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Exploring the festival lived experience: A basis for social marketing interventions promoting responsible alcohol consumption

Young adults are surrounded by positive images not only of alcohol consumption but of actual *drunkenness*. Images of drunkenness permeate TV reality shows (Koordeman et al. 2012), YouTube music videos (Cranwell et al. 2015), and Facebook photos, with behaviours supported by ‘likes’ and approving comments (Niland et al 2014). Furthermore, alcohol consumption is often synonymous with the heightened emotions experienced at events, attended with friends and a community of like-minded people. Unfortunately, alcohol marketers are all too aware of the efficacy their brands have with lifestyle consumption communities and leverage this through sponsorship and event marketing (Rowley 2008). The ethics of this are clearly questionable (Gordon et al. 2015).

Risky or illicit behaviour is therefore encouraged via these media which create the desire to be drunk and can be seen to have a particular effect on young people who are highly influenced by peers and anxious to conform (Netemeyer et al. 2015; Rose et al 2001).

Our research uses music festivals as a space to engage with attendees and investigate their relationship with alcohol and the social influences on this behavior aiming to answer the following questions: *What lived experiences do young persons have in an alcohol and emotionally-rich time and place?* and, *What can social marketers learn from these lived experiences that could help develop appropriate interventions?*

Literature review

In understanding behavior change in relation to alcohol there has been much debate about where the responsibility lies or at least whose actions will have the most effect. The *downstream* approach has been more prevalent in recent safer drinking campaigns (Zharekhina and Kubacki, 2015) where the focus is typically on the end user and imposed by an *upstream* organization/body. The *downstream* approach assumes the consumer will make a rational decision to change their behavior once given the right information on health and/or other risks. This approach also presumes that consumers can understand and react to ‘be risk aware’ messages and, more importantly, trust the information provided (Guthrie, Mancino, and Lin 2015; O’Sullivan 2015). However, several studies have shown this not to be the case (Andrews, Netemeyer, and Durvasula 1990; Cherrier and Gurrieri 2014; Hastings, Stead, and Webb 2004; Patterson et al. 1992).

The *upstream* approach calls for policy makers to “understand individuals within a contextual setting ... In doing so, environments can be altered in ways that support and promote behavior change objectives” (Cherrier and Gurrieri, 2014, p. 610). The problematic ‘environments’ within the context of this research are the power of the alcohol industry, the goals of festival organizers, and the alcohol marketing techniques used; in addition to the wider social influences and pressures to drink. The influence of *upstream* organizations is highlighted by Yoon and Lam (2013) who conclude that CSR is often used to define problems and guide policy debates away from the underlying corporate intent. This in turn shifts the blame for ‘alcohol problems’ from those who manufacture and promote alcoholic products to those who consume them. Further, the alcohol industry undertakes so-called ‘philanthropic sponsorships’ as a means of indirect brand marketing whilst gaining preferential access to emerging alcohol markets. This certainly seems to be the case within the heavily sponsored festival market (Portman Group, 2016). We might also be skeptical of the on-brand alcohol consumption warnings as these seem to do little to change consumer behavior but have been shown to positively affect attitude towards the brand (Christie et al. 2001; Garretson and Burton 1998).

Both *upstream* and *downstream* approaches have their drawbacks. It can be alternatively argued that social marketing operates at the intersection between three approaches; namely: the end

