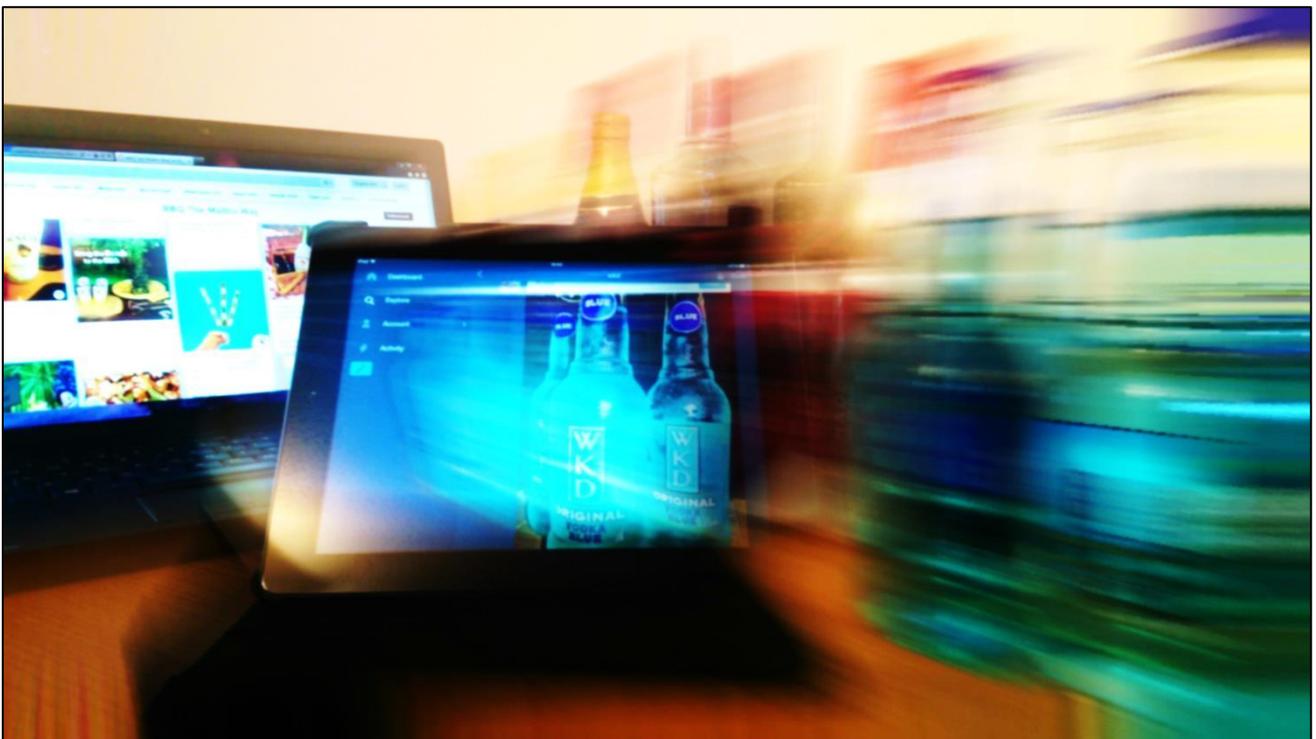


**“What are you meant to do when you see  
it everywhere?”**

**Young people, alcohol packaging and  
digital media**



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### ***Background and aims***

The consumption of alcohol plays an important part in the way in which people create desired identities and live their social lives. Through marketing practices, alcohol brands have become embedded in everyday life and this is amplified by the increase in new technologies which facilitate the transference of marketing messages. This research has sought to explore how alcohol brands use social networking sites (SNS) and packaging as part of their repertoire of marketing activities, and how users respond to these activities.

This study has not sought to examine the impact of marketing on behaviour; for this, different designs of study and much larger scale studies are required (see Pinsky et al., 2010; Gordon and Harris, 2009). Instead, it has sought to explore how brands use social networking sites and packaging as part of their repertoire of activities, and how users respond to these activities. Much marketing activity is directed not towards producing direct effects on consumers but towards creating and reinforcing powerful brands. In order to understand marketing, we need not only to examine evidence of direct effects – increased sales or consumption – but also to explore how marketing works: how marketing activities contribute to the creation and reinforcement of desired brand values. In other words, are the messages communicated by the brand consistent with the desired brand position? Are the associations created in consumers' minds the desired associations? Are consumers' responses to the brand in line with the emotions the brand wishes to evoke?

