you not wanna drink ...

Female, vocational training, aged 17

If it looks like in the picture, if it looks like they're having a good time, then they'll think 'oh I wanna good time too', so I'll be more likely to drink. But if they're all over the place drunk, they won't; they'll be like 'oh I don't wanna be like that', why would you?

Male, Year 9

Kind of a mixture of things influence people to drink. I reckon like celebrities that's the least, because we don't know them and we don't go 'oh I like them pictures, I'll copy'. It's not as simple as that ...

Male, Year 9

Young people as critical consumers

Participants were aware that some sections of the media might have an agenda in focusing on celebrity alcohol use. Young people were critical and sceptical towards the reporting of celebrity alcohol use, and were conscious that both magazines and newspapers created and exaggerated stories in order to attract readers and make a profit. This was one of the main reasons why they did not trust magazine and newspaper accounts of celebrity behaviour. Young people were keen to express the role of the media in deliberately reporting and constructing negative images of celebrities, and were aware of the techniques employed in doing so. As previously discussed, young people regarded the idea that celebrities drink more than other people as a media creation. This suggests that young people were able to make sophisticated assessments regarding the nature and production of media depictions. With the exception of a few younger participants who appeared to be less media literate and took some of the images at face value, young people were also sceptical about celebrities' own accounts of their drinking behaviour (e.g. in interviews). Most participants felt that it was unfair for the media to report a celebrity's drinking, particularly problematic alcohol use, as they believed this to be a private issue and as such something that should not be exposed via the media. However, they also expressed an interest in reading about celebrities' drinking and related behaviour (particularly female celebrities), with some acknowledging this paradox. Others felt that media reporting of private issues was acceptable and a necessary aspect of being a celebrity.

Like if they find one little thing, they try and make it bigger to sell a paper ...

Male, Year 10

Because, no, but I reckon it's not as bad as they make it out to be. Because if they get a bad picture and then they decide to add a certain title [caption] to it then you're gonna think that it's bad. But people should realise they've just created the story so we'll all buy it and then they'll get money. And if we know it's not true, it's not going to make us drink ...

Male, Year 9

Gender, the media and alcohol

Throughout the discussions, participants debated and discussed differences in men's and women's drinking, which reflected the ways in which drinking had been depicted in the magazines analysed. For example, men and women were aligned with different alcoholic drinks, and men were discussed as being able to control their drinking more than women.

Girls always get this fancy drink, like [high-pitched voice] 'I'll have a vodka but with a bit of coke, and a dash of lemon' and lads are just like [deep voice] 'a beer' ...

Male, Year 9

I mean, men can generally handle their drink better, but we can drink a lot more generally and it depends what you drink ...

Male, vocational training class, aged 16

Associations between alcohol use, weight and appearance were also implied by young people, particularly in relation to women's drinking. For example, both weight gain and weight loss were associated with alcohol use and discussed in the context of the media critique of celebrity appearance and body image.

Because she had liposuction and then she went fat, because she drunk too much, that's what happens to the girl celebrities if they drink too much and then the magazine pictures them all fat and that ...

Female, Year 7

Participants also noted that in both magazines and the tabloid press, images of intoxicated celebrities tended to involve females. It was suggested that this was because celebrity-based magazines are targeted at a female audience who are generally more interested in female celebrity culture. Drinking by female celebrities was also believed to be more 'interesting' to read about than drinking by males. Young people also discussed drinking by female celebrities negatively and in ways which suggested that they were viewed as transgressing stereotypical gender-appropriate behaviour. For example, drinking within the public sphere was seen as inappropriate in relation to their roles as mothers, and celebrities displaying themselves sexually in the drinking context were viewed negatively by some. However, older females tended to be critical of the way magazines and the news media portrayed female celebrities who drank in a negative manner. It was argued that these images reflected unequal attitudes towards men's and women's drinking in general. Participants also recognised that magazine and newspaper editors were not simply representing female celebrity drinking, but were also attempting to comment upon it.

They all kind of look like whores ...

Male, Year 9

Men are like known for doing it. Like everyone knows that men drink, but like so, if you're like a women working, cleaning and stuff, might be looking after the kids as well. So, when they go out, it's like viewed as being worse ...

Female, Year 9

Most participants thought that messages from men's magazines depicting alcohol as a key aspect of masculine identity were 'unfair', 'untrue', 'stupid', 'silly' and 'stereotypical', suggesting that 'you can still be a man if you don't drink' (Male, Year 8). However, it was acknowledged that in real-life drinking situations men feel pressured to drink alcohol, and that magazines may add to this pressure. Participants commented that articles in men's magazines that suggest men drink in single-sex groups did not reflect their own drinking practices or their perception of drinking practices in general. Instead, drinking was viewed as commonly occurring in mixed-sex groups.

It's saying if you don't [drink] you're a coward and you couldn't handle it ...

Male, Year 9

Yeah. And if you try and fit in with 'the lads', and be one of 'the lads', then you're gonna try and be the manliest you can be, aren't you?

Male, Year 12

Young people also discussed the way in which alcohol is associated with sexual encounters and interaction with the opposite sex (particularly in men's magazines), and agreed with the message that, in real life, purchasing alcohol provided a way of instigating conversation with the opposite sex. However, some participants viewed such messages as problematic in that they suggested that women are more willing to have sex when intoxicated.

Yeah, because you're in that kind of atmosphere as well. Like, if you were in a park, you'd say do you want an ice cream, if the ice cream van's there. But because you're not, you're in a club, so it's the only thing you have to communicate with someone is a drink ...

Female, Year 12

It's like he's looking for a one-night stand, he's gonna be buying someone a drink, isn't he, and hoping that they're gonna be all like that model in the magazine ... because it's like giving the message that get a girl drunk and you can get her ...

Male, Year 12

Alcohol and sport sponsorship in the media

Young people's recognition of alcohol brand sponsorship of sport was explored using images of alcohol sponsorship on football shirts (e.g. Chang and Carlsberg) that had featured in the TV programmes and magazines analysed in the early stages of the research. Young people's recognition of alcohol sponsorship varied, with older participants and males being more aware of the sponsorship. Six out of the fifteen groups did not recognise the alcohol sponsorship. Those who did not recall the brand names provided other explanations as to why the images were related to alcohol. For example, football was associated with positive health outcomes such as fitness and a healthy diet, which were viewed as restricting alcohol use among players. Furthermore, participants suggested that football players would drink after both winning and losing a game. Young people believed that the reason for the alcohol industry's sponsorship of sports was purely economic, with the industry targeting fans, particularly men, in order to boost profits. Young people also felt that alcohol brands' sponsorship of football reflected a longstanding cultural association between alcohol, particularly beer consumption, and football, which was also felt to be a male-dominated activity.

To be more profitable. Because if they're going out on a football pitch, the camera's gonna be on them, so they'll see the make ...

Female, Year 9

I think like pubs and football, as in alcohol and football, are always linked. People go to the pub to watch a match ...

Female, Year 12

I think it's kind of like a subliminal message. If you imagine, some people watching games in the pubs yeah, you imagine like big, um, blokes ordering beer, yeah. So, they see Carlsberg, they probably wanna buy Carlsberg beer ...

Male, Year 9

The branding of football shirts by the alcohol industry was viewed as potentially influencing brand choice among particular groups (e.g. 'kids', 'bitter fans'). Overall, most participants believed that fans of a particular football team would not deliberately buy a particular alcoholic beverage simply because of the football team it sponsored. However, influences of sponsorship on brand choice were felt to be more indirect. For example, it was noted that particular alcohol brands had become more accessible in local supermarkets since the manufacturer had begun to sponsor a local football team, and that brand choice was restricted to the sponsor's brand at football matches.

In a similar manner to young people's views on the potential influence of celebrities, young people insisted that the alcohol industry's sponsorship of football would not impact on *their* brand choice. Young people also suggested that the branding of football with alcohol both reflected and reproduced a cultural association between drinking and sports fandom. Young people reported that in general they did not pay attention to alcohol sponsorship and did not associate brand labels on football shirts with alcohol. Instead, the alcohol branding was viewed as being a standard and expected element of the football strip. In this way, cultural association, rather than direct advertising, might be an important means by which young people are exposed to, and influenced by, alcohol marketing.

It wouldn't influence me, no. Just like some really pathetic people ...

Female, Year 12

I just think it's part of the outfit now. Like if I seen, um, the football shirt, I'd just like immediately associate it with the football shirt. I wouldn't think of like the beer or nothing. It's just like a standard thing that goes on ...

Male, Year 12

Alcohol and the Internet

Participants were asked to discuss the ways in which alcohol featured as part of their online activities. With a few exceptions, participants reported regularly viewing online alcohol advertising for a variety of brands, particularly when logged into SNS such as Facebook. Young people also recalled having viewed alcohol advertising on football team websites, YouTube and 'pop ups' on non-alcohol related websites.

SNS had also acquired an important role in young people's drinking culture, with the uploading of drinking photographs discussed as providing a means of documenting an enjoyable night out. Older participants mentioned how they had seen images of themselves and their friends drinking alcohol on SNS. However, most young people were reluctant to openly discuss uploading images of themselves drinking and talked negatively about others who did. When asked why people did this, participants suggested that uploading drinking photographs was a way of portraying a particular image of themselves (e.g. 'mad', 'cool', 'fun' and 'hard').

I just always find random pictures of me drunk on Facebook ... and I've got a video on my phone, do you wanna see it? Me having a race with a man, and he's got a pint of mild and I've got a pint of lager ...

Female, vocational training class, aged 16

Yeah, because they think it'll make them look like fun people, kind of stuff, or like hard ...

Female, Year 12

Alcohol on television

Young people were asked to recall TV programmes depicting alcohol use and their general thoughts on the representation of alcohol on television. Participants listed a variety of programmes, suggesting an awareness of

the high prominence of alcohol use on television. Soap operas were highlighted as programmes that regularly depicted alcohol due to the pub being a popular scene setting. Participants were then shown a selection of TV clips portraying alcohol use from the programmes analysed in the early stages of the project (*EastEnders*, *Friends*, *Shameless*, *Skins* and *The Simpsons*). The clips portrayed alcohol in a number of differing contexts including alcohol in more positive and humorous ways, mundane and everyday use of alcohol, alcohol dependence and young people's drinking specifically. Participants discussed the ways that alcohol was represented in the clips and the type of alcohol-related messages they believed were being transmitted. Young people were critical consumers in that they were able to deconstruct the alcohol-related messages being transmitted within the programmes (e.g. the relationship between alcohol and sex, alcohol use for celebration).

However, young people were divided as to whether they thought alcohol use had been represented in a realistic manner in the programmes shown. Participants felt that the more mundane aspects of alcohol on TV reflected real-life drinking culture, yet the amount of time characters were shown drinking in the pub was regarded as unrealistic. Young people believed that alcohol use was included in TV programmes in order to reflect real life. However, they also felt that drinking provided a way for TV programmes to exaggerate and dramatise characters and situations. As such, young people appeared to be uncertain as to whether alcohol was shown in a realistic manner on TV.

Like you know, Coronation Street and all that, all they do on it is go to the pub. That's it. They just go 'I'll meet you in the pub' every five minutes. People do go the pub but you don't get all the street spending all their time down there together ...

Male, Year 7

I think just dramatic soaps ... nearly every programme really. But then the soaps have it in to make it seem more real, but then add in, like an alcoholic or something, to make it seem more dramatic ...

Male, Year 9

Young people felt that television presented a selective image of alcohol use, with certain aspects of drinking being omitted. For example, the more subtle negative effects of drinking were thought to be rarely shown (e.g. hangovers). Young people commented that this created an unrealistic account of drinking as, in reality, alcohol use could result in negative effects. It was suggested that showing the associated harms and effects of alcohol on TV could be a way of informing young people of the possible dangers associated with alcohol use. However, it was highlighted that focusing only on the negative effects of alcohol would also provide an unrealistic account as, in real life, alcohol use does not always result in negative experiences. Participants felt that TV should provide a balanced view of alcohol use, showing both the positive side of drinking and the possible negative effects without an overemphasis on the latter. In contrast, some young people expressed that they did not want television programmes to focus on the negative effects of alcohol, as this would impact on the entertainment value of the programme.

Yeah like when it's all positive, it gives people a false impression and a false idea of alcohol and then it makes them wanna go out and do it, even though they don't know the full extent or damage they're doing long term. Like it's not always bad, but people should know it could be. But they shouldn't overdo it on the negative side, or it would be less real than it is now ...

Male, Year 9

The thing is, it's because like sometimes, you actually are generally having a good time and then there's no fights or nothing bad after drinking when everyone drinks. But like, at the same time if bad things about alcohol are shown then it may put people off, but like I say, it's not always bad. There needs to be a balance, and it's not about having a big scary storyline, just adding things like hangovers and things in, but not make a fuss about it ...

Female, Year 9

No, they're making it entertaining though, aren't they? You're watching programmes to be entertained, you don't wanna see the negatives ...

Male, Year 12

Participants also noted a lack of young people's drinking on television. One youth drama in particular (*Skins*) was regarded as covering the more negative side of alcohol by young people. However, young people felt that the programme exaggerated the effects of alcohol use to some extent, and did not feel this reflected their own drinking experiences. By presenting excessive alcohol and recreational drug use as a key aspect of youth leisure, some participants felt that television unfairly labels all young people as binge drinkers and recreational drug users.

I think it shows the realistic extreme side of like when things go wrong, or people get like drunk, and high and stuff. So, it is realistic in the extreme scenarios, but not like every weekend, it's not like that ...

Female, Year 12

I don't think it's everyone. It's just like everyone drinks to a point, but not everyone's like a binge drinker. Not everyone goes out to get drunk ...

Male, Year 12

Young people were divided as to whether they felt that TV's portrayal of alcohol influenced their attitudes towards alcohol and their alcohol use. Most participants were adamant that TV did not influence them, stressing that they recognised the portrayals were 'not real'. Again, participants spoke in the third person and suggested that TV may influence 'younger' people by presenting alcohol in an attractive manner. Negative portrayals were viewed as potentially deterring young people from drinking.

It's like the way people say 'oh people start smoking, young people, because they see it in films' and stuff like that. Well, it's not really is it? You don't like see someone in a film and think 'oh I'll start smoking' ...

Male, Year 12

I don't think TV would encourage me though, because they show like how they can get aggressive and it shows like that you get memory loss and everything from it, so why would I want that?

Female, Year 8

Sources of alcohol information and the media's role in health promotion

Participants were asked whether they had ever required information on alcohol and what their main source of alcohol information would be. Most participants noted that they had not required information on alcohol, yet some recalled receiving advice from their parents and alcohol education at school. Parents and the family were discussed as the main sources of information young people would turn to if they required information on alcohol. Some participants suggested that they would use the Internet to search for alcohol advice, yet this would not be their first point of contact. Confusion and scepticism regarding the trustworthiness of alcohol information online appeared to act as a barrier to young people searching for alcohol information online. Official branding of websites was viewed as an indicator of a website's trustworthiness, with official sources such as the NHS, Talk to Frank and Drinkaware regarded as legitimate sources.

Drawing on the issues discussed throughout the focus groups, young people were asked their views on how the media could be used to disseminate alcohol advice and information to young people. Participants agreed that television was a good way of targeting the population and suggested that alcohol-related messages could be transmitted before or after television programmes in order to reach a large audience. However, it was felt that educating audiences on alcohol-related issues was not a priority purpose or key role of the media.

The whole of the UK watches EastEnders and like it's kids watch it as well, and like if they show the bad side of it, kids won't drink as much ...