consumer *downstream*, policy makers and corporations *upstream* and friends, family and influential ‘others’ *midstream* (Lee & Kotler 2011). The midstream approach highlights the importance of the social context as an influence on individual behavior (French, Raven, and Cartwright 1959; Hogan, Perks, and Russell-Bennett, 2014) and is particularly relevant to festivals and group behavior (Rose, Bearden, and Manning 2001). Consumption choices are, therefore, not individual or rational but are a result of symbolic and cultural representations alongside social norms which are embedded by *upstream* organizations (i.e. policy makers/industry) and *midstream* influencers (i.e. social media/family/friends) (Lagarde 2012, Kenyon, Wood and Parsons 2008). Cherrier and Gurrieri (2014) provide a useful framework showing the interactions between *upstream*, *midstream* and *downstream* social marketing and the modalities involved. These modalities have relevance for alcohol behavior at festivals where legitimization of behavior takes place partly due to the influence of social norms and cultural tradition (Hogan, Perks, and Russell-Bennett 2014). The *midstream* modalities of interest within a festival setting are: interpretive schemes (social grouping and positional status); resources (marketplace offerings and promotional techniques); and norms (rituals and traditions). These mediate the *upstream* institutional activities of ‘signification’, ‘domination’ and ‘legitimization’ often the focus of much public policy. At the individual *downstream* level the modalities identify response and proactive actions as communication, power and sanctions. The *midstream*, or social context and influences, are of particular importance with younger alcohol consumers and festival attendees (Németh et al. 2011). These are considered at an individual and group level in our research to identify signs of and potential for self-moderation/moderate-drinking decision-making and group-modified behavior (Rose, Bearden, and Manning 2001).

Festivals as Social Marketing Tools

Although festivals, of all types, provide more spaces and places for extreme levels of alcohol consumption and are another enabler of a ‘culture of intoxication’ they may also provide opportunities to promote behavior change. Indeed festivals have already been identified as an effective vehicle for interventions to promote ‘risk competence’ on safer drug use among a large number of at-risk people (Lim et al. 2008; Lim et al. 2010). Martinus et al. (2010) also conclude from their study of drug and alcohol use at a Scottish music festival that policy makers have the opportunity at music festivals to manipulate the environment and promote protective behaviors by including normative messaging and modern communications media. Interestingly, they also found that rather than the festival attendees’ partying being ‘out of control’, alcohol and drug use were, to some extent, contained within a developing social culture of ‘controlled intoxication’ (Martinus et al. 2010). This nascent and naturally occurring self-regulation is explored in our study to inform the content of social marketing approaches that may lead to positive behavioral changes. Despite this evidence of ‘controlled behavior’ the carnivalesque nature of ‘being drunk’ with friends (Hackley et al. 2013) finds a perfect setting within music festivals. The organizers, the alcohol industry and the cultural context of social group behavior (Mason et al., 2013) tend to push the same message of ‘while you’re here excess is OK’. Figure 1 summarizes these contextual issues of social marketing, alcohol and festivals. The figure highlights the socio-cultural and commercial influencers that may lead to risky drinking behavior. This paper focuses on developing a deeper understanding of the shared emotional responses associated with alcohol in a socially and experience-rich time and place where the behaviors are exaggerated, social norms are subverted and alcohol is seen to play a crucial role. Only through this deeper understanding of the lived experiences of young people will social marketers be able to develop appropriate interventions (Hackley et al. 2013).

Methodology

This research project involved multi-method inductive research, with two stages covering ‘in-the-moment’ and retrospective data. Five young (18-25) adult festival attendees were recruited through purposive sampling based on their plans to attend a weekend festival. The ‘thick’ data obtained from the sample, using multiple methods, follows an established approach within consumer psychology focusing on individual cases rather than aggregated data from large samples (Kazdin 2011).

Stage 1 ESM survey and photo-elicitation technique

Over a two-day period, an SMS containing a link to the ESM survey was sent to the participants' smartphone every 2-3 hours. Regular two-hourly intervals were deemed more appropriate than ad hoc or event-contingent intervals as participants would expect the SMS and would therefore be less disrupted in their activities (Fisher and To 2012; Wheeler and Reis 1991). Completion of the ESM survey took around one minute in line with previous ESM surveys (Csikzentmihalyi and Hunter 2003). The participants were asked to complete a series of questions about what they were doing at the festival, how they were feeling, what and how much they were drinking (alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks) and their observation of people and events around them. The SMS also prompted participants to answer an open question about their 'last undisturbed moment' (Heavey, Hurlburt, and Lefforge 2010) giving the participants the freedom to tell us something they were experiencing outside of the standard questions. After each ESM survey participants were asked to take photographs as per the pre-event briefing instructions.