### ***Methods***

Research in this new and little understood area needs to use approaches which are reflexive and inductive. There is great value to be had in combining traditional qualitative research methods, such as interviews and focus groups, with more recent innovations in the field of online research (Maclaran and Catterall, 2002). Therefore two qualitative methods, content analysis of brand activity on five social network sites over a seven day period and focus group discussions with 14-17 year-olds, were used in order to answer the following research questions:

- How do young people perceive and engage with alcohol packaging and labelling?
- In what ways do alcohol brands feature in community conversations on social media sites?
- How are alcohol brands used by young people in social media networks to construct desired identities?
- How do alcohol marketers encourage consumers to actively engage with alcohol brands through the use of web addresses and QR codes on packaging and labelling?
- How do alcohol marketers encourage user engagement on social media sites?
- What alcohol brands do young people find most appealing and would be most likely to engage with further through websites and social media pages?

The first stage of the study sought to identify, observe and analyse on-line communications regarding alcohol products on SNS as a lens through which to understand how alcohol marketers encourage consumers to talk about alcohol brands online and also how alcohol brands are used by consumers in their conversations and sharing activities on SNS. We examined these communications by conducting a content analysis informed by netnographic approaches. 'Netnography' applies ethnographic methods to the study of online cultures (Rokka, 2010), treating online communications, such as comments and images shared on social network sites, as a form of social interaction (Kozinets, 2010; Maclaran and Catterall, 2002). Five of the most popular social networking sites in the UK were selected for analysis over a seven day period (March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014 to

March 10<sup>th</sup> 2014). These SNS were: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest and Tumblr. Six alcohol brands (Budweiser, Bulmers, Dragon Soop, Malibu, Smirnoff and WKD) were selected for analysis.

All potentially relevant data were 'captured' using the web browser extension NCapture. This software allows the user to gather textual and visual material from the web to import into NVivo. A coding frame was developed and piloted by two researchers to assess consistency. The researchers met to discuss and resolve any discrepancies in coding and to refine the coding frame according to emerging practices and themes. To establish inter-rater reliability, findings were compared and any differences in interpretation resolved. Codes were developed inductively, using grounded theory based on observations that were summarised into conceptual categories and gradually refined and linked to other conceptual categories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

The second stage of research consisted of qualitative focus group interviews with 14-17 year old males and females. It is difficult to explore people's perceptions of nebulous concepts such as branding through direct questioning techniques, and the benefit of using focus groups is that they enable the use of indirect and creative methods to elicit responses. A semi-structured interview schedule was developed looking to explore young people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour relating to alcohol packaging and labelling and their levels of awareness and engagement with alcohol marketing. Eight focus groups (6 participants per group, n=48) were conducted involving single sex friendship groups of girls and boys aged 14-17, recruited in two categories: 14-15 year old 'starter drinkers' and 16-17 year old 'established drinkers' (MacKintosh et al., 1997). The interviews were transcribed verbatim and transferred for coding and analysis into the NVivo 10 software package. Each transcript was reviewed by two members of the research team to identify major themes and sub-themes through open coding. To establish inter-rater reliability, findings were compared and any discrepancies resolved. Findings were then grouped into major categories reflecting key topics. Again, codes were developed inductively, using grounded theory.

## **Findings**

### **SNS content analysis**

This research found that alcohol brands performed a number of actions on SNS: they used SNS as an advertising platform, for product and distribution information; they used SNS to *solicit* feedback from users and open up a conversation; they used SNS to encourage users to act (for example, by 'liking', or posting comments, or entering competitions, or re-tweeting brand authored content); and they used and co-opted user generated content to support their own branding.