Male, Year 9

Yeah, at the end of the programme or something they could have a message or hotlines, or in magazines but not in TV programmes or as a main part of the magazines. Because that's not what they are for ...

Female, Year 8

Drawing on an example of a government campaign produced in collaboration with a popular youth soap (*Hollyoaks*) to deliver responsible drinking messages to young people, participants were asked their views on TV programmes incorporating health messages around alcohol in their storylines. While some believed this was a good way of delivering information, others expressed the opinion that this approach would have little impact and would reduce the entertainment element of the programme. Targeting the population with messages via TV was also felt to be unfair, as not everyone was regarded as requiring such advice and information.

I think everyone already knows you're not meant to so giving messages on TV or in magazines and stuff isn't going to make a difference is it?

Female, vocational training, aged 16

Personally, I'd prefer not to have them ... and people switch off. So if young people are being told like a serious message, they'll switch off ...

Male, Year 12

And if you're just watching like what's going on around you, you're watching it every day anyway, so you don't wanna come home and watch it on the telly, do you? You wanna be entertained by other things ...

Female, Year 12

Box 2: Key findings: young people's perspectives on media representations of alcohol

- Young people were critical media consumers and were aware that some sections of the media might have an economic or editorial agenda in focusing on celebrity alcohol use. The media were viewed as exaggerating the extent and nature of celebrity drinking, with extensive media coverage giving the impression that celebrities drank more than they actually did. The idea that celebrities drank more was therefore regarded as a media creation.
- Young people were critical of celebrities who were depicted drinking to intoxication, and it was these celebrities (often females) that young people tended to dislike and were critical of. Images of casual drinking by celebrities were regarded as unproblematic; this suggested that drinking must be seen to be extreme and excessive to be labelled problematic.
- Most participants felt that media reporting of celebrity drinking may influence young people's attitudes and behaviour (i.e. may encourage or prevent young people from initiating alcohol use). Participants deemed younger people and 'others' as being more susceptible to media and advertising influence than themselves.
- Media depictions of celebrity alcohol use were felt to be less influential than other factors (e.g. peers, family) that influence young people's initiation into alcohol use. Peer pressure and parents were highlighted as being the most influential factors.

- Young people felt that the more subtle negative effects of alcohol use were rarely depicted on TV, and suggested that less attention should be given to extreme effects such as violence. For example, everyday effects such as hangovers reflected the reality of 'everyday' drinking that TV often omits.
- Participants felt that young people's drinking is rarely shown on television, and felt that, when it is shown, it tends to focus on young people as excessive and binge drinkers. Young people felt that these depictions do not realistically reflect the drinking experiences of all young people, label all young people as binge drinkers and potentially reinforce negative stereotypes of young people.
- Alcohol adverts were a regular feature of young people's online activities, particularly on SNS. Young people themselves also uploaded and 'tagged' alcohol-related images to document a night out. Documenting alcohol-related materials online may be helping to shape some young people's identities, as well as circulating messages about alcohol use between peers. Such online interactions may therefore be seen as an extension of young people's 'real-world' drinking culture.
- Young people did regard the media as having a role to play in providing alcohol information to young people. However, the media was viewed as essentially having an entertainment function. Parents were highlighted as young people's main source of information on alcohol.

3 What influence do the media and celebrities have on young people's alcohol use?

This chapter presents the findings of a survey of school and college pupils aged 11–18 (see [Appendix I](#) for a description of the methodology). The chapter describes typical drinking behaviour for this sample and then sets out how this may be related to media use, and more specifically celebrity attachment and modelling of behaviour in response to media representations of alcohol. Although this data is subject to some of the same 'social desirability' biases as the focus groups, whereby respondents might provide answers that they think they are expected to give to please the researcher, the questionnaire allowed us to explore topics in multiple and indirect ways. This means we were able to assess the influence of media on young people's alcohol behaviour in a way that would not be immediately obvious to most respondents, hence reducing the opportunities for them to provide answers that they thought we would have liked to hear, or that they thought would present them or people of importance in their lives (e.g. friends, parents, 'role models') in a good light.

As we collected a large amount of data, we have only reported those findings of most relevance to this report. Where we have reported data relationships and differences, this means that the findings are generally statistically significant, but for readability we have not reported statistical parameters. Full statistical details are available upon request and scientific papers reporting on this data in more detail are being prepared.

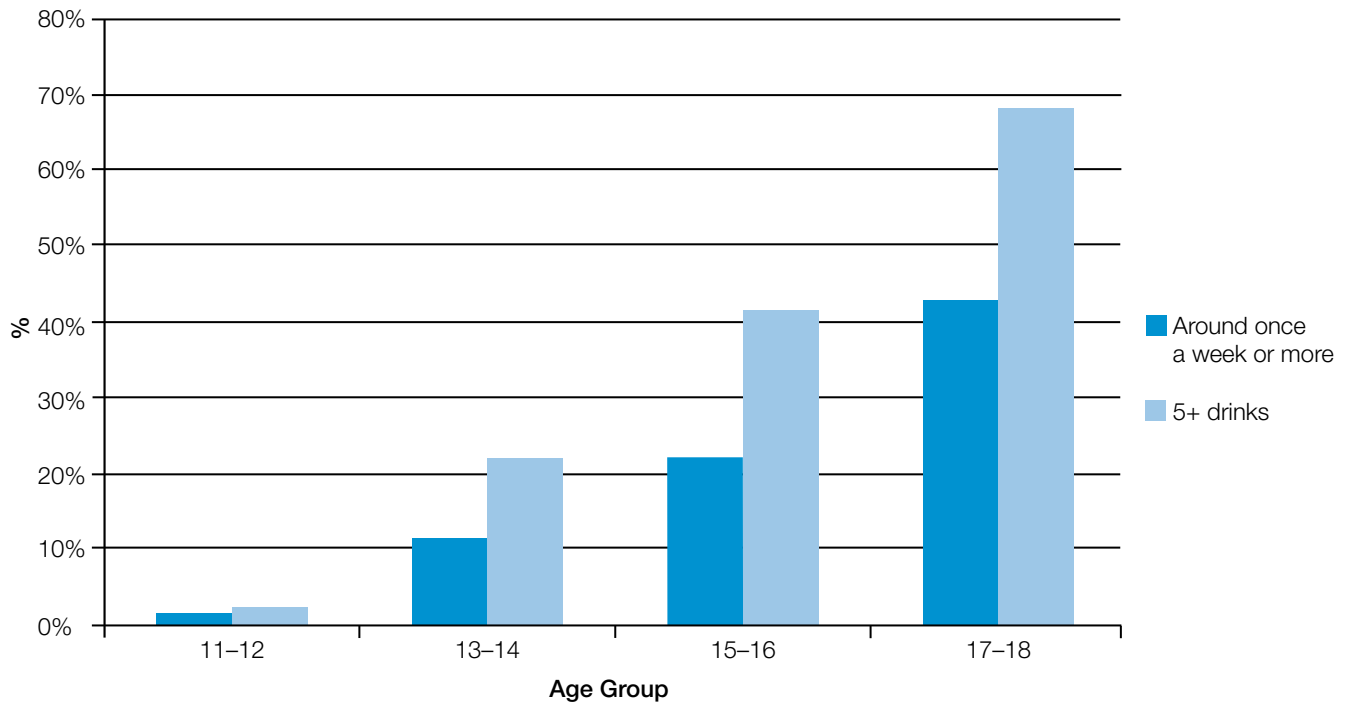
The sample

In total, 941 young people provided complete data sets (i.e. provided responses to all questions about alcohol use and the majority of media/celebrity questions); 60% were female and 40% male (reflecting the greater percentage of male questionnaires that were incomplete or assessed as unreliable), and the majority self-identified as White British (92%). The majority of participants reported being Christian (61%; the majority of others did not identify with a religion) and one in ten of the sample reported attending a religious service outside of school.

Alcohol use

The majority of the sample (82%) reported having consumed at least one full drink of alcohol. Of those who drank, the age of initiation into alcohol use ranged from 5 to 17 years. The average age at which participants had their first full drink of alcohol was 12.5 years. Of those reporting frequency of alcohol use, the largest proportion reported drinking 'a few times a year (e.g. on special occasions)' (37%). Unsurprisingly there was a strong correlation between the age of the respondent and frequency of use. The most frequently reported type of drinks consumed were alcopops (79.2%; the examples given in the questionnaire were WKD and Smirnoff Ice), spirits (38.4%; e.g. vodka, gin), beer (28.4%), wine (26.2%), and cans (18.9%) and litre bottles (9.6%) of cider. One third of drinkers reported drinking more than five drinks on one occasion, although this mostly took place 'a few times a year (e.g. on special occasions)'. Again, this seemed to be age-related and was more common in older respondents (see [Figure 1](#) in this chapter). Overall, there were no significant differences between having ever drunk alcohol and the sex of the participant. The number of boys and girls reporting ever having drunk alcohol was equivalent in each age group examined (11–12, 13–14, 15–16, 17–18). However, boys did initiate use at a slightly younger age (12 years, 2 months vs 12 years, 10 months).

Figure 1: Percentage of young people in each age group reporting drinking around once a week or more, and drinking 5+ drinks per episode more than once a month



Media use and celebrities

As shown in [Table 3](#), the most frequent form of media consumed by young people was TV, followed by the Internet and magazines. Across all age groups, young people reported using these media on a daily basis. However, participants tended to use the Internet for a longer period of time than TV (8.1 vs 7.1 hours a week). Magazines were read for an average of 1.3 hours a week. Interestingly, statistics showed that girls used the Internet (8.5 vs 7.7 hours a week) and read magazines (1.6 vs 0.9 hours a week) for longer than boys, although both sexes watched TV for around the same amount of time (about 7 hours a week). Controlling for these sex differences, it was found that the older participants were, the less time they spent watching TV.

Table 3: Media use across all age groups

Form of media	Every day	Several times a week	Weekends only	Several times a month	Several times a year	Never used	Total
Internet	75.7%	19.9%	2.4%	1.8%	0.1%	0.1%	100% (n=934)
TV	78.6%	18.0%	1.2%	1.7%	0.2%	0.2%	99.9% (n=933)
Magazines	6.3%	25.6%	8.4%	28.2%	16.9%	14.5%	99.9% (n=915)

Although names are not shown here, when asked to list their favourite celebrities, participants provided a diverse list. Young people reported liking a wide range of celebrities, including pop singers, actors and sports stars. Interestingly, there was greater agreement about the celebrities that young people did not like compared with the level of agreement on those that they liked. Two of the most disliked celebrities were also thought to drink the most (Katie Price, Amy Winehouse). Similarly, celebrities who were thought not to drink included many of those mentioned as young people's favourites, including sports stars and other professional athletes, as well as internationally famous pop stars and some Saturday night TV stars.

Beliefs about alcohol representations in the media

When asked directly, young people were undecided as to the relative effects of alcohol representations in the media on their own and other young people's drinking behaviour. This may represent a lack of previous thought on the topic, a general indecision, or a genuine difficulty in determination. However, slightly more (albeit a non-significant number of) young people believed that representations of celebrity alcohol use would encourage young people to drink more than direct advertising, general alcohol representations in the media, and representations specifically depicting young people drinking alcohol. This is an interesting finding, but as discussed in the sections below, when assessed more objectively and indirectly, celebrity drinking did not seem to be exerting much influence on young people. When respondents were grouped according to their age, there were few age differences in their beliefs on whether alcohol advertisements made young people drink more or if depictions of celebrities who drank made young people drink more (e.g. 15–16-year-olds held both of these beliefs to a greater extent than 11–12-year-olds).

Exposure to alcohol advertisements

Looking at alcohol advertisements in more detail, 60% of young people (all ages) reported being exposed to alcohol advertisements on a daily basis, primarily through watching TV. Around one third of respondents also reported seeing alcohol advertisements on the Internet daily, where, at the time of study, there was little guidance or regulation.¹⁰ Around 16% of the sample recalled seeing alcohol information provision (e.g. Know Your Limits), while 4% spontaneously reported having seen advertisements for discounted drinks. This suggests that the majority of representations were for alcohol brands rather than retailers (such as supermarkets, who tend to advertise price discounts). Table 4 shows the frequency of seeing advertisements in particular forms of media, although these figures are largely dependent on the frequency of engagement with the source. In addition, cinema data would also be subject to the effects of age restrictions in place to prevent underage viewing of films, although films classed as suitable for under-18s (e.g. British Board of Film Classification (BBFC), 2009) may still carry alcohol adverts before screenings (Cinema Advertising Association code of practice). There was no relationship between the age of the respondent and the percentage reporting seeing advertisements daily (see Figure 2 in this chapter for TV data). Self-reported frequency of exposure to alcohol advertising through TV, magazines, the Internet and cinema did not significantly predict self-reported alcohol consumption. However, there was a small but significant correlation between the age of alcohol initiation and frequency of TV advertising recall.

Table 4: Young people's recall of viewing alcohol adverts by media source

	TV	Internet	Magazines	Cinema
Daily	60.8%	35.9%	25.0%	10.2%
Weekly	28.7%	32.6%	36.7%	15.6%
Monthly	6.4%	15.3%	18.3%	27.2%
A few times a year	4.1%	16.2%	20.1%	47.0%
Total	100% (n=854)	100% (n=810)	100.1% (n=788)	100% (n=755)

The influence of significant others

With regard to the perceived acceptability of their own drinking by significant others, our sample clearly differentiated between their beliefs about friends (who they believed would think it was acceptable for them to drink), teachers (who would not), parents/carers (most, but not all, of whom were presumed to disapprove of alcohol use), and celebrities (where respondents did not suggest perceived approval or disapproval). Like many alcohol use behaviours and attitudes, these beliefs were affected by the age of the survey respondent, and there was a significant trend between the age of the respondent and the belief that there would be greater

acceptance of alcohol use by these significant others (i.e. alcohol consumption was seen to become more acceptable to others with age). Likewise, this pattern of responses was repeated when examining whether respondents actually 'cared' what other people would think about their drinking. It is notable that, as well as young people thinking that their friends would approve of their drinking, a majority also 'cared' about their friends' reaction, suggesting that friends' approval was an important factor in determining alcohol use (see [Figures 3 and 4](#) in this chapter). Older respondents reported caring more about what their friends thought about their drinking than younger respondents.