Stage 2 Expositional Interviews

During stage 2 participants were invited to a face-to-face interview where the facilitator, in line with the photo elicitation technique adapted from ZMET (Zaltman, 1996; Christensen and Olson 2002), asked the participant to tell a story of events and activities prompted by the photographs. In addition, the facilitator and participant reviewed the data captured via the ESM survey questions and the text messages. Each interview lasted between 1 hour and 1.5 hours. The transcribed interviews, survey responses and texts were analyzed through the lens of goal directed behavior (Perugini and Bagozzi, 2001) set within Cherrier and Gurrieri's (2014) contextual framework for social marketing related to alcohol. Four main themes emerged which are discussed below.

Results and discussion

Social marketing messages

Although not at the forefront of the experience or the later discussions, some social marketing messages were noticed and commented upon by the participants. For example, Figure 2 shows a photograph taken by Jezz of a beer can and the conversation when recalling this photo centered on the alcohol unit details shown. The Portman Group (2016), who represent the alcoholic drinks industry, provide a range of 'drink responsibly' messages reinforced by apps and other media in line with government legislation and voluntary codes. This cognitive downstream approach provides the information and puts the onus on consumers to act accordingly through monitoring their own intake of units.

Jezz stated "you notice them on cans [messages with alcohol units and recommendations to drink responsibly]. And they have them [alcohol units] on pint glasses now in the pubs, don't they? The newer ones. Because they all have the units on. I know beer mats have it as well."

The factual information provided on units is understood by Jezz but is not necessarily empowering any behavioral change (Zharekina and Zubacki, 2015). The legitimization of alcohol within the festival setting (Gordon et al. 2015) appears to outweigh the limited attempts at encouraging drinking in moderation or within alcohol limits depicted by alcohol units (suggested as 21 units of alcohol for men and 14 units of alcohol for women per week). Jezz reflected that no commercial beer tents, bars, drinking cups or signage at the festival showed social marketing messages advising attendees to drink responsibly/in moderation, indicated units of alcohol or provided health warnings, despite the World Health Organization's (2016) recommendations. Indeed it would seem that the alcohol brands may be taking advantage of the less regulated festival environment (Yoon and Lam 2013).

There was little evidence, therefore, of the downstream approaches to social marketing recommended by Cherrier and Gurrieri (2014) and little attempt at encouraging the future goal-focused positive emotions in relation to more moderate drinking called for by Previte et al. (2015b). Although the messages noted lacked emotional appeal it could be argued that detailing the units

empowered the consumer, to some extent, through knowledge and symbolic cues (Kleinjan et al. 2012).

Although the participants did not notice any social marketing interventions suggesting changes to alcohol consumption they did discuss other social marketing campaigns related to recycling.

Carrie-Anne “For every cup you take back you get 10p back to spend on beer”.

Jezz “The only information on the cup I saw was that if you returned it to the bar you got 10p back. They had their parents sending them off.” (see Figure 3 Recycling cups)

Other social marketing campaigns noticed were “Every Can Counts” (see Figure 4) which encouraged people to recycle their beer/soda cans again encouraging recycling but this time with the reward of free beer tokens.

Jezz “Oh we did, we just put them in a bag and they give you a token for a free beer. It encourages you to tidy up, doesn’t it?”

In this instance the pro-social behavioral change of recycling was achieved through a successful targeted, goal-directed campaign; unfortunately the goal was free alcohol. Alternative approaches could encourage the recycling of cups and cans with ‘protective’ rewards such as free coupons for water or food, rather than coupons that further encourage alcohol consumption.

Perceptions of drunkenness

In the descriptions of their own state of inebriation and that of others all the participants viewed themselves as less drunk than those around them. For example, the text messages to the facilitator from Mia and Nadia described others (friends and people around them) as being ‘well out of it’ (survey response) whereas they saw themselves as ‘just tipsy’ (survey response):

Mia “They were all really drunk now, they’ve got a bit rowdier.”