These types of brand actions, however simple they may appear, could all be seen as having been carefully designed to reinforce the values and identity of the brand. For example, when brands posted content or 'talked' to users, the tone of voice, the selection of images and wording, the cultural references and so on all appeared to have been carefully selected to evoke particular associations and emotional responses in users' minds which were consistent with what the brands were trying to achieve. A key aspect of brand identity is the persona or personality which the brand chooses to project. Brand personality is an expression of the brand's core values and characteristics with an emphasis on human traits such as, for example, trustworthiness, excitement, stylishness or warmth. Brand personality can be seen to be constructed through the tone of voice which a brand uses when 'talking' to users, through cultural references which say something about the brand's values, through use of imagery and language designed to appeal to a particular gender or age group, and so on.

As well as evoking a particular personality, the brands sought through their SNS communications to appeal to values which would resonate with their target users and which were consistent with the brand's identity. These values varied from brand to brand: for Bulmers, key values were around heritage and tradition, and for Smirnoff they were concerned with glamour and fun, while Dragon Soop, the youngest and least established of the brands, sought to communicate values around being a little bit alternative.

Another technique used by the brands on SNS was to associate themselves with particular cultural references and events or with particular organisations. Brands seek to create desirable brand associations because they contribute to brand identity and values, and also because they will be of intrinsic interest to users, who will in turn be happy to be associated with such references and share them with their social networks. Different types of associations were identified: associations with popular culture and music, association with sporting events, and association with other brands, retailers and producers. Brands engage with SNS because these platforms provide new ways of engaging with users to build strong and appealing brands. However, our analysis suggested that some of the brands' uses of SNS could be seen to encourage and drive not just feelings about the particular brand but alcohol consumption in general. Two strategies were identified, co-opting seasonal events and occasions, and positioning the product as part of every-day life.

A particular strategic benefit of SNS for brands is that they can work *with* SNS users to co-create social media content. In effect, brand-authored content and user-generated content work together to create and distribute marketing messages. Brand messages are passed on, commented on and transformed by users who become part of the marketing, co-creating the branding and working in synergy to create marketing messages. Users engage with, respond to and create alcohol brand related content on SNS in three broad types of engagement. The first category of engagement, direct responses to the brand, included responses to advertising, new flavours and promotions, and direct questions or answers in response to brand content. A second type of engagement was labelled 'self-presentation' in the analysis. This referred to the ways in which users used alcohol brand related content to say something about themselves, their tastes, personality and lifestyle on SNS. The third type of engagement, labelled a 'space for conversation', referred to the ways in which users conversed and shared with one another content which did not directly refer to the brands or even to alcohol. While this content did not at first appear directly relevant, it was important because it took place on platforms linked to the alcohol brands.

### Focus groups

The findings identified four main uses of social networking sites by young people: maintaining contact with and expanding friendship groups; providing a shared space to establishing a sense of belonging; and a means of building and expressing a sense of self-identity and allegiance with friendship groups. Although the term 'network' implies these sites will make it possible for users to make contact with strangers and befriend them, the findings suggested that most SNS were used primarily to support pre-existing social relations as opposed to meeting new people. For example, there were typically some common offline connections with those they interacted with online, such as attending the same school or being in the same class. This was significant as it confirmed that SNS formed part of and consolidated participants' existing social reality. It was generally felt that if you did not have access to SNS 24 hours a day there was a risk that you could be missing out on social occasions or general chat which could result in you being excluded from certain groups. The implications of this dependence are extremely important as it illustrates how corporations using

SNS can have direct access to, and indeed form part of, a young person's social reality. In this way commercial brands and messages can also become omnipresent in young people's everyday life.

It was apparent that respondents could attach value to brand labels and symbols, with brand packaging acting as a trigger, signifying a brand's values. This could be particularly significant for products such as alcohol which are consumed publicly, and where brand preference can be used to say something about the consumer to those around them. Gender emerged as an important dimension for differentiating between brands with respondents distinguishing alcohol brands they believed were aimed at males from those aimed at females. The appeal of brightly-coloured packaging amongst female respondents was in stark contrast to male preferences for simpler designs and well-established brands. While male tastes and preferences were generally very conservative female choices were more likely to be driven by a desire to try something new, to experiment and to take risks.