Figure 2: Relationship between age and daily exposure to alcohol adverts

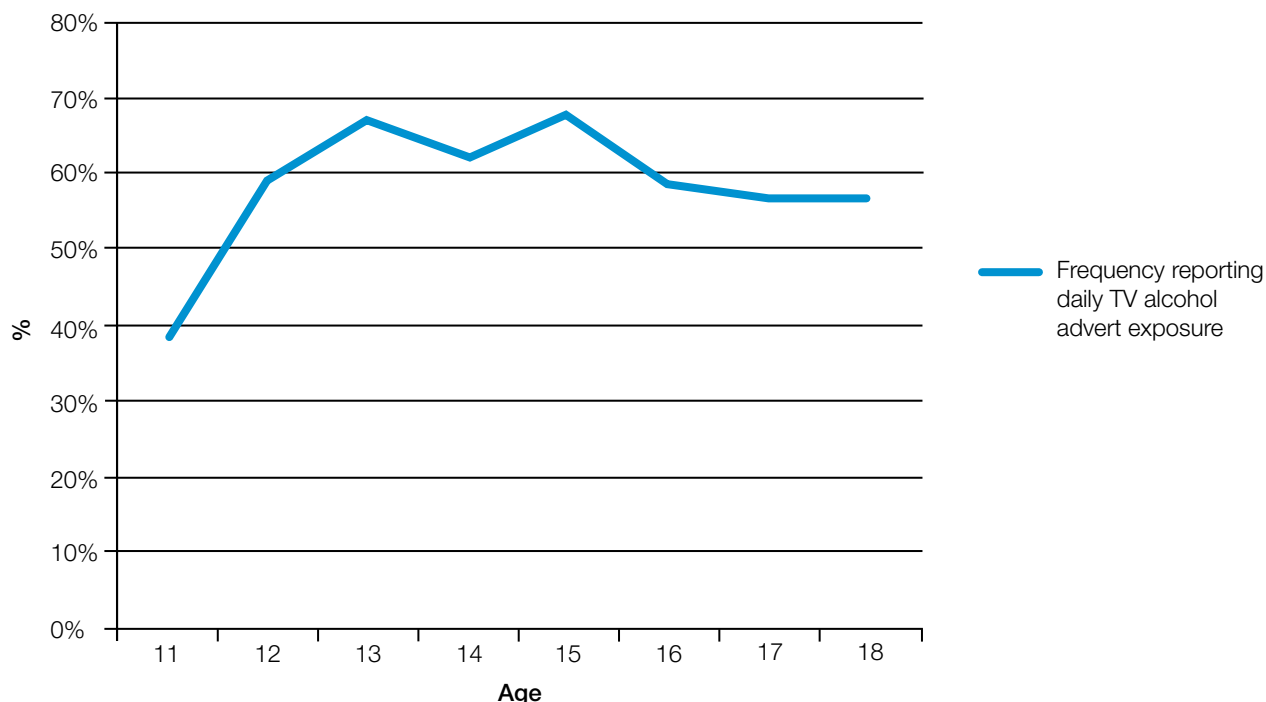


Figure 3: Percentage of each age group who thought significant others would think it was acceptable for them to drink

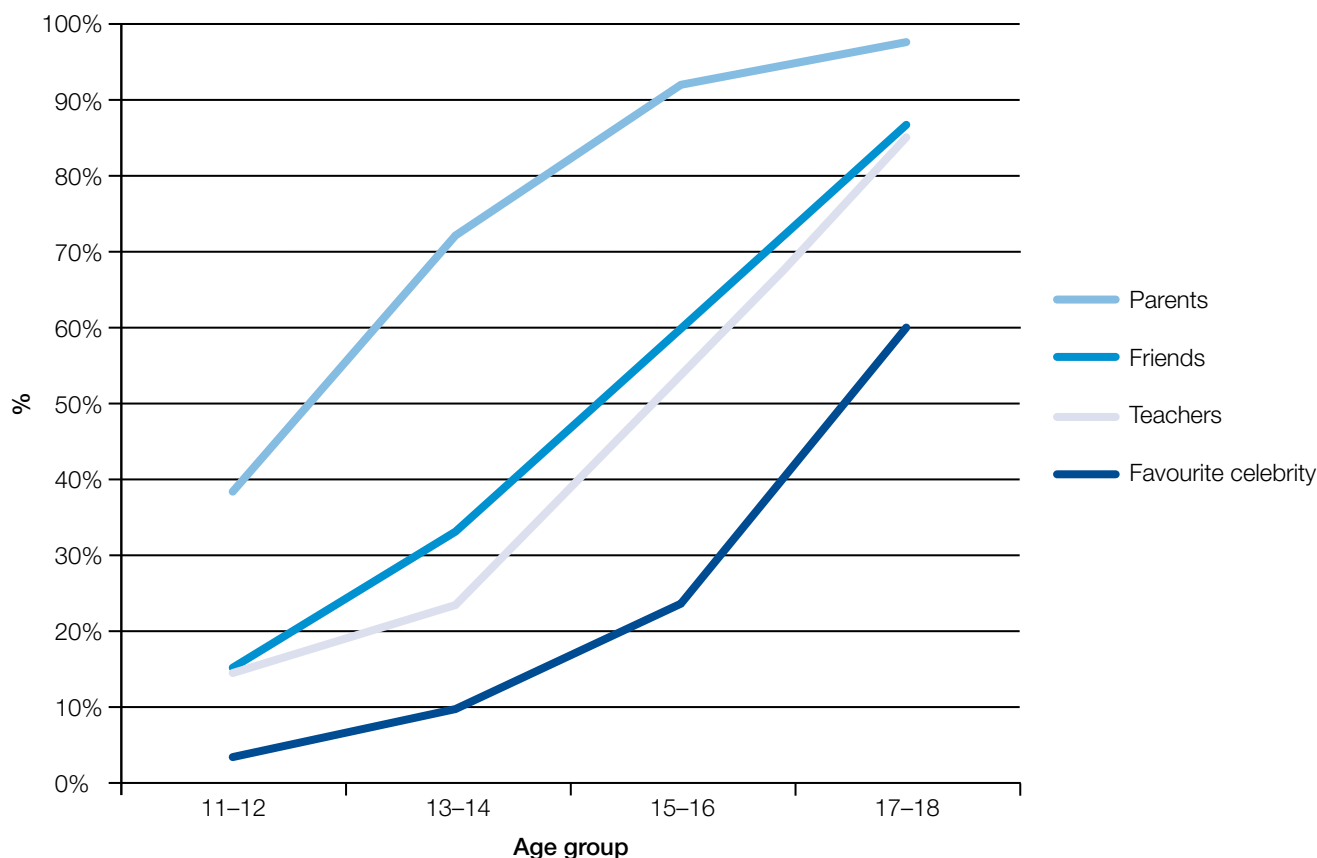
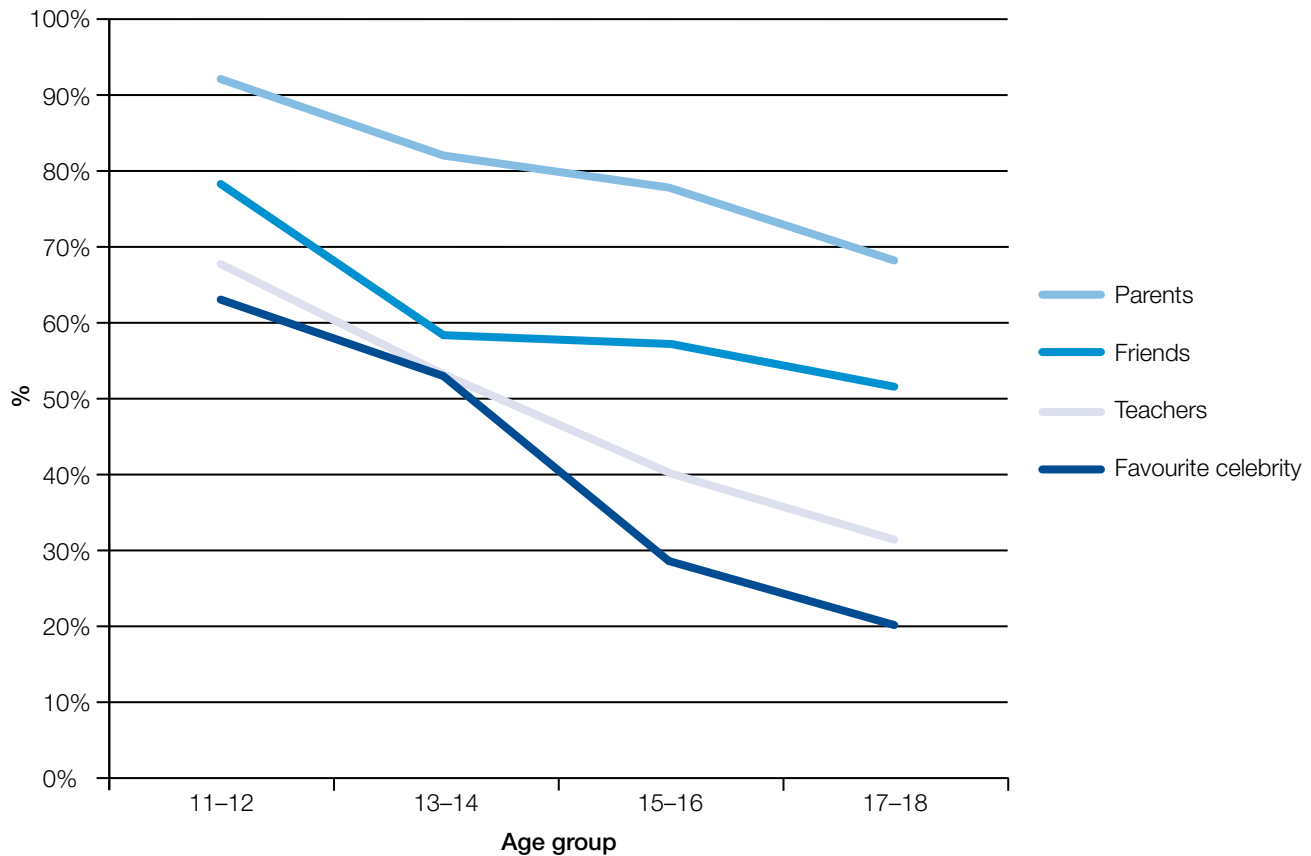


Figure 4: Percentage of each age group who care what significant others think about their drinking



Perceived alcohol use by significant others

Young people's beliefs about how frequently significant others drank are shown in [Table 5](#) in this chapter.

We were able to compare this data to drinking prevalence estimates collected in a similar geographical area by the Centre for Public Health, Liverpool John Moores University (Elliott, *et al.*, 2010) (the bottom two rows of [Table 5](#) in this chapter). We were not able to collect data from respondents' parents about their drinking in our study, but in Elliott, *et al.* (2010), actual drinking frequency in typical parents was estimated. Although not all frequency categories were directly equivalent, it can be seen that our respondents seemed to be quite accurate in estimating the proportion of parents who drank once a month or less frequently. However, differences arose when our respondents were asked to estimate more frequent patterns of drinking; they thought that their parents drank more frequently than this other data suggests they actually do.

Interestingly, our data also suggests that young people believed celebrities drank similar amounts to their parents/carers. They also believed their friends drank more than themselves, which is a common finding in research that seeks to determine factors that influence young people's drinking. Estimation of friends' drinking was similar in younger age groups to that of the participant, but older respondents tended to believe that their friends drank more than they did themselves. Finally, there was a significant relationship between the frequency of respondents' drinking and their beliefs about the frequency of other people's drinking (we controlled for the effects of respondents' age in this analysis). This relationship was strongest between young people and their friends, meaning that the more the respondent thought their friends drank, the more they drank themselves. However, there was no significant relationship between young people's estimates of the frequency they believed their favourite celebrity drank alcohol and their own consumption of alcohol.

Table 5: Perceived frequency of others' drinking

	Never	A few times a year	Once a month	Once every two weeks	Once a week	Twice a week	Every day	Total
Current study								
Mother/female carer	12.1	19.7	17.3	13.5	15.8	14.2	7.5	868 (100.1%)
Father/male carer	11.7	15.5	13.5	12.9	16.3	18.0	12.1	838 (100%)
Friends	17.7	23.7	11.5	16.6	16.4	11.9	2.2	866 (100%)
Favourite celebrity	12.2	15.2	15.0	16.2	16.1	17.7	7.7	809 (100.1%)
Respondents' reported drinking	6.0	37.0	16.0	17.0	8.0	14.0	2.0	941 (100%)
Data from Elliott, <i>et al.</i>*								
Mother/female carer	15.0	26.0	18.0	<1.0	25.0	11.0	5.0	-
Father/carers	12.0	18.0	16.0	<1.0	30.0	15.0	8.0	-
Mother's reported drinking	15.0	24.0	12.0	<1.0	32.0	13.0	3.0	-
Father's reported drinking	12.0	19.0	9.0	0.0	25.0	28.0	7.0	-

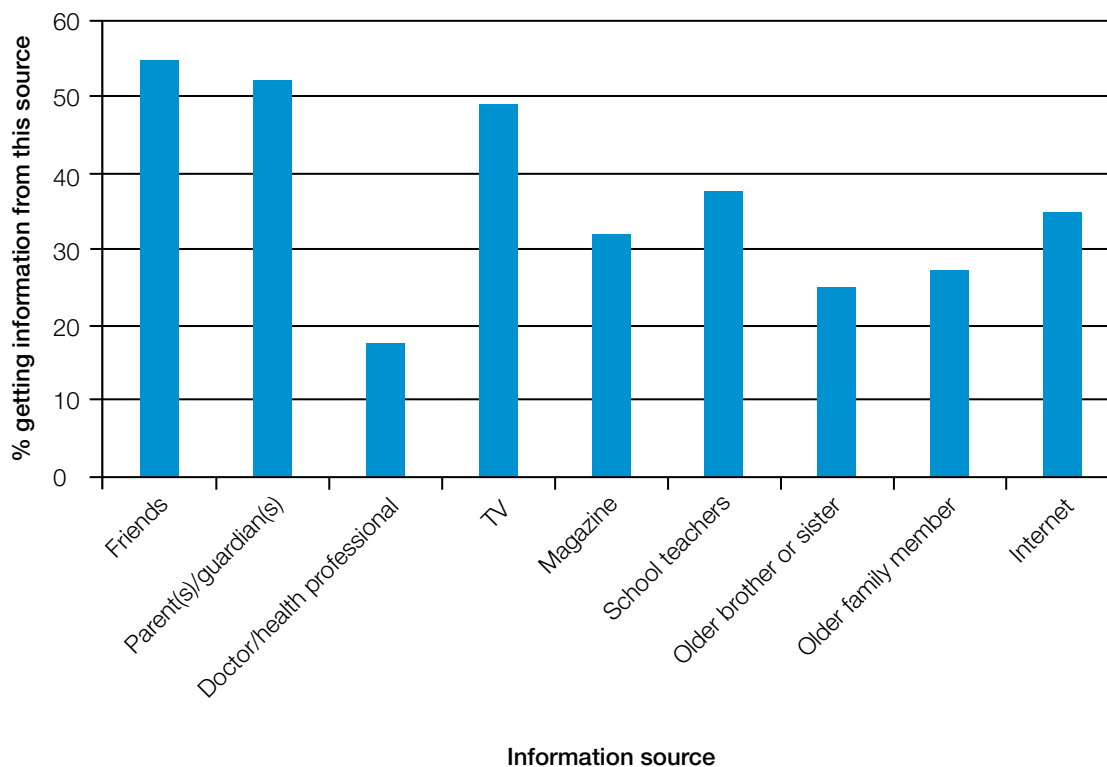
*Supplementary data analysis from Elliott, G., Morleo, M., Harkins, C., Cook, P.A., Phillips-Howard, P.A. (forthcoming) *Parents' perceptions of their children's alcohol consumption*. Centre for Public Health, Liverpool John Moores University

Young people's views on how they believed friends, parents and teachers would react to the respondent's own drinking were also examined. Overall, parents and teachers were thought most likely to want to encourage the young person to stop drinking, or at least drink less. Although some younger respondents felt that their friends would want them to drink less or stop drinking, a higher percentage, particularly in older respondents, believed their friends would encourage them to drink more. Friends were thought to encourage drinking more and be less likely to inform authority figures. While parents and teachers were thought not to encourage drinking, they were considered less likely to tell the young person to stop drinking altogether, and more likely instead to advise them to reduce their consumption.

Sources of alcohol information

Finally, young people were asked to indicate their main sources of alcohol information (see [Figure 5](#) in this chapter). Friends and parents were the sources most frequently referred to. Interestingly, there were more respondents who reported that they would get information from television (the third most frequent source), magazines or the Internet, than those who would get information from health professionals.