Nadia “And then those boys were very obviously drunk. They were well on at this stage. And lovely Tate was really drunk as well.”

In this instance participants reflected upon quotes from their ESM responses that showed that Mia had had 6 pints (mainly cider) and a spirit (gin) equating to around 13 units of alcohol, and Nadia had also had 6 pints of cider and two little bottles of beer equating to around 15 units of alcohol. Both female festival attendees had exceeded the UK Government’s suggested daily alcohol intake of two units per day and would be categorized as ‘hazardous drinking’. The subjective group norms mentioned by several authors (Fry et al. 2014; Hogan Perks and Russell-Bennett, 2014; Lee and Kotler, 2011; Previte et al. 2015b) clearly influence the participants’ assessment of their own behavior. Their level of drunkenness is judged in relation to their perceptions of those around them and not on the cognitive understanding of how many units they have consumed. This substantiates the finding that festival attendees ‘trivialize hazards’ within the group setting (Wiedermann, Niggli, and Frick 2014). The carnivalesque acceptance of intoxication (Hackley et al. 2013; Hackley 2008) is seen here as the norm even when it is classified to be at the level of high individual risk. This poses a number of challenges for social marketers and reinforces the need to focus on modifiable behaviors (Kleinjan et al. 2012) through emphasizing the goal of future positive emotions to their actions and behavior change (Fry et al. 2014; Previte, Russell-Bennett, and Parkinson 2015a; Previte et al. 2015b).

The other participants also regarded drunkenness as the norm and provided evidence of Hackley et al.’s (2013) ‘purposive drinking’ undertaken to deepen social bonds and share experiences, often through parodying others.

Aimee “When Adela gets drunk she just disappears. She left because she was really drunk. When she gets to the point of drunkenness she just takes herself off home [laughing]. She woke up this morning in the spare room, didn’t know if she’d had anything to eat, but there was a plate on the table”.

Brad “There was another girl that projectile vomited – I tried to get the picture. It was gross but funny”. (See Figure 5 More Drunk Than Me)

Jezz “He (discussing one of the photographs taken at the festival) was in a bad way he wasn’t with it at all, we couldn’t really understand what he was saying.”

Carrie-Anne “I did see one girl. She necked back a big blue bottle, of something, in one go. I thought that’s not a good idea. An hour later she went crazy, she was screaming, arguing with everyone and running around in her bra. It was a big bottle, maybe Sambucca”.

In the cultural context of the festival extreme drinking, drunkenness and rowdy behavior is legitimized and accepted. Behavior is influenced negatively by upstream (alcohol culture, brand messages), midstream (group norms) and downstream (individual motivation) factors (Cherrier and Gurrieri 2014). In order to change behavior positively all three areas need to be tackled.

Responsibility and self-control

Despite the acceptance of drunkenness as the norm and a disregard for safe alcohol levels, participants did demonstrate an awareness of their own risks and discussed strategies for responsibility. This echoes the conclusion of Martinus et al. (2010) who state that festival attendee behavior is to some extent self-regulating. The participants reflected upon who would be responsible and ‘look after’ those who were drunk:

Jezz discussed a drunken man depicted in one of his photographs: “Yeah, you had medics about and security about. So he was looked after.”

Aimee “A drunken girl was carried out by security.”

