

Social Norming Through Alcohol Advertising and Binge Drinking on College Campuses

Taylor Soldner

Dr. Shelly Rodgers, Thesis Supervisor

Abstract

Binge drinking is a problem on campuses with alcohol related deaths increasing from 1,440 in 1998 to 1,825 in 2005, a 3 percent increase per 100,000 students (Hingson, Zha, & Weitzman, 2009). It is difficult not to wonder the following question: How do alcohol advertising and social norming correspond to alcohol-related behaviors on college campuses? Through a series of focus groups, obtained from a large, public Midwestern university, I hoped to gain more insight into this phenomenon. From the literature, four empirical generalizations (EG's) emerged. First, alcohol advertising affects consumers from a young age. Second, social norms inspire heavy drinking behaviors. Third, social norming and alcohol advertising correspond to both females and males, social norms are increasingly affecting females and females are then drinking more to fit in with their peers. Fourth, the Third Person Effect Hypothesis depicts to what extent people perceive advertisements relate to others and themselves. Thus, this thesis focuses on the practical aspects of alcohol advertising's effects as well as theoretical implications gleaned from social norming and Third Person Effect Hypothesis research.