Figure 5: Sources of alcohol information reported by young people



How media use and attitudes towards celebrities influence young people's drinking

To determine the relationship between the social learning data collected and personal alcohol use, we conducted a statistical analysis (hierarchical logistic regression) that allowed us to predict how scores on particular questionnaire scales and items were related to young people's alcohol use.

In this section of the report, we refer to common terms that are used in social learning research but were assessed by more than one question in our survey. These are detailed below:

- 1 **Alcohol norms**¹¹ – the extent to which young people believe that alcohol use is a frequent and accepted activity among significant others; used in defining alcohol behaviours in which the individual is expected to conform.

Indicators of alcohol norms used in the questionnaire were: respondents' estimates of parents', friends' and favourite celebrity's alcohol use; the favourite celebrity of the respondent being known for drinking alcohol; attitudes to alcohol laws; approval or disapproval of alcohol use.

- 2 **Differential association**¹² – a classic theory, derived from criminology, suggesting that, partly through interaction with others, individuals learn the values, attitudes, techniques and motives for their behaviour.

Indicators were: respondents' perception of approving or disapproving attitudes of adults (including celebrities) and friends towards their own drinking.

- 3 **Differential reinforcement**¹³ – explains how the frequency of behaviours are altered by attitudes and beliefs that either encourage or discourage that behaviour. So with respect to alcohol use, beliefs about other people's reaction to a person's own alcohol use will determine whether it is initiated, increased, ceased or maintained.

Indicators were: encouragement by others to drink; caring about others' views on their drinking; perceived reaction/sanctions by parents to their drinking; perceived chance of parents finding out about drinking; perceived chance of police catching underage drinkers; interference of drinking with participation in important activities, such as schoolwork and extra-curricular activities.

Our analysis proceeded in several stages, and in each we examined how answers to different types of question predicted young people's alcohol use. Firstly, we added demographic information, then media use, then exposure to alcohol in the media (including advertising), then the three sets of variables mentioned above (alcohol norms, differential association and differential reinforcement). Finally, we added responses to those questions assessing celebrity attachment (see [Appendix I](#) for details of how this concept was measured).

Overall, and unsurprisingly, age was the best predictor of personal alcohol involvement (i.e. the older the young person, the more likely it was that they had drunk alcohol). There were some media use effects, but these were small in comparison to the effects of age. There was a small but significant impact of celebrity-inspired behavioural change, but estimates of friends' drinking and perceived acceptability of drinking by friends were much better predictors.

Describing subpopulations of young people according to their celebrity attachment

We used a statistical technique called Latent Profile Analysis (which allows categorisation of survey respondents into groups based upon similarities in how they respond to questionnaires; see description of Methods in [Appendix I](#)) to identify five distinct subgroups (or classes) of young people based upon their celebrity attachment. This was calculated from scores obtained from questions about celebrity exposure, celebrity influence, celebrity behaviour, social activities focusing on celebrities, and seeing their favourite celebrity drinking (see 'Celebrity attachment typologies', below).

Controlling for age and sex differences between classes (older males would tend to drink more and therefore bias the results), we investigated whether there were differences in reported alcohol use indicators between these derived celebrity attachment classes. It was clear that those young people reporting the greatest celebrity attachment did not necessarily report the greatest alcohol use involvement. For example, there was no difference in the frequency of drinking more than five drinks per occasion between groups. However, Class 5, the smallest group (n=28), who reported the highest celebrity attachment, also reported the greatest alcohol use involvement, and the greatest level of harm from their own and others' drinking. This suggests that, for a small number of young people, there is an association between celebrity attachment and alcohol use.

Celebrity attachment typologies

- **Class 1** comprised 37% of participants.
- They had the lowest composite celebrity attachment score.
- Members reported low celebrity influence and were unlikely to report changing their behaviour in response to their favourite celebrity's behaviour.
- Although they reported high levels of 'celebrity socialisation' (i.e. they liked talking about their favourite celebrity and being around others who shared their interest), they thought there were too many media stories about celebrities in general.

- **Class 2** comprised 26% of participants.
- They were quite similar to Class 1, but reported being influenced more by celebrities, and were slightly less likely to enjoy social aspects of celebrity.

- **Class 3** comprised 20% of participants.
- They had the highest composite celebrity attachment score.
- They reported the highest level of celebrity influence, with respect to both personal investment and how much they had tried to personally change in response to celebrity behaviour.
- Members of this group reported less enjoyment in sharing their interest in celebrities with others, and thought that there were the least amount of celebrity stories in the media.

- **Class 4** comprised 14% of participants.
- They were similar to Class 3, but were less likely to think that celebrities had exerted an influence upon their lives.

- **Class 5** comprised just 3% (n=28) of respondents, but they reported the greatest celebrity attachment.
- Although they reported low levels of celebrity influence, they also reported greater enjoyment from social aspects of celebrity and a high level of behaviour change in response to their favourite celebrity's own behaviour and attitudes.
- There was evidence to suggest that this group drank the most, and they reported the greatest level of alcohol-related harm.

Box 3: Key findings from the survey

- Our sample reported similar drinking behaviours to those of young people in other surveys. Older respondents tended to be more likely to believe that significant others (teachers, parents, friends) would think it was acceptable for them to drink. Apart from the views of their friends, they reported that they did not care what others thought about their drinking. In general, respondents tended to overestimate the amount of alcohol their friends drank, and perceived celebrities to drink to a similar extent as their parents.
- Television was the most frequently used media form, although younger people spent longer using the Internet. Older participants tended to watch TV less.
- Sixty per cent of respondents were exposed to alcohol advertisements on a daily basis; 11–12-year-olds were exposed at this level of frequency just as much as older age groups. One third of young people also reported seeing online alcohol advertisements on a daily basis.
- Parents, friends and TV were the most frequently cited sources of information about alcohol. Respondents rarely reported seeking advice from health professionals and doctors.
- Young people liked a wide variety of celebrities from the fields of music, sport and drama. However, they were clear about which celebrities they did not like, and these were also likely to be the celebrities perceived to drink the most.

- Young people thought that, in general, celebrity alcohol behaviour was likely to influence the drinking behaviour of young people in general. However, although there was a small but significant impact of celebrity-inspired behavioural change, (incorrect) estimates of friends' drinking and the perceived acceptability of drinking by friends were much better predictors of respondents' actual drinking. Media use itself (i.e. number of hours using a particular form of media) was not an accurate predictor of alcohol consumption when the effects of other influences were controlled for.
- Different classes of young people could be constructed based upon their alcohol use and celebrity-related behaviours. No clear pattern emerged to support a conclusion that celebrity attachment (and attachment to alcohol-drinking celebrities in particular) was a risk factor for personal alcohol use. However, a small number of young people (n=28) showed both high celebrity attachment and high levels of alcohol-related harm.

4 What is the perspective of media professionals?

This chapter presents the perspectives of individuals (N=12) working within a range of media industries on the production of alcohol-related content (see [Appendix I](#) for details). Although the news media has not been examined in depth in previous chapters, we aimed to examine the *production* of alcohol-related news content.¹⁴ The overall aim of the interviews was to seek an understanding of whether media professionals actively sought to frame alcohol in particular ways in their work, and if they believed the ways in which alcohol is depicted can influence young people in both positive and negative ways. The potential role of the media in providing alcohol-related advice and information to young people was also explored. It must be noted that, due to the small sample, the views and experiences discussed are personal perspectives. As such our analysis should not be considered representative of the media industries, and caution should be taken in generalising the findings.

News media reporting of alcohol

The aims and origins of an alcohol-related story

Alcohol was viewed as a stable news item and an issue that had constant relevance with no seasonal constraints. The main reasons for producing alcohol-related news reports were believed to be providing information, reflecting public opinion and the interests of the audience/readership, and generating debate. It was also suggested that the news media may actively support or oppose specific policies and campaigns (e.g. minimum pricing). The decision to create an alcohol-related story was discussed as arising in both a reactive and active manner. Stories were discussed as being created in reaction to the publication of research, national statistics, policy, and information provided by the public. It was also suggested that an alcohol-related issue would receive more coverage if previous news reports had received a high level of public interest (i.e. they had already been proven to be newsworthy). Stories were also discussed as being instigated by journalists themselves (e.g. investigative journalism into supermarket pricing and student drinking), with alcohol-related issues being chosen based on general observations and individual preferences.

Objective and balanced reporting?

All participants highlighted the importance of producing objective and balanced reporting on alcohol. In order to reduce the risk of a journalist's own views and opinions biasing news reports, participants stated that they aim to present the views of a range of key interest groups. It was also suggested that journalists are obligated to report a balanced account by presenting both sides of an argument. For example, a public health perspective would be reported alongside the viewpoint of the alcohol industry. However, a number of issues appeared to potentially undermine the production of objective and balanced reporting. For example, it was felt that, although differing perspectives are presented, reports may still be more critical of one school of thought; some journalists acknowledged this as problematic. It was also suggested that an issue (e.g. alcohol use) would be presented differently depending on the ideological position of the newspaper. Moreover, it was acknowledged that journalists tend to work on papers that represent their own ideological perspective.

When I approach a story, without doubt, you get both sides to it ... I think the way you do that is by getting different people to speak ... So the way you reflect what you might be thinking is by having

those two sides of the argument, and you try and get other people to reflect those opinions ... like if you think that one side of the story is stronger than the other, then sometimes you might have what we call vox pop for people and you might reflect some of what people say more towards your slant as your story. Which shouldn't happen; it should reflect equally. That's how it could happen, but it shouldn't happen ...

Broadcast news and video journalist

If it is critical or calling for action by someone else, then we'll try and speak to that person or that organisation as well, to obviously give them a fair ... I mean that's our legal kind of obligation, in terms of giving them a right to reply. And if there's any interested parties, ideally kind of get their reaction, even if we don't, aren't able to include everything in the piece, so that it's as balanced as possible ...

News print journalist

Characteristics of newsworthiness

The production of alcohol-related news reports was discussed by participants with reference to the creation of 'newsy', 'interesting', 'shocking' and 'dramatic' stories. A number of factors were identified as important in the production of a newsworthy story and are discussed below.

Whether it's interesting. That's all news is; is it interesting? And which is more interesting? And you're constantly vying with which is the more interesting of your stories that are on your list.

National broadcast news journalist

The use of sources

Participants reported using a variety of sources in the production of alcohol-related news reports. Research and 'expert' views were regarded as an essential component of a news story. For example, academics, alcohol/drug charities, advocacy and pressure groups, doctors, police, publicans, magistrates, youth workers, health professionals and the alcohol industry were noted as credible sources, or sources that the public perceive to be credible. However, it was suggested that some sectors (e.g. health services) may be suspicious of providing information to the news media due to a fear that their views will be taken out of context. Assessing the credibility of such sources was regarded as important, with credibility being judged by individual journalists and through consultation with colleagues. Journalists also highlighted that they developed relationships with key individuals whose credibility they believed was assured (e.g. academics, doctors, charity spokespeople). Establishing who funded research was also seen as important in considering the credibility of a source.

I suppose mostly, we're not dealing with bodies that we've never heard of before. You know, they're established kind of groups, and so that is a certain credibility ...

News print journalist

We would always go to a reputable source. And if for example we're taking statistics from the drinks industry, we would always say somewhere within our script, or within our graphics, the source of that information. And for example, if I suddenly found a report that said that whisky was the North West's favourite drink, I would look at who commissioned the report. And if it turned out to be a whisky industry, then you would think twice about using it ...

National broadcast news journalist

Human interest/case studies

Human interest stories or case studies were regarded as important elements of alcohol-related news reports. For example, a news report would aim to present a personal account from an individual in alcohol treatment

alongside coverage of recently published research evidence. Substance-use charities were mentioned as useful in the recruitment of individuals for case studies. However, it was acknowledged that such case studies may not necessarily provide a representative account.

You will look for the key elements for telling a story. So you nearly always need a case study of some sort. Whether that's a landlord who's struggling, that might be your case study. Or if you're doing a story about public health, you might need to find someone who's got an alcohol problem. Um, so you go and find a case study that illustrates your story, and then you look for sources of information around it; people who are in a position of knowledge ...

National broadcast news journalist

When I have been working [in an advisory role to the news media] they [newspaper reports] haven't exactly been based on evidence. And I think there are some stories, for example there's quite a common story about ... middle-aged women who are addicted to valium. The key to a story is usually that there is a case study. So they'll interview someone who is in this position. Now that'll probably get stapled into a piece about how Britain's middle-class valium addicts are ... you know?

Advisory professional (substance-use charity) and journalist

Negative, new and novel reporting

With the exception of one journalist, news media reporting (including alcohol-related news) was discussed as being predominantly negative in nature. It was felt that, to some extent, there was a public demand for negative news, and, as such, negative news reports provided interesting stories for readers/viewers. While it was suggested that negative reporting reflected alcohol-related problems that exist in society, participants also suggested that positive stories about alcohol use (i.e. reductions in use) were rarely reported due to them being less newsworthy. Alcohol-related news stories were also discussed as having to be perceived as 'novel' and 'new'. It was suggested that one way of achieving this was using new information such as research, policy, laws and campaigns. Although young people's drinking was regarded as a stable news item and as such not necessarily 'new', the 'shock factor' associated with young people's alcohol use was felt to maintain the impression of a new and novel story.

So with alcohol, for example, things that would make me want to do a story on alcohol, something that's with alcohol would be, if something bad has happened as a result, like there's been a death or a crash, or a teenager has decided to speak out about living with alcoholic parents and how horrendous it is, you know, that's really emotional ...

Broadcast news and video journalist

I think it's easy, well how can I say this? It's hard to, sometimes it's hard to make a story, or it's hard to say why something should get a place within a news programme, when it is good behaviour. Not saying there's no such thing as a good news story, but it has to be novel and unusual. Now if you're behaving responsibly and normally, is that newsworthy?

National broadcast news journalist

Newspapers try to reflect what is actually happening in courts, councils, government, on the street and in the home. News, by its very nature, involves the 'new' and the 'out of the ordinary'. For this reason alone, the status quo is not reported as readily as the unusual or the sensational. A newspaper will also seek to reflect the views of its readers and these are often male, middle aged and middle class, or at least perceived to be by journalists. This can lead to a focus on young drinkers and the problems they create ...

Newspaper editor and lecturer in journalism

Visual images

Individuals working within both the print and broadcast news emphasised the importance of visually representing alcohol in news reports. The decision to cover an alcohol-related story within the broadcast news was discussed as ultimately depending on whether the issue provided the opportunity to film and generate interesting images. While participants suggested that visual images within news stories provided essential elements of drama, this was felt to be problematic in terms of providing balanced reporting.

Don't forget we work in television, so you always need pictures ... and so we have some good drama that would work on television, and it's obviously a problem. A reason why we might not do it is because, um, there's not a lot we can film ...

Broadcast news and video journalist

New information and sort of pictures. There's an awful lot of stories which are interesting but if you can't illustrate them then they don't make good TV and tend to get dropped. So if something is suddenly just lots of exteriors of pubs, that's not interesting; you need to get into a venue, you need to see people doing things ...

National broadcast news journalist

Alcohol use by specific groups

Participants acknowledged that news media reporting on alcohol use tends to focus on specific groups (mostly women and young people). The national press were noted as being more likely to accept and reinforce stereotypes as they are more removed from their readership than local newspapers, and consequently pay less regard to audience feedback. At the same time, drinking by some groups was discussed as receiving less media attention due to it essentially being less newsworthy. For example, it was noted that drinking by middle-aged people provides less opportunity for dramatic alcohol-related images.