Although the emphasis here is on officials taking care of those who were drunk and needed assistance their comments also echo Hutton and Jaensch’s (2015) in that participants were aware that should such circumstance arise their ‘mates will be taken care of’. Further, responsibility for less risky drinking can be shared in friendship pairs or groups to encourage peer monitoring and tempering of each other’s drinking/drunkenness (Whitehill, Pumper, and Moreno 2015). Self-regulating behavior was also in evidence and tended to be goal-directed with a focus on anticipated future positive emotions (Fry et. al. 2014; Fry 2010). They also discussed specific protective behaviors (Martinus et al. 2010) including pacing their drinking, drinking water as well as alcohol and eating before/whilst drinking. They talked proudly about looking after themselves in terms of, ‘lining the stomach’ in readiness for alcohol consumption and pacing their drinks:

Carrie-Anne “Yes we ate [laughing] breakfast sandwiches and lunch we had pizza and we definitely had dinner but...” [laughing] “yeah we did eat yeah” (See Figure 6 Lining the stomach).

Carrie-Anne went on to say “Ellie said ‘you can’t start [drinking alcohol] until 12’. But I lied to her about the time and we started about 10.30.”

The ESM data showed the amount of alcoholic units Carrie-Anne drank over the period of the study (30 in total) which she recalled accurately stating “...it was steady, just carried on about one an hour”.

Carrie-Anne’s ESM reports showed that alcohol consumption did not negatively affect her experience, possibly due to self -regulation of how much she drank. This amount, although in the official high risk category, was controlled according to her own and her peers’ criteria. Only Brad mentioned that drinking alcohol might have negative consequences and showed greater inclination to regulate his own drinking:

Brad: “From a health point of view people probably do drink too much, not just there [at festivals] but you go to some pubs in town and people are worse. [At the festival] you don’t want to get a drink sometimes, because you don’t want to lose your spot [place watching the band] or have to go to the loo and I didn’t want to get a hangover.”

Despite the evidence of high levels of alcohol consumption by the participants this is far from being unmanaged and is underpinned by an understanding of the dangers and the actions that can be taken to mitigate these. This suggests that social marketing messages, if framed correctly, could be effective in this context and with these consumer segments.

Midstream socializing

Unsurprisingly much of the lived experience of the festival and the accompanying alcohol consumption is dependent upon the social group (Wiedermann Niggli, and Frick 2014; Németh et al. 2011). The direct peer pressure and wider cultural pressure to consume alcohol (Hogan, Perks,

and Russell-Bennett, 2014) is hard to resist in the festival environment and individual inclinations are easily overturned. This is exemplified by Nadia who did not want to feel left out or to let her friends down.

Nadia was hung-over from the previous night and was desperately trying to match her friend's drinking at the music festival.

“She [my friend Shelly] was like ‘Here, drink this.’ ‘Don’t talk to me until you’ve drunk it.’” [laughing]

Nadia reported feeling anxious, not about drunken behavior but about conformity. When asked why she stated: “...hangover anxiety. I was also anxious about not being able to drink and join in with Shelly”. This short excerpt demonstrates the anxiety caused when there is a mismatch between social pressure and individual motivation. The desire to feel better and healthier (i.e. abstain) was easily overcome by the need to conform to the behavior of friendship groups (Mason et al. 2013; Rose, Bearden, and Manning 2001). Any social marketing campaign therefore needs to take into account the desire to please friends and to fit in with social groups. Harnessing the power of peer influence for responsible drinking campaigns is not a simple task but there is already evidence to show how consumption communities can be formed around lifestyles (Gordon et al. 2015) and how the moderately behaving majority can influence the binge drinking minority (Fry 2014). This again emphasizes the importance of a midstream approach to social marketing in a festival environment.

Conclusions and implications

This study gives a deeper understanding of the lived experience of younger adults in the UK in relation to alcohol and can provide a sounder basis for interventions. These should empower those involved in risky drinking to reflect upon and ultimately change their behavior. Such interventions should utilize the medium of music festivals as the alternative is to allow such events to perpetuate as vehicles for promoting alcohol brands, encouraging the excessive consumption of alcohol and a disregard (albeit temporary) for risk taking.