... pictures of people drinking a bottle of wine at home at night probably aren't quite as interesting as a bunch of kids, hanging around a bus stop, smashing a window at the same time ... it is, again, image driven ... I'm afraid it is about pictures and this is an image-driven media ...

National broadcast news journalist

Women's alcohol use was highlighted as receiving increased news media attention in recent years. This was viewed as reflecting statistics showing an increase in women's drinking. However, it was noted that, although men's alcohol use is also a cause for concern, it receives less press coverage. Women's drinking was felt to receive more attention due to being more 'interesting' and 'newsworthy'. The use of photographs in press reports showing drunken women was also discussed as an example of the sexist nature of news reporting and the importance of dramatic visual imagery. Young people's drinking, and binge drinking in particular, were common stories recalled by participants and were regarded as stable news items. Young people's drinking was discussed as providing the 'shock factor' required for reports to be newsworthy, and, as such, a bias against young people within news media reporting was acknowledged. It was also suggested that the news media rarely report positive stories about young people, which can help reinforce negative stereotypes. The age of a news subject was also noted as an important factor when reporting problematic alcohol use and dependence. For example, it was felt that a substance user under the age of 18 would be reported as innocent and the story framed sympathetically, compared to an individual over the age of 18, who would be portrayed in a negative and stigmatised manner.

I would argue that on my particular programme we would be serving to educate people and tell them the facts about drinking. However, if we are focusing on a particular subgroup, there is no doubt that, that kind of image of young people and alcohol reinforces that stereotype, even if it is minority, it does

reinforce it because you see it more often. But I would also argue that's not what we do on our programme ...

National broadcast news journalist

I think it's the shock factor. And I think it's also an association partly that people can go out and they do see women getting drunk, and they think, "oh yes, I've seen someone", or, "I've done it myself", and they think, "gosh yeah, my mum never used to do this". So maybe they buy into the fact that actually ... and maybe we all do, we all think, "gosh yes, people are getting more drunk and we have more money", and everything fits into place. I think that that's probably why. But I think that their alcohol coverage in the media is very sort of biased towards that. I agree with you, it's always about young people. That's all you ever really hear about alcohol, about young people, the result of drink driving and things like that ...

Broadcast news and video journalist

The portrayal of alcohol on entertainment television

The nature of alcohol representations on television

The portrayal of alcohol use on TV was discussed as changing over time to reflect the changing position of alcohol within society. It was noted that TV representations of drinking were initially limited to reflecting distinctions between the leisure activities of different social groups, i.e. working vs middle vs upper classes: "proper people drank properly, and feckless people drank improperly" (TV producer). However, increased access to television was highlighted as allowing for the expression of differing viewpoints on social issues such as alcohol use. From the 1960s onwards, the portrayal of drinking within the home was noted as an expression of the aspirations of the increasingly wealthy 'working class'. In the early years of television, alcohol use was therefore viewed as being used as a marker of wealth and prosperity. Another shift in the portrayal of alcohol consumption on TV was noted as occurring in the 1970s and 1980s, in response to greater societal awareness of the social and health harms associated with alcohol use. It was suggested that this resulted in influence from the 'health lobby' and an increase in representations of the negative effects of alcohol. More recently, representations were viewed as portraying European drinking styles (e.g. 'cafe culture'), which were supported by contemporaneous policy drivers, and drinking within the night-time environment. This was seen as reflecting recent developments to the urban drinking environment and the use of nightlife to regenerate city centres.

Despite the changing nature of alcohol depictions over time, two distinct types of alcohol representations were defined by participants. Firstly, alcohol was discussed as being portrayed in a subtle manner, often within the background of a storyline (e.g. characters ordering drinks, or as an accessory to other activities (e.g. drinking during a meal or meeting). This type of representation was seen as reflecting real life. Secondly, alcohol use and related consequences were discussed as providing storyline narratives. These representations were discussed as providing dramatic content, as well as a way of raising public awareness of such issues.

Reflecting real-life drinking?

The depiction of normative and social drinking on TV was believed to reflect real-life drinking styles and public attitudes towards drinking. Although some participants suggested that an emphasis on drinking locations as main sites for social interaction reflected real-life situations, it was also suggested that the portrayal of the pub as a community focal point may be somewhat out of date with contemporary drinking styles.

And it is real life. People do tend to socialise, in our society, people do tend to socialise in those kinds of places; in pubs and clubs, and restaurants and, you know, the student union bar ...

Series editor, youth soap

The pub doesn't tend to be the centre of a community anymore. Perhaps 30 years ago, but not now. In that respect it's not realistic that everyone always gathers at the pub every night ... These days people do a lot more drinking at home, but then, that's not interesting to watch. We need our soap characters to interact with each other ...

Freelance scriptwriter, soap operas

Normative and social drinking were discussed as being used as practical devices within TV programmes. For example, alcohol consumption and drinking environments provided social situations which allowed for character interaction. Alcohol use was also discussed as allowing for the movement of a scene and as a way of filling gaps in unscripted moments. Some participants did not view this as problematic as it was seen as reflecting real life. However, others believed that such frequent depiction of alcohol use without a specific narrative purpose should be avoided as it reinforced a normalised image of alcohol use.

And writers, directors, actors, whenever they were looking for unscripted bits of business to fill the vacuum, "err what shall I do here?" It's very easy to say, "he comes in and pours a drink", because that's what everybody got used to ...

TV producer

Well, the reason for having the pub is the social setting. It's a great way of kind of crossing stories; it's a great way of getting people in; it's a very social place. And it is real life ...

Series editor, youth soap

The pub tends to be the central hub of the community. It's part of the wallpaper in a soap opera ...

Freelance scriptwriter, soap operas

Alcohol use as a dramatic and entertaining storyline

Problematic alcohol use and alcohol-related consequences were discussed as providing dramatic storylines. However, the portrayal of alcohol consumption on TV was labelled as uninteresting in itself. Instead it was the behaviours surrounding drinking, and negative consequences, that were highlighted as key to the creation of interesting and dramatic narratives. Moreover, it was suggested that alcohol use provided a useful drama prop in generating radical behaviour and 'interesting' consequences that could be depicted over short periods of time, compared to, for example, smoking, where consequences occur over longer periods. It was also suggested that reflecting the realities of problematic alcohol (and drug) use was not particularly entertaining: "quite often, drug misuse is repetitive and kind of dull" (Series editor, youth soap). A tension was therefore acknowledged between reflecting realistic images of alcohol consumption and problematic use, and the need to provide dramatic and entertaining television. It was also noted that, within the current TV climate of falling audience figures and high levels of competition, alcohol use and related issues would be dramatised and exaggerated in order to make programmes 'watchable'. It was acknowledged that a watchable TV programme was essentially one defined as 'sensational' (TV producer).

Then looking for drama, looking for stories, we'll invent someone that's drunk, you know, their inhibitions drop, and then exaggerate the characters ...

TV producer

We also use binge drinking as a device. It allows characters to do/say things they wouldn't normally have the courage/idiocy to do. It makes good drama ...

Freelance scriptwriter, soap operas

But also, just generally, what is the fun in watching a story about people just having a good time? It's great to have fun, happy stories, where people are just having a good time, but it's not great drama. Because there's no conflict involved in that.

Series editor, youth soap

Participants highlighted that, when alcohol was presented as the main focus of a storyline, it tended to be mostly portrayed in a negative light. This was viewed as an outcome of Ofcom guidelines that prohibit excessive drinking being shown in a 'positive' manner, particularly in youth programmes and when portraying young people. Furthermore, it was believed by some participants that young people's drinking had to be portrayed negatively to prevent depictions of 'safe, sensible and social' drinking by young people being perceived as promoting drinking or underage consumption. Participants discussed how such guidelines were strictly adhered to, and how they consciously worked within the codes to balance positive and negative representations of alcohol use.

Underage drinking is probably one area that we never portray realistically. Editorial guidelines mean we always have to show drastic consequences to a teenager drinking, i.e. being really ill, or admitted to hospital, or failing all their exams or some such. The reality is that teenagers drink all the time without any such consequences but it would be deemed irresponsible to show that ...

Freelance scriptwriter, soap operas

Online alcohol advertising

The one interviewee working within online media suggested that new media such as the Internet was being used by the alcohol industry as it provided cost-effective marketing in a competitive environment. It was also noted that new media allowed advertisers to target advertisements at specific audiences. The participant also asserted that on the website for which he worked, alcohol advertising was strictly monitored and controlled through age verification, which prohibited under-18s from viewing alcohol adverts. It was also noted that, in the participants' experience, alcohol advertisers did not wish to target their products at underage website users.

We're very conscious of where targeted advertising should go to, and we don't see any benefit of it going to anyone under age. Because a) well, it's not legal, and b) they're not the people that the alcohol brands that we work with wanna target, I'm sure ...

Representative from a legal music-sharing website

The influence of media representations of alcohol use: a complex relationship

The majority of participants agreed that the media, including entertainment TV, news media and magazines, may play a role in influencing young people's attitudes to alcohol and their alcohol consumption. Influence was seen as working in two ways: firstly, through the process of normalisation with repetition of alcohol-related news reports reinforcing alcohol use as a normal and expected leisure activity; secondly, it was suggested that the media may deter young people from drinking by reporting alcohol use negatively. It was also felt that the reporting of celebrity drinking could potentially contribute towards the normalisation of alcohol use over time, by presenting intoxication as a normal and acceptable behaviour. However, it was noted that celebrity drinking most often receives negative coverage, and, as the national news 'mocks' celebrities, such reporting may potentially deter young people from drinking. Overall, the reporting of celebrity behaviour, including alcohol use, was regarded as a stable news item due to public interest and demand.

Some news journalists rejected the idea of media influence and suggested that the news media simply reflect societal issues. It was also suggested that it was easy to blame the media with regard to public opinion and behaviour, highlighting the role of individual choice and responsibility in drinking behaviour (National tabloid and broadsheet news journalist). The degree to which TV may influence young people's attitudes to alcohol and their alcohol use was felt to be dependent on the degree to which content resonates with individuals. Participants suggested that TV may influence viewers by reinforcing existing views and providing a means for individuals to self-validate already existing values and behaviours. News media journalists suggested that representations of alcohol on entertainment TV may be more influential on young people than the news, while those working within the TV industry felt the news media was important in influencing public perceptions of alcohol. All participants highlighted that the influence of media depictions of alcohol on young people was

highly complex. For example, it was noted that media influence would occur among a variety of other influential factors (e.g. parental influence, young people's experience of alcohol use) and over time. Participants also suggested that the influence of the media was cumulative, noting that it is difficult to determine the influence of one media source in isolation. With regard to the potential influence of alcohol advertisements on young people's drinking, it was highlighted that alcohol advertising would be one of many influential factors contributing towards young people's initiation into alcohol use, with factors such as the wider cultural context and the family being more influential.

I think it might encourage them, "oh look, how do they get their alcohol, let's try that" or it might encourage them to think, "shit, they look really awful, let's not drink" ... from a news perspective, it's more likely to have a positive impact than a negative one. Because I think, if you watched someone on the news and saw them getting drunk, then you would think "oh that doesn't look very good" ...

Broadcast news and video journalist

I think it's self-reinforcement values, isn't it? I mean the thing about alcohol is that we as a nation, or we as a society, a race, a species, whatever, across the world, we teach our young how to drink, from an early age ... So it all becomes self-reinforcing, so they are eager to turn around and say, "well, you know, everybody at school does it, everybody on TV does it" ...

TV producer

I think probably taken together with all the other media, it probably over time does change people's perceptions. But it's very difficult to say that one particular story would have a specific outcome. Especially, I think, a newspaper story, because it's so transient really and even if someone reads the same newspaper every day, there's no guarantee that they're reading all the articles. I think it's more of a drip-drip process.

News print journalist

The media's role in health promotion and disseminating alcohol-related information to young people

Media professionals differed in their views with regard to the media's role in disseminating alcohol-related information to young people. News media journalists did not feel that providing alcohol-related advice and information was within their remit. The main reason for this was that health-related drinking messages and information about alcohol were not regarded as newsworthy content. Instead, the entertainment media such as TV and magazines were viewed as having more of a role to play in providing such information. However, it was suggested that lighter-hearted 'feature' articles and newspaper magazine supplements could potentially be used in disseminating health advice on issues such as alcohol. Some news journalists also suggested that the news media could contribute to health promotion by reporting the views of certain interest groups/campaigns, or by advocating and endorsing views from a public health perspective (e.g. researchers, doctors, alcohol charities). It was also highlighted that the news print media (particularly the tabloids) have the potential power to portray alcohol (and drug) use in useful ways due to their large public reach. Moreover, changing the stereotypical ways that alcohol misuse is portrayed in the news media was viewed as important in changing negative public opinion and false perceptions of problematic alcohol use.

Well, I don't think that is the role, no. I mean it's not what newspapers are there for ... it's never gonna be the primary purpose, it's not their business ...

News print journalist

Only in the same way they have a role to play with all information that's newsworthy. I don't think young people have a specific right to this information ...

Broadcast journalist

Newspapers do have a social conscience, but not to the extent of damaging readership figures. Campaigns do not sell newspapers directly but they can add to public perception over the longer term ...

Newspaper editor and lecturer in journalism

Participants working within the TV and magazine industry felt that the entrainment media provided a useful means of reaching a large targeted audience with health information on alcohol use. However, it was suggested that unrepresentative or small-scale health issues should not be prioritised as this may give a false impression of impact and prevalence. Youth-targeted media in particular (e.g. youth magazines and youth soaps) were viewed as having a responsibility to convey educational messages to audiences and raise awareness about issues such as alcohol. They were also discussed as having a responsibility not to depict alcohol in a celebratory and normalised manner. One youth magazine in particular held a strong ethos on the way that alcohol should be presented, and had made a deliberate decision to provide alcohol-related advice and information to young people. Participants from youth media provided examples of collaborations with government organisations in presenting drinking messages, and highlighted substance-use charities and government-supported organisations as credible sources used by TV programmes to inform the creation of alcohol-related content.

You can plug into something that the public are already concerned about, they're already thinking about, and if you tell a story, which they will then go, "ah yeah, okay". And what that does, it creates a more sympathetic environment for a health campaign, if you actually listen to it. That's what we do, you know, or that's what we used to do in [TV programme]. But we never set out to change anything ourselves. All we wanted to do was to say, "listen to this, right, this is really interesting. Now listen to this bit because these are the answers" ...

TV producer

But then, with this show, there is a sense that, we've got a young audience and, therefore, part of our role and responsibility is about educating them. I think there is a strong sense of responsibility ...

Series editor, youth soap

I mean our readers are kind of ... 13 to 15, 14 to 17, but we know that we're getting younger people, and you've just to be really responsible ... they're at that point where they're making that decision whether they want to drink or not drink, or how much ... and there's a responsibility to kind of give them the information, so that they're informed, to make whatever is the right decision for them ...

Editor, teenage girls' magazine

Despite TV being viewed as useful in the delivery of alcohol information, it was noted that, as some programmes cover so many 'social issues', writers and producers were struggling to portray these issues with sufficient depth and balance. Overall, participants asserted that providing educative information on alcohol with the aim of health promotion would never be the main aim of TV. Instead, entertainment would always be prioritised.

I think there is a role for it, but it doesn't have to be sanctimonious, it doesn't have to be preachy. I mean [TV programme] is not anywhere near as good as it used to be, in my opinion, because they don't drill into the issues as much ... It's kind of lost the vocational vision that was once behind television ...

TV producer

If you want to know about the consequences of alcohol, you can go on the Internet, you can get a book, you can talk to a health professional. You don't switch on the telly for that. You switch on the telly

to watch these characters doing exciting, interesting, informative maybe, things. But I mean, try as much as possible to kind of bury the messages ...

Series editor, youth soap

I think that when the media tries to send out messages, young people will generally compare it to their own experience. If they go out drinking every weekend with little consequence then they'll see straight through our attempts to educate them by showing a teenager having their stomach pumped ... I think that TV drama is there for entertainment. I think when we try to send out alcohol-related messages we may be able to influence/educate a few people, but I think by far the stronger influence is society itself ...

Freelance scriptwriter, soap operas

Box 4: Key findings: the perspective of media professionals

- Alcohol-related content was viewed as a stable feature of most media throughout the year. The reasons for its inclusion varied, from political or social commentary, supporting policy and generating debate (news media), through to symbolising social interactions, providing dramatic impact (television) and providing alcohol-related information to young people (youth magazines).
- The majority of participants agreed that the media, including media depictions of celebrity drinking, might play a role in influencing attitudes to alcohol and alcohol use. Influence was seen as working in two ways: firstly, the repetition of alcohol-related content was felt to potentially reinforce alcohol use as a cultural 'norm'; secondly, it was suggested that the media may deter young people from drinking by reporting alcohol use negatively.
- While news media journalists suggested that TV representations of alcohol may be more influential on young people than news, those working within the TV industry felt that print media was important in influencing public perceptions of alcohol.
- News media reporting on alcohol use was seen as focusing on specific groups (mostly women and young people). Young people's and women's drinking was discussed as providing the 'shock factor' required for reports to be newsworthy. It was also suggested that the news media rarely report positive stories about young people, and that this can help reinforce negative stereotypes.
- News media journalists did not feel that providing alcohol-related advice and information was within their remit. Some participants did suggest that the news media could contribute to health promotion by reporting the views of certain interest groups/campaigns, or by advocating the public health perspective.
- Providing realistic representations of alcohol use on TV was felt to be difficult within an industry that primarily aims to entertain. Participants asserted that providing educative information on alcohol with the aim of health promotion would never be the main aim of TV. Entertainment would always be prioritised.
- Youth-targeted media in particular (e.g. youth magazines and youth soaps) were viewed as having a responsibility to convey educational messages to audiences and raise awareness about issues such as alcohol.

5 Conclusions and implications of the research

Many factors are known to influence young people's alcohol-related beliefs and behaviour. This research explored the role of the media in this relationship. Alcohol and drinking appeared to be common in media consumed by young people, with a variety of alcohol-related depictions present across the different media sources. However, young people were sophisticated media consumers and had good insight into how particular representations of alcohol are constructed. Subsequently, celebrities, who are so often blamed for providing 'bad examples' of behaviour to young people, appear to have less of an impact on behaviour than friends. Young people were exposed to subtle and selective representations of alcohol use and its consequences more frequently than direct advertising.

Comprehensive responses to alcohol require a more carefully considered and long-term examination of the impact of media products on young people and wider society. Addressing young people's media use or alcohol representations in the media in isolation (e.g. through initiatives such as advertising watersheds or bans) is not an adequate approach to changing young people's drinking practices. Instead, such initiatives need to be part of a multi-component response.

The normalisation and transmission of alcohol use

In all forms of media examined, alcohol was predominantly presented as a normalised activity that accompanied, if not defined, a wide variety of social events. Reasons for its use were mostly pro-social, although a minority reflected alcohol dependence and personal crisis management (e.g. self-medication for stress). When references were made to negative consequences of alcohol, they tended to focus upon the more extreme effects such as alcohol dependence and violence. Young people and media professionals suggested that alcohol was included in TV programmes both to reflect real life and to add elements of drama and comedy. Young people also suggested that showing the harms and effects of alcohol was a way of informing young people of the possible dangers associated with alcohol use. However, exclusively focusing on the negative effects of alcohol was also viewed as unrealistic by young people, who felt that, in reality, alcohol use does not always involve negative experiences. Overall, young people felt that TV in particular should provide a balanced view of alcohol use, showing both the positive side of drinking and the possible subtle negative effects (e.g. hangovers, falls, inappropriate or embarrassing behaviour).

Our data cannot tell us directly whether alcohol use has been normalised through the media, but classic social learning theories (Biddle, *et al.*, 1980) indicate that norms around alcohol are established in two main ways: firstly, individuals believe themselves to be different from their peers in their drinking (i.e. they believe they are light drinkers whereas others are heavy drinkers); and secondly, individuals believe that their own particular patterns of alcohol behaviour occur more frequently than they actually do (i.e. they drink heavily and so think everyone else also does). Environments or cultures which support these views are likely to reinforce these misperceptions. This has one of several effects on beliefs about health behaviours such as alcohol use. Firstly, beliefs are established around the types of behaviour that other people exhibit and the number of people that conduct them. Secondly, beliefs are established around whether a particular behaviour is acceptable to the individual and wider society. Inaccurate and frequent alcohol representations in the media are therefore likely to contribute to this normalisation process.

Both young people and media professionals were unsure as to whether they believed that media representations of alcohol (including consumption by celebrities) influenced young people's attitudes towards alcohol and their alcohol consumption. Media reporting of celebrity alcohol use and normative depictions of alcohol use were seen as reinforcing the idea that drinking alcohol was an acceptable, unproblematic and

normalised activity. They also suggested portrayals of intoxication and related negative behaviour held the ability to deter young people from alcohol use. However, it was also noted that portrayals of intoxication and related negative behaviour may transmit the message that such behaviour is also common and acceptable. A 'third-person effect' was evident in discussions with participants who suggested that the media and celebrities influenced 'other' young people or 'kids', but not themselves. Both young people and media professionals felt that other factors, such as peers and parents, were more influential in young people's initiation into alcohol use than the media and celebrities.

Our survey data also indicated that one of the best predictors of personal alcohol use was not media use *per se*, or sense of attachment to celebrities associated with alcohol use, but the belief that friends drank frequently. The key question, therefore, is how these beliefs about friends' drinking arose? The simplest explanation is that individuals tend to socialise, or seek out friendships, with other people who exhibit (or at least give the impression that they exhibit) identical or desirable behaviours (e.g. alcohol use). Friends' drinking could therefore be seen as an accurate reflection of survey respondents' own alcohol use. Another more complex reason is that, as outlined above, through the establishment of norms (partly, but not exclusively attributed to media representations), young people held the false perception that their friends were heavier drinkers than themselves.

Therefore, we must ask, what is the effect of presenting a selective view of alcohol use in the media? In contrast to news reports, which provide a negative and extreme view of adverse alcohol use outcomes, focusing on death, violence, drink driving and long-term health impacts (see Nicholls, 2010, and confirmed by our interviews with media professionals), young people are predominantly exposed to consequence-free depictions of alcohol use in the entertainment media. Although representations of extreme negative outcomes of alcohol use may reinforce commitments not to drink alcohol to excess in some individuals, there is the possibility that such depictions may also provoke a defence mechanism in others, whereby they 'explain away' the messages received as not being relevant to their particular behaviour or circumstances. Young people may therefore set artificial upper limits on their alcohol behaviour according to these extreme negative outcomes, without realising that harm is still associated with relatively lighter and apparently unproblematic patterns of use.

Celebrity behaviour is unlikely to have a direct influence on young people's alcohol consumption

A key feature of the drinking depictions in magazines read by young people was an emphasis on celebrity alcohol use, which was reported in both a positive (e.g. glamorous) and negative manner (e.g. alcohol dependence). A fascination with celebrity alcohol use in magazines and the news media was identified by young people. Media professionals suggested that magazines and newspapers (particularly the tabloids) focused on celebrity behaviour, including alcohol use, due to public interest and demand. Young people were extremely 'celebrity literate' and knowledgeable about celebrities' alcohol-related behaviour, and held negative views towards those celebrities who were shown drinking to intoxication in the media. In contrast, images of casual drinking by celebrities were regarded as unproblematic, which suggested that alcohol use must be seen to be extreme and excessive to be labelled problematic.

Within the survey findings, and contrary to their declared opinions, measures of celebrity attachment (i.e. the time and effort spent on pursuing the celebrity relationship, particularly alcohol-using celebrities) did not predict young people's personal alcohol use. Although we asked young people about only one favourite celebrity, and young people are likely to admire a range of famous individuals, we concluded that celebrities were admired for their talents and not for their alcohol use behaviours. Young people were therefore unlikely to model unhealthy behaviours on the activities of celebrities.

Young people are critical and sophisticated media consumers

An important finding of the research was that young people made sophisticated assessments regarding the nature, production and interpretation of media representations of alcohol. They were critical and sceptical

towards the reporting of celebrity alcohol use, and were aware that both magazines and newspapers created exaggerated stories in order to attract readers and make profits. This was one of the main reasons why they did not trust magazine and newspaper accounts of celebrity behaviour. Moreover, they were aware that the main reason for the inclusion of alcohol use on television was to give the impression of reality, yet, at the same time, intoxication was regarded as a way of adding drama to TV programmes to increase audience viewing figures. Such scepticism and critical media literacy may have implications for the degree to which images of alcohol use can actually shape young people's attitudes towards alcohol.

Media representations of alcohol are highly gendered

It was noticeable that media representations of alcohol, particularly within magazines, were highly gendered in nature. This was also reflected in conversations with young people, in which gender was central to discussions about drinking. In female-targeted magazines, drinking was aligned with health, diet, glamour and beauty, most often with reference to celebrity. In male-targeted magazines, alcohol use was associated with masculine activities and presented as being embedded in male leisure and social interaction. Most young people rejected magazine content that suggested alcohol use is a key aspect of masculine identity, yet acknowledged that, in real-life drinking situations, men may still feel pressured to drink alcohol to symbolise their masculinity, and that magazines may add to this pressure. There was also an absence of references to alcohol-related effects and consequences, and to drinking little, in men's magazines.

Women's alcohol use was portrayed as being relatively more problematic than men's. In men's magazines, female drinkers were portrayed as unfeminine, vulnerable, emotional and as individuals engaging in sexual activity when drunk. Some young people were critical of the way that drinking by females (including celebrities) received more negative media reporting than men's drinking, and suggested that these images reflected unequal attitudes towards men's and women's drinking in general. Societal norms that cause excessive use of alcohol to be more stigmatising for women than for men were thus being reinforced through these media images of women's drinking.

Young people are frequently exposed to 'official' and 'unofficial' alcohol advertising

Although this study was not intended to be an in-depth analysis of alcohol marketing (for a review see Gordon, *et al.*, 2010b), it was clear that young people were frequently exposed to alcohol adverts through their media use. Our survey data showed that, regardless of age, 60% of young people reported being exposed to alcohol adverts on a daily basis through TV, 35.9% through the Internet and 25% through magazine readership. Alcohol advertising was a common feature in magazines and TV commercials, as were adverts which featured alcohol use in the promotion of non-alcoholic consumer items (e.g. DIY stores). SNS and YouTube were being used by alcohol producers to display official alcohol advertising. Users of SNS, including young people, were also 'advertising' alcohol brands and intoxication through the creation of user-generated content that promoted and displayed brand images. On sites such as Facebook, these 'informal' pages were almost visually identical to official industry pages, but tended not to display links to sources of alcohol information such as Drinkaware. Although not measured in this research, the nature of alcohol advertising (e.g. gender alignment, cultural association) and the extent to which young people find alcohol adverts appealing is likely to influence young people's drinking over time.

Young people were also exposed to alcohol adverts through the sponsorship of sports (e.g. football) and events (e.g. music festivals), and believed alcohol brands sponsored football due to alcohol being an integral element of football fandom and sports fandom in general. The sponsorship of leisure activities such as sport and music is an important part of the overall alcohol marketing mix, and although young people may not recognise that they are influenced, this type of advertising contributes to the overall normalisation of alcohol branding.

A large body of research confirms links between the total amount of exposure to alcohol advertising and young people's drinking behaviour (Anderson, *et al.*, 2009; Smith and Foxcroft, 2009b; Gordon, *et al.*,

2010a, 2010b), and so the extension of alcohol advertising through online media such as SNS is of concern. Online age verification devices are being used by alcohol producers to try to prevent those under the age of 18 from being exposed to alcohol advertisements on SNS and official brand websites. However, age verification itself is not an effective deterrent to underage visitors, as users can easily enter a fictitious age to override the restrictions. Participants in our own research who were aged under 13 had SNS profile pages, despite the fact that, in theory, these pages cannot be set up by those under 13; this shows that young people are able to consume media despite age restrictions.

Do the media have a role in alcohol-related health promotion?

Media producers should not assume they are presenting balanced and responsible portrayals of alcohol and young people's drinking simply by adhering to codes of conduct (e.g. ASA, Ofcom, Portman Group). A lack of official educative information on alcohol use within media consumed by young people suggests that the mass media is not currently being used to a great extent in the promotion of alcohol-related health messages. Teen magazines did feature alcohol-related advice and SNS were being used by alcohol campaigns in the promotion of 'sensible drinking' messages. However, such content was relatively scarce compared to other pro-normative and advertising messages presented. Overall, health-related drinking messages were deemed not to be newsworthy or of entertainment value by both young people and media professionals. Although it was suggested that the media might help raise awareness of social issues such as alcohol, there is a lack of evidence to suggest that current approaches lead to behavioural change (Boots and Midford, 2003; Babor, *et al.*, 2010).

Considerations for policy and practice

The research has a number of considerations for policy and practice:

- **Overall, media, in all its forms, is just one among many influences upon young people's drinking behaviour.** Therefore, adopting alcohol policies solely based on media regulation is unlikely to prevent alcohol use and related harm. Focusing on media controls in isolation and ignoring wider societal and cultural factors (e.g. peers) is not an adequate or effective way of reducing alcohol-related harm in young people. Unlike advertising bans, prohibiting all alcohol depictions in the entertainment and news media is unrealistic, compromises producers' creativity, and may reduce young people's entertainment opportunities.
- **There are limits to the extent to which current alcohol advertising regulations can prevent young people from being exposed to alcohol advertising.** Alcohol advertising is currently subject to self-regulation (ASA, 2009). Our research shows that young people are easily able to access media targeted at adults and are therefore exposed to alcohol advertisements before and after the TV watershed (9pm). This poses problems for advertising regulators. Although a pre-watershed advertising ban would reduce the total exposure to advertisements, it is important to recognise that under-18s are frequently viewing TV post-watershed and are able to access late-night TV programmes through digital recording devices and the Internet. If a total TV alcohol advertising ban is introduced in the UK, young people will still be able to access international advertising via the Internet.
- **Online alcohol advertising and depictions of alcohol pose particular challenges to policy-makers and the alcohol industry.** Regulation and self-regulation face strong challenges from the very nature of the Internet, where content is easily shared and globalised. It is one of the great values of the Internet that users can produce and share their own content. However, informal 'advertising' techniques initiated by Internet users challenge industry or regulatory body attempts to control exposure to alcohol marketing. The industry needs to clearly differentiate its own marketing activities from that of consumers and support activities that seek to reduce the impact of 'informal' advertising.