Music festivals, socially, culturally and commercially, encourage risky, drinking and irrational behavior. However, they also have the potential to be the medium through which safer drinking messages can effectively reach at-risk groups. It is unlikely that alcohol brands will stop using festivals as marketing tools and equally unlikely that festival organizers will stop accepting sponsorship from alcohol brands. The alco-centric festival culture is likely to continue. This notion, coupled with the findings here, show that *midstream* approaches, focused on incremental goal-directed change, will be most effective. *Midstream* sourced and targeted messages such as – ‘take care of your mate’ or ‘look after your friends’ – would have far more relevance to young adults at a time of celebration. This is a departure from the upstream approach of highlighting long-term health risks known to have little effect on drinking behavior (Hutton and Jaensch 2015; Whitehill, Pumper, and Moreno, 2015).

Campaigns which emphasize group values such as ‘looking out for each other’, ‘... ‘no booze before 12’ can harness the power of the social group whilst also empowering individuals. This provides goals that are social rather than focused on ‘the self’ and will have far greater resonance with the young festival attendee than a downstream intervention focused on units, employing health-harm fear, or indeed, a patronizing upstream directive interpreted as ‘don’t have fun’. Further, positive emotions could be connected with higher-level outcomes such as looking good, not being ‘out of it’, putting money into better things, not having hangovers, enjoying more of the experience, and being able to enjoy reminiscing with friends without embarrassment. The goals suggested can be achieved instantly unlike the existing health/risk-related social marketing campaigns, appealing to negative emotions foretelling outcomes expected in the distant future.

Further research could usefully employ the methods developed here to explore similar tourism, events and leisure environments where alcohol has a central role. This greater understanding of the lived experience of leisure and alcohol will ultimately inform the development of effective and innovative methods for developing effective public policies relating to safer alcohol consumption.

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FIGURE 1 FRAMING THE PROBLEM

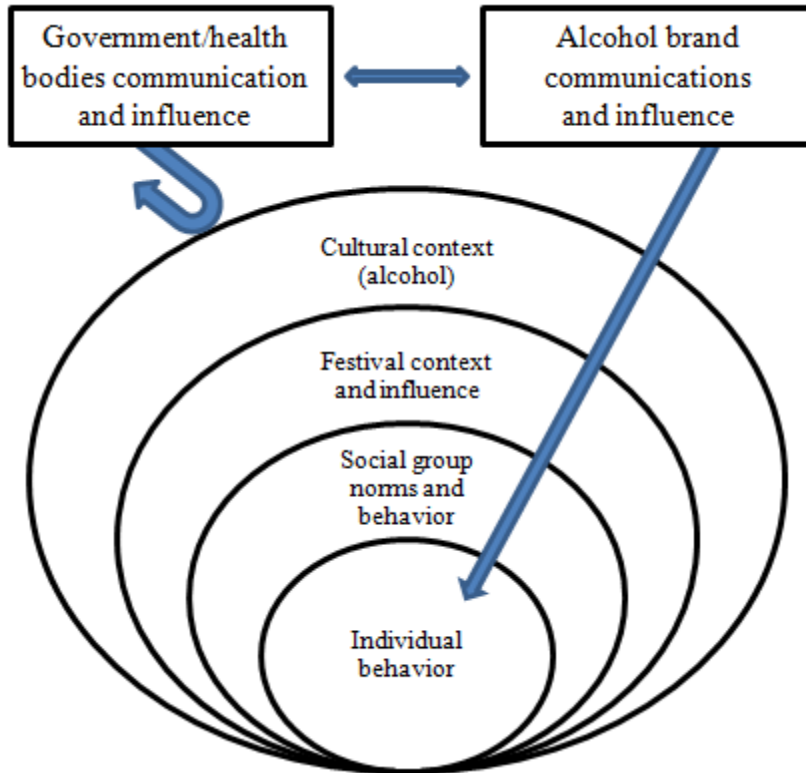


FIGURE 2 ALCOHOL UNITS ON BEER CAN



FIGURE 3 RECYCLING CUPS



FIGURE 4 RECYCLING CANS



FIGURE 5 MPRE DRUNK THAN ME



FIGURE 6 LINING THE STOMACH