- **Young people are active media consumers and often reject simplistic and normalised messages about alcohol and related harms.** Such scepticism and critical media literacy may have implications for the degree to which images of alcohol use can actually shape young people's attitudes towards alcohol. Teaching and building upon these existing media literacy skills in primary and secondary schools will therefore support young people in thinking critically about how and why alcohol is represented in the media, and how these representations may influence them to drink in particular ways.
- **The media can have an important role in health promotion, but this requires rethinking of existing strategies.** Entertainment media generally depict alcohol as a mundane, consequence-free activity, which may be equally important as direct advertising upon young people's alcohol use behaviours. Inserting public health messages into entertainment media is unlikely to be effective while they are countered by predominantly pro-normalisation messages and alcohol advertising. For media producers, the challenge is to provide consistent, practical and factually accurate alcohol advice and content for all ages, without being undermined by pressures to produce an 'entertaining' story. It is no easy task to integrate the two approaches, and viewers are unlikely to be entertained by purely factual content. If the media can overcome these challenges they may be able to play a useful role by supporting efforts to reduce alcohol-related harms through social marketing or advocacy.
- **Discussion is required regarding the way in which the media respond to, and depict, alcohol use.** Depicting alcohol responsibly in the media should not just be seen as a legal 'tick box' exercise by producers and regulators. Current regulators' codes of conduct might be a useful starting point but these require development. Media professionals themselves should be encouraged to think about the wider potential impact of their work on health and social issues. To this end, it is important that there is discussion between media producers, health and social care professionals, regulators, the alcohol industry and young people to establish whether it is feasible and acceptable to change the nature of alcohol content, and whether there is common ground on which to develop new and innovative media-based alcohol campaigns.

Notes

- 1 It must be acknowledged that the media are key to the rise of celebrity through the commoditisation and promotion of the individual via representation and the circulation of images (Turner, 2004; Evans, 2005).
- 2 It should be noted that these findings informed the qualitative research with young people. As such, the chapter provides an overview of the type of depictions young people were asked to discuss in the focus groups (findings presented in Chapter 2).
- 3 Footballer's wife or girlfriend.
- 4 Glamour models are topless female models presented within male-targeted publications.
- 5 *Shameless*, *The Simpsons* and *Coronation Street* were the only programmes in which alcohol featured as a storyline narrative.
- 6 By *alcohol-related advertisements* we are referring to *advertisements for alcohol*, as well as advertisements where alcohol features i.e. in the background or as a key feature of the advertisement.
- 7 Spoofs are mocking imitations of social marketing campaigns produced by members of the public.
- 8 Reality TV is a television genre that usually follows the lives of 'ordinary' people, as well as 'celebrities', in both everyday and extraordinary situations. The content is presented as unscripted and as reflecting 'real-life' situations and interactions.
- 9 Images of the following celebrities were shown in the focus groups: Katie Price (model), Kerry Katona (former singer and reality TV participant), Lindsay Lohan (actress), Alex Gerrard (footballer's wife), Amy Winehouse (singer), Paris Hilton (socialite), Lilly Allen (singer), Sarah Harding (singer), Kate Moss (model), Ricky Hatton (boxer), Pete Doherty (singer), Gavin Henson (rugby player), Jack Tweed (reality TV participant), Danny Dyer (actor).
- 10 The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) began regulating Internet advertising for UK companies on 1 March 2011.
- 11 See Biddle, *et al.* (1980), for one of the earliest discussions of this topic and McAlaney, *et al.* (2010) for a recent UK guide on how to incorporate social norms approaches into health and social practice.
- 12 See Matsueda (1988).
- 13 See, for example, Siegel, L.J. (2008) for chapters on differential reinforcement.
- 14 At the start of the project it became known to us that other research was being conducted on the UK news media's portrayal of alcohol. This analysis showed that negative outcomes and celebrity alcohol use are frequently portrayed in the news media. (For a thorough analysis of the UK news media's portrayal of alcohol, see Nicholls, 2009, 2010.) We therefore decided not to repeat this work, but aimed to extend it by interviewing news journalists on the production of alcohol-related content.
- 15 Smirnoff, After Shock, Jägermeister, Absolut Vodka, Stella Artois, Budweiser, Carling, Carlsberg, Coors, Lambrini, Jacob's Creek, Magners, Strongbow, WKD.

16 This was the median age of the study's target group.

17 <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/tellus-3-survey-of-views-of-children-and-young-people>

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Appendix I

Study design and methodology

The research was conducted in three stages of data collection and adopted both qualitative and quantitative methods. Methods used included content analysis (TV, magazines and SNS), focus groups and a survey questionnaire with young people, and interviews with media professionals. The research focused on young people aged 11–18 (school years 7–13; see [Table 6](#)) attending secondary schools, colleges and pupil referral units in a metropolitan county in the North West of England. The research was conducted in a metropolitan county in the North West of England. The specific location remains unnamed in the report to protect the confidentiality of the participating schools and young people. An overview of the methods employed in each stage of the project is provided below.

Table 6: Participating school years and corresponding age ranges

School year	Age of pupils
7	11–12
8	12–13
9	13–14
10	14–15
11	15–16
12	16–17
13	17–18

Stage 1: Content analysis of alcohol in media consumed by young people

Sample

In the first stage of the study, a content analysis of alcohol depictions in media consumed by young people was conducted. The findings informed the subsequent primary research with young people (Stage 2). Previous studies have demonstrated that an initial examination of media content is an essential starting point in research aiming to illustrate the potential role of the media in influencing young people's attitudes to alcohol and drinking. Carefully selecting media content for analysis is therefore a crucial element of any study aiming to provide empirical findings on the potential influence of media coverage (Hansen and Gunter, 2007). A variety of existing data sources (National Literacy Trust, 2005, 2008; Ofcom, 2008; ABC, 2009; Broadcasters' Audience Research Board, 2009; National Readership Survey, 2009) and a survey questionnaire of school pupils (n=194) were used to explore what types of media young people consume. In combination with existing data, the survey results provided a clear picture of what magazines, TV programmes and SNS are popular among young people. While young people do consume news (i.e. print and broadcast news), it is less popular than other forms of media (Ofcom 2009; Hargreaves and Thomas, 2002). Moreover, at the time of data collection, it became known to us that other research was being conducted on the news media's portrayal of alcohol which showed that negative outcomes and celebrity (particularly female) alcohol use were most often portrayed, and that health has become central to the framing of alcohol in news stories (Nicholls, 2009, 2010). We therefore decided not to repeat this other work, but aimed to extend it by interviewing news journalists on the production of alcohol-related content (Stage 3).

Using a combination of survey results and existing data, specific magazines, television programmes and SNS were selected for analysis. The sample of magazines (N=23) (see [Table 7](#) in this Appendix) were collected over a one-month period in April–May 2009. Each broadcasted episode (N=41) of the top ten most popular TV

programmes (see Table 8) was recorded over a one-week period (Monday 27 April–Sunday 3 May 2009), generating 20 hours of TV footage. Websites (Facebook, Myspace, Bebo, YouTube and alcohol brand websites¹⁵) (see Table 9 in this Appendix) were analysed on the same day, due to the constantly changing nature of online content.

Table 7: Sample of magazines analysed

Magazine (N=13)	Number of copies included in the sample (N=23)	Target audience	Magazine weekly circulation figures (ABC, 2009)	Young people's media consumption questionnaire (read once or more in the last two weeks) (N=194)
Closer	2	Women, adults	529,671	21.2%
Glamour	2	Women, adults	498,840	12.4%
OK!	2	Women, adults	480,071	26.8%
Heat	2	Women, adults	457,082	23.3%
Hello	2	Women, adults	354,459	9.3%
FHM	1	Men, adults	243,299	8.8%
Nuts	2	Men, adults	228,093	14.9%
BBC Top Gear	1	Men, adults	180,620	13.4%
Sugar	2	Teenage girls	151,661	7.7%
Zoo	2	Men, adults	141,750	10.3%
Bliss	2	Teenage girls	88,985	12.9%
Match	1	Teenage boys	80,040	17.0%
NME	2	Men, adults	44,897	11.3%

Table 8: Sample of TV programmes analysed

Programme	BARB data (audience viewing figures per episode)		Young people's media consumption questionnaire (N=194)
	10–15 years	16–19 years	Young people aged 11–18 years (viewed once or more in the last two weeks)
EastEnders	558,824	251,946	51.0%
Coronation Street	452,516	244,568	53.6%
The Simpsons	312,584	143,299	71.1%
Emmerdale	230,368	166,238	32.5%
The Bill	264,838	124,347	6.2%
Skins	100,795	246,822	39.7%
Friends	N/A	67,148	52.6%
Shameless	N/A	142,481	49.5%
Hollyoaks	N/A	107,712	45.9%
Match of the Day	N/A	109,492	39.2%

Table 9: Sample of SNS/video-sharing websites analysed

Website	Most popular SNS used by 8–17-year-olds (N=653) (Ofcom, 2008)	Young people’s media consumption survey results (used once or more in the last two weeks) (N=194)
YouTube	N/A	86.2%
Facebook	18%	77.2%
Myspace	37%	54.5%
Bebo	63%	39.3%

Analysing magazines and TV programme content

Content analysis was used as a method of analysing the various media sources (Holsti, 1969; Altheide, 1996; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Definitions of content analysis usually focus on differentiating between quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative content analysis involves coding text into explicit categories, which are then analysed using descriptive statistics. Pre-determined coding frames were developed for both the magazine and TV analysis, which were informed by the broad question, ‘Who is portrayed as drinking what, where, with whom, for what reasons and with what effects and responses?’ Addressing this broad question would provide a picture of the social context in which drinking was positioned in the magazines and TV programmes (Van den Bulck, *et al.*, 2008). Drinkers’ demographics, the type of alcohol consumed, the location and social dimension of drinking, alcohol effects/consequences, and responses to alcohol use were recorded. The appearance of drugs, cigarettes and non-alcoholic beverages were also logged for comparative purposes. For the TV analysis, the number of scenes in which an alcohol representation appeared was recorded to allow comparison between genres. A new scene was defined as occurring when a storyline or narrative jumps to a different time or when the camera moves to a different narrative location. Scenes were coded for *drinking acts* and/or *visual references* (see Table 10). Descriptive and Chi square statistics were conducted using SPSS 17. Significant associations are presented and were tested at the 0.05 level.

Table 10: Units of analysis for TV programmes

Visual references	Alcohol-related images such as unattended drinking vessels, beer pumps and alcohol advertising on football shirts and billboards.
Drinking acts	
Active use	A character being depicted as drinking an alcoholic beverage or holding one to the mouth.
Implied use (including verbal implied)	Preparations to drink such as pouring, accepting, holding a drink or having one within reach.

Using quantitative content analysis alone is problematic as it extracts the data from the wider content of the text, and cannot fully grasp the nature of the representations in the context in which they are framed (Lindolf, 1995; Richardson, 2007). Qualitative content analysis differs in that it goes beyond frequency counts to examine the language and nature of the text through the systematic classification of coding and theme identification (Holsti, 1969; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). A qualitative content analysis was initially conducted separately from the quantitative analysis, with the aim of adding more contextual meaning to the quantitative results. Analysis consisted of reading and re-reading individual texts in depth, before cross-referencing and systematically establishing and examining themes across the texts using matrix tables (Altheide, 1996).

In summary, both quantitative and qualitative content analysis were used to examine the extent and nature of alcohol depictions and specific questions posed prior to data analysis, while also allowing themes to

emerge from the texts that had not been anticipated. The quantitative and qualitative data may differ in nature yet relate to the same texts, and, as such, should be read and interpreted as functioning alongside each other.

Analysing SNS and video-sharing sites

Given the widespread popularity of SNS and video-sharing sites and their youth appeal, the following websites were chosen for analysis: Facebook, Myspace, Bebo and YouTube (Ofcom, 2008; Brooks, 2010, ClickyMedia, 2010a, 2010b; YouTube, 2010). Each SNS was searched using four key terms derived via consultation with experts working in the area of young people's alcohol use. The researcher logged into the SNS with the fictitious age of 14¹⁶, to ensure that the search results were consistent with those viewed by a young person. For SNS, the total number of results were logged and the top ten results for each search term recorded for further examination (N=120, 40 pages per SNS). Each website was also searched using a list of leading alcohol brands to gain insight into the extent and nature of alcohol advertising on SNS. These brands were selected based on previous research (Brooks, 2010; EUCAM, 2010; House of Commons Health Committee, 2010) and conversations with young people about their drinking preferences. We were particularly interested in whether the images included official or user-generated content, alcohol sale links and links to alcohol-related health information.

The age verification system used by Facebook to ensure young people under the age of 18 are not exposed to official alcohol advertisements was also examined using a fictitious account for an underage user. For YouTube, a selection of alcohol brand search terms were used to retrieve UK videos relating to specific brands. The top ten most viewed video clips were also screened for alcohol content. We were also interested in whether SNS and YouTube were being used by official alcohol-related campaigns (e.g. Drinkaware, Talk to Frank) and therefore searched for their presence on the websites. Official websites for leading alcohol producers were also examined for the display of health information and the use of age verification devices.

Stage 2: Primary research with young people

Accessing participants

Recruitment letters (n=105) detailing the research aims were sent to head teachers and principals of all secondary schools (both state and private), colleges and pupil referral units (PRU) in the study site. Five schools responded in the first instance, and other schools located in specific Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintiles were followed up. We were therefore able to recruit nine education establishments from each of the five IMD quintiles. The sample included schools without a specified religion, Catholic schools, Jewish schools, mixed schools, one all-boys school and one all-girls school (see [Table 11](#) in this Appendix).

Survey questionnaire

In each school, one randomly selected, mixed-ability class from each school year group (Years 7–13, ages 11–18) took part. Young people in alternative education (e.g. PRUs, vocational training centres) were included in order to sample young people not attending mainstream education. Surveys were conducted during school time and administered by researchers under exam conditions. Of the 1,060 school pupils invited to take part, 19 opted not to participate (1.8%).

The survey was initially piloted with 100 participants, and final amendments were made before the survey was launched. The survey was split into separate sections, each focusing on a different topic. Where possible, validated questionnaires were used, although for some novel and exploratory topics, researcher-derived questions were used. Items and scales used included:

Table 11: Sample of schools participating in the research

Number of school	Establishment category	Religion	Sex	IMD quintile	Number of classes	Age range	Number of participants (final sample)
1	Secondary school	N/A	Mixed	1	5	11–16	153
2	Secondary school and sixth-form college	N/A	Mixed	1	13	16–18	182
3	Secondary school	Jewish	All boys	2	4	11–15	80
4	Further Education college	N/A	Mixed	4	5	16–18	91
5	Secondary school and sixth-form college	Catholic	Mixed	3	5	11–16	131
6	Pupil referral unit	N/A	Mixed	3	2	14–15	7
7	Secondary school	Catholic	Mixed	3	2	11–16	66
8	Secondary school and sixth-form college	Catholic	All girls	5	6	11–18	133
9	Secondary school	N/A	Mixed	5	4	11–16	98
N=9					N=46		N=941

- **Demographics and background characteristics:** participants' demographics (age, gender, ethnicity, religion), weekly income (e.g. pocket money, part-time employment), participation in religious services outside of school, and extra-curricular activities.
- **Media:** media consumption questions were developed using the Ofsted/DCSF Tellus3 survey.¹⁷ This covered young people's frequency of Internet use, magazine readership and TV viewing. Young people were also asked questions on other topics such as whether they should be allowed to view media they wish to consume, questions related to perceived 'media effects' and their opinions on the extent of the media's reporting on celebrities.
- **Celebrity attachment:** the survey aimed to identify the celebrities that young people identified with, and whether they believed that such celebrities were associated with alcohol use. Celebrity attachment was assessed through a number of items. Using a five-point Likert scale they rated their strength of attraction, the size of personal investment in the celebrity (monetary and time expenditure) and how seriously they took their relationship with the celebrity. Four items were then included to provide a measure of celebrity attachment: whether the respondent had tried to change aspects of their personality, physical appearance,

or attitudes and personal values to emulate the celebrity; and whether the celebrity's lifestyle had ever persuaded them to pursue a particular activity. A values checklist also assessed which of nine values or beliefs the participant believed the celebrity had influenced (e.g. education, family, alcohol use, sex, morality). Two further items assessed participants' belief regarding the extent to which they shared an intimate connection with their favourite celebrity (measure of knowing the celebrity; perceived closeness) and two items assessed the extent to which participants believed that the celebrity had influenced their sense of identity. Participants were also asked if they had ever seen or heard about their favourite celebrity drinking through the media.

- **Alcohol use:** assessment of alcohol use behaviours included identification of heavy episodic drinking (drinking five or more alcoholic drinks in one session, which is one frequently used measure of 'binge drinking') and frequency of drinking. The type of alcohol consumed, location of drinking, reasons for drinking/abstaining and access to alcohol were also examined. Young people's experience of alcohol-related harm (through their own and others' use) was also measured. Alcohol norms were examined in relation to the perceived drinking of parents, friends, teachers and favourite celebrity, and the perceived reactions of these individuals to the participants' own drinking. Additional questions addressed participants' preferred sources of alcohol information. Young people's exposure to alcohol advertising was also measured, as were their attitudes towards the extent to which they believed the media influenced young people's drinking. For some analyses we computed a composite 'alcohol involvement' indicator, which comprised scores based on age of initiation, frequency of use, frequency of heavy episodic drinking, and harm from own and others' drinking. The use of this indicator reduced the chances of incurring statistical biases as a result of multiple testing.

Data analysis

The data obtained from the surveys was analysed in two main ways:

- 1 Firstly, we ran simple descriptive statistics (Chapter 3) on all the data, which allowed for a greater understanding of the background of the sample, the types of media they were exposed to, the identification and attachment to celebrities, and their alcohol use patterns and behaviours. Regression analysis was then used to identify those factors and constructs which best predicted particular behaviours.
- 2 Secondly, we used a technique called Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) to identify particular subpopulations of young people who were similar to one another with respect to the relationships between the variables of interest (e.g. alcohol use, celebrity attachment), but different from individuals in other subpopulations. Two separate LPA analyses were conducted. The first sought to identify subpopulations based on alcohol use characteristics, and the second on the basis of participants' relationship to, and response to, celebrities. This was then followed up by analysing differences between groups on their responses to key variables of interest. This allowed us to gain a better understanding of the diverse nature of young people's alcohol use, and to see whether this was also reflected in their media use, and the types of celebrity that they admired and felt close to.

Focus groups with young people

Young people from four of the educational establishments participating in the survey were recruited to take part in focus groups. In addition, a vocational training centre for young people aged 16–18 also participated. Participating schools were located from low-, high- and mid-point IMD quintiles. A total of 15 focus groups were conducted with 114 individuals between March and September 2010. Focus groups were conducted during school hours and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The number of participants in each group ranged from 3 to 12 and included both mixed- and single-sex groups (see [Table 12](#) in this Appendix).

Table 12: Focus group sample

Number of focus group	Number of participants	IMD quintile	Age range	Sex
1	5	5	14–15	Boys only
2	8	5	11–12	Boys only
3	8	5	13	Boys only
4	7	5	13–14	Boys only
5	6	1	16–18	Girls only
6	6	3	14–15	Girls only
7	8	3	17	Mixed
8	3	3	14–16	Mixed
9	12	3	15–17	Mixed
10	8	3	17–18	Mixed
11	11	5	11–12	Mixed
12	12	5	12–13	Mixed
13	11	5	13–14	Mixed
14	3	5	13	Mixed
15	6	5	12–13	Mixed
N=15	N=114			

Focus groups were conducted in same-age groups to facilitate discussion and reduce any intimidation. Group discussions were also used to provide a variety of views on the same subject and to gain insight into young people's shared meanings and understandings (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996; Eder and Ferguson, 2003; Heath, *et al.*, 2009). A representative selection of media content (e.g. magazine articles, TV programme clips) depicting alcohol was used in the focus groups in order to instigate conversation and gain an understanding of young people's interpretations. In practical terms, group interviews provide access to a large sample of young people in shorter periods of time. However, there are some limitations in conducting group interviews, such as reluctance among some participants to express their views in group settings, especially when discussing sensitive issues such as (underage) drinking (Gibbs, 1997; Homan, 1991; Melrose, *et al.*, 2007; Bagnoli and Clark, 2010). However, all young people were familiar with each other and used to interacting and engaging in discussions with one another within the school context. A questionnaire was completed by each focus group participant in order to provide information on demographics and alcohol use. The questionnaire data was analysed using descriptive statistical tests conducted in SPSS 17.

Sample details

A total of 114 young people participated in the focus groups. The age of participants ranged from 11 to 18 years and the average age was 14.2 years. Of the sample, 60.5% (n=69) were male and 39.5% (n=45) female. The majority of the sample were White British (93%, n=106) and had drunk alcohol (84.2%, n=96). The age at which participants had first drunk alcohol ranged from 8 to 15 years and the average age of alcohol initiation was 12.1 years. Of those who reported frequency of alcohol use (n=105), 34.3% (n=36) drank a few times a year (e.g. on special occasions), 20% (n=21) once a month, 19.1% (n=20) every two weeks, 8.6% (n=9) once a week and 7.6% (n=8) twice a week. None reported drinking every day or nearly. Of those who had drunk alcohol, 55.2% (n=53) were male and 44.8% (n=43) female. Out of the full sample, 76.8% of males had drunk alcohol compared to 95.6% of females.

Stage 3: Interviews with media professionals

In addition to the research with young people, the project consulted individuals working in the media industries at the national and local level. A total of twelve interviews were conducted with individuals in a number of professional roles (see [Table 13](#) in this Appendix). These included individuals working in TV, 'new' media, the magazine industry and those providing advice to media producers in the production of alcohol-related storylines. Although the project did not examine the portrayal of alcohol in the news print media, interviews were also conducted with news journalists due to the press and news media being discussed by participants within the focus groups. Moreover, at the start of the project it became known to us that other research was being conducted on the UK news media's portrayal of alcohol. This analysis showed that negative outcomes and celebrity alcohol use are frequently portrayed in the news media. (For a thorough analysis of the UK news media's portrayal of alcohol, see Nicholls, 2009, 2010.) We therefore decided not to repeat this work, but aimed to extend it by interviewing news journalists on the production of alcohol-related content. Participants worked within a range of organisations, including national tabloid and broadsheet newspapers, the local press and leading national broadcasting organisations. Journalists had extensive experience of working within the news media (5–20 years) as both freelance and contracted journalists. Although all participants had experience of producing alcohol-related content, they had produced news reports on a broad range of topics including politics, sport, mental health and broader young people's issues. All had produced a variety of news reports related to alcohol use. These included the reporting of trends in the nation's alcohol use, with a particular emphasis on the drinking of subgroups such as young people, women and celebrities. More policy-orientated stories were also discussed, including minimum pricing and licensing laws. Participants working within the TV industry included producers, scriptwriters and editors working on youth-targeted programmes, soaps and dramas. They had experience ranging between 10 and 30 years, and had worked on alcohol-related storylines. One individual with experience of advising TV programmes and the news media in the production of alcohol-related content was also interviewed. Recruitment of individuals working within both new media and the magazine industry was limited, and several attempts to recruit individuals from SNS, celebrity-based magazines and men's magazines failed. The final sample included one representative from a popular, legal music-sharing website that is funded by advertising, including alcohol advertisements. An editor from a leading teenage girls' magazine with experience of working for a number of female-targeted magazines also participated.

Interview questions

News media journalists were asked questions relating to the production of alcohol-related content. Questions were also asked to determine what an alcohol-related story should contain in order to be deemed newsworthy. Participants were also asked their views on the news media's reporting of celebrity alcohol use, the potential influence of the media on public perceptions and young people's attitudes and behaviour, and the role of the media in health promotion. Similar questions were asked of the teen magazine editor with a particular emphasis on the regulation of alcohol content and their role in providing advice and information on alcohol to young people. Questions asked with regard to the portrayal of alcohol on TV aimed to explore the production of alcohol-related content and its regulation. Participants were also asked their views on whether television aimed to portray real-life drinking patterns, the potential influence of TV on young people and the role of TV in health promotion. One individual acting as an advisor to TV programmes and the news media in the production of alcohol-related content was also interviewed to gain insight into the sources television programmes and the news media use to inform their writing. Interviews with one participant working within new media focused on online alcohol advertising and its regulation.

Table 13: Sample of media professionals

Number of interviewee (N=12)	Sector	Role	Gender
1	TV	Series editor of leading youth soap	Female
2	TV	Freelance scriptwriter for soap operas	Female
3	TV	Television producer, screenwriter and professor of media studies	Male
4	News media	Ex health editor of a leading British tabloid and freelance journalist for both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers	Female
5	News media	Health editor of local paper	Female
6	News media	Ex editor of local paper and lecturer in journalism	Male
7	News media	Political editor within national broadcasting news	Female
8	News media	News journalist and video producer in broadcasting news	Female
9	News media	Freelance radio/print journalist	Male
10	Magazine industry	Editor of a leading teenage girls' magazine	Female
11	New (online) media	Representative from a legal music-sharing website	Male
12	Advisory role for a substance-use charity and journalist	Advisor to TV programmes and news media on the portrayal of alcohol and drugs	Male

Analysis procedure for qualitative data

Both focus groups and interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. All identifiable data was anonymised in the transcripts. Transcripts were analysed using the NVivo (2.0) qualitative data analysis programme (Richards, 1999). The researchers who had conducted the interviews coded the transcripts. Although the focus groups and interviews were conducted based on a pre-determined, structured interview schedule, key patterns and themes emerging from the discussion were identified and coded using an inductive thematic analysis approach (Krippendorff, 1980; Boyatzis, 1998). In reporting quotations as examples of each theme, an effort has been made to ensure that the quotations used represent consensus in young people's views. Any inconsistencies and contradictions have also been acknowledged.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for all stages of the research was granted by the university ethics committee. For the research with young people, parents of pupils under the age of 16 years were sent a letter detailing the aims and requirements of the study. Parents were provided with a parental 'opt out', which allowed them to withdraw their child from the research. A stamped addressed envelope to return the slip was provided. A total of four opt-out forms were received. Young people themselves also provided consent on the day of the survey. Young people were fully informed of the nature of both the survey and focus groups and that they were free to withdraw from the research at any time without providing a reason. Alternative activities were provided for

those who did not wish to take part. Young people were informed that participation was voluntary and assured that anonymity would be protected. While using incentives in research is a contested area (Heath, *et al.*, 2009), focus group participants received a £10 voucher for taking part in order to increase participation and to show our appreciation for their willingness to express their views and experiences. Similarly, consent was gained from media professionals and they were fully informed of the nature of the interviews and that they were free to withdraw from the research at any time. In writing the report, references to individuals, place names and organisations have been anonymised.

Appendix II

Media content analysis tables

Magazine analysis

Table 14: Reasons for drinking depicted in magazines read by young people

Reason for drinking	n	%
Party	124	48.2
Celebration	33	12.8
Single-sex bonding	24	9.3
Love/romance	23	8.9
Sexual facilitator	21	8.2
With food	15	5.8
Alcohol dependence	10	3.9
Personal crisis management	7	2.7
Total	257	99.8

Table 15: References to the consequences and effects of alcohol use in magazines read by young people

Consequence/effect	n	%
Intoxication	40	34.5
Physical violence/antisocial behaviour/verbal aggression	15	12.9
Sexual behaviour/flirtation	10	8.6
Alcohol dependence	10	8.6
Relationship problems	9	7.8
Drink driving	4	3.4
Work-related problems	4	3.4
Hangover	3	2.6
Confidence	3	2.6
Family/childcare problems	3	2.6
Weight gain	3	2.6
Hallucinating	2	1.7
Hunger	2	1.7
Sickness	2	1.7
Slurring	2	1.7
Passing out	2	1.7
Sleep problems	2	1.7
Total	116	99.8

Television analysis

Table 16: Alcohol-related scenes by TV genre

Genre	Total number of programmes/ episodes	Total number of scenes	Total number of scenes involving alcohol	% of alcohol-related scenes within genre
Soap	13	316	101	32.0
Comedy	19	387	97	25.1
Sport	1	270	53	19.6
Drama	8	263	36	13.7
Total	41	1,236	287	-

Table 17: Categories of alcohol reference in TV programmes viewed by young people

Alcohol reference	Frequency	%
Implied drinking act (including verbal reference to drinking)	687	60.5
Active drinking act	117	10.3
Visual reference	331	29.2
Total	1,135	100

Table 18: Location of drinking depicted in TV programmes viewed by young people

Setting	Frequency	%
Pub	401	51.3
Home/other's home	193	24.7
Bar/club	91	11.7
Street	54	6.9
Restaurant/hotel	29	3.7
Other (e.g. work)	13	1.7
Total	781	100

Table 19: Reasons for drinking portrayed in TV programmes viewed by young people

Reason for drinking	Frequency	%
General socialising	618	52.0
Celebration	217	18.3
Party	64	5.4
Student life	57	4.8
Single-sex bonding	52	4.4
With food/meal	46	3.9
Love/romance	43	3.6
Personal crisis management	35	2.9
Alcohol dependence	28	2.4
Dutch courage (e.g. social facilitator)	15	1.3
Relaxation	13	1.1
Total	1,188	100.1

Table 20: Consequences and effects of alcohol use portrayed in TV programmes viewed by young people

Consequence/effect	Number	%
Intoxication	96	39.9
Sexual facilitation	28	11.6
Alcohol dependence	25	10.4
Laughing	17	7.1
Impact on family/children	15	6.2
Relationship problems	12	5.0
Regretted drunken action	10	4.1
Hangover	9	3.7
Aggression	8	3.3
Vomiting	7	2.9
Sleep	6	2.5
Work-related problems	3	1.2
Drink driving	2	0.8
Alcohol poisoning	1	0.4
Drunken and disorderly	1	0.4
Homelessness	1	0.4
Total	241	99.9

SNS and video file-sharing site analysis

Table 21: Total number of alcohol brand-related pages (official and unofficial) on SNS used by young people

Alcohol brand	Social networking site		
	Facebook	Myspace	Bebo
Smirnoff	390	347	373
After Shock	53	75	95
Jägermeister	89	329	186
Absolut Vodka	210	358	28
Stella Artois	397	315	170
Budweiser	415	233	80
Carling	122	216	559
Carlsberg	459	258	142
Coors	81	78	24
Lambrini	232	321	168
Jacob's Creek	11	25	1
Magners	143	75	54
Strongbow	174	141	35
WKD	527	232	255
Total	3,303	3,003	2,170

Table 22: Total number of alcohol-related pages on SNS used by young people

Search term	Social networking site		
	Facebook	Myspace	Bebo
Alcohol	3,700	454,000	4,699
Drunk	15,000	6,360,000	14,381
Drink	7,100	159,000	29,111
Booze	3,400	1,250,000	1,890
Total	29,200	8,223,000	50,081

Table 23: Alcohol-related brand search results for YouTube

Alcohol brand	YouTube videos
Carling	3,560
WKD	543
Carlsberg	342
Smirnoff	341
Lambrini	321
Budweiser	285
Coors	211
Magners	175
Strongbow	165
Jägermeister	98
Stella Artois	90
After Shock	67
Absolut Vodka	33
Jacob's Creek	23
Total	6,254

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