Users' SNS profiles were important to expressing their desired image and self-identity. Who and what a person associated themselves with on SNS could influence their ability to make new friends and contacts. The brands 'liked' by respondents were often carefully selected to reflect their desired values and identity. All were aware that once a user made a decision to 'like' a commercial SNS page, this preference was available for all of their friends to see, so it was considered important that they associated themselves with what were considered accepted brands. Findings indicate that alcohol brands communicate social status and can appeal to individual aspirations and are important to identity formation and peer acceptance. Again, significant differences emerged by gender.

Respondents reported seeing large volumes of commercial marketing on SNS sites a significant proportion of which were seen to include advertisements for alcohol products. There was a general acceptance amongst participants that alcohol marketing was an inevitable part of SNS and that it had become just another part of the daily content. Participants stated that they regularly saw examples of friends having 'liked' or 're-tweeted' a post from an alcohol brand and that this led to advertisements for alcohol appearing on their home pages on SNS. As a consequence many of these brand messages appeared to come from or to be endorsed by a trusted friend or source with the exchange of user generated messages and information between friends becoming entangled with marketing content. The fact that they were exposed to such a high level of alcohol marketing led participants to question the amount of alcohol advertising they saw in everyday life and the apparent mixed messages they were receiving from different sources about the attractions and dangers of consumption. These findings illustrate how drinking and images of excess were often a central feature of the self-generated content that was widely accessed and shared on SNS, and that these practices not only served to normalise excessive consumption and potentially risky drinking behaviours, but also to provide a platform for endorsing specific alcohol brands.

New pack technologies are emerging that enable consumers to directly access online content and in particular SNS pages or websites for specific alcohol brands. These technologies include Quick Response (QR) codes and augmented reality advertising (virtual enhancement of the physical object) which allows consumers to interact with the physical product using smartphones or tablet computers, and promote greater engagement by providing access to electronic games and challenges which can then be shared on SNS. These examples and the positive response they received provide a clear illustration of how augment technologies such as these have the potential

to not only enhance product packaging as an advertising platform, but also to reposition it as a new channel for generating branded user-led content on social media.

### **Conclusions**

By appealing to certain values and creating desirable brand associations, the six alcohol brands studied were able to craft a personality and convey to users the impression that their online content was not from faceless corporations but from friends with similar interests and a familiar outlook on life, making it easier for users to pass on the brand messages to other friends within their social network and thereby to extend the reach of the brand's marketing and to lend it an authenticity and persuasiveness. On SNS, marketing content becomes entangled with the exchange of user-generated messages and information between friends and as a consequence, many brand messages appear to come from or be endorsed by a trusted friend. In turn, brands co-opt user generated content – for example, particularly amusing tweets or attractive images - which supports their brand values. Thus, marketing and branding can be seen to be co-created on SNS.

The analysis suggests that all of the alcohol brands' actions on SNS were designed to reinforce the values and identity of the brand. Brands adopted a particular tone of voice, appealed to certain values, used humour and associated themselves with cultural references points such as sport or music which would be of intrinsic interest to users and would encourage them to feel comfortable in the brand's presence. The online spaces created by alcohol brands could be seen to function as 'glue', bringing users together who shared similar interests or views. This creates social and emotional bonds between users which are beneficial in creating a feeling of belonging and acceptance. Although these conversations may not always revolve around alcohol consumption, they reflect brand values, revealing the subtlety and complexity of branding. The analysis also suggests that the brands used SNS to position the brand as part of everyday activities, framing alcohol consumption as a positive, everyday activity.

Consumers also derive benefits from interacting with alcohol brands on SNS. The analysis of user generated content on SNS suggested that users were able to respond directly to the brand, expressing opinions on new products, advertising campaigns and promotions. They appeared to respond voluntarily and with enthusiasm to brand content, spreading it to their wider social network and further increasing its reach. More subtly, users were also able to engage with alcohol brands in order to portray something about themselves to others. Alcohol brands worked as shortcuts or symbols with which users could display taste and demonstrate personality or lifestyle. In the focus groups, packaging was found to have a similar function. The pack was an embodiment of the brand values and carried extra significance for young people, who would often consume their product directly from the packaging and in the company of their peers. New packaging technologies have the potential to not only enhance product packaging as an advertising platform, but also to reposition it as a new channel for generating branded user-led content on social media.

Alcohol marketing was a part of young people's everyday life. Messages from alcohol marketers on SNS appear alongside comments and images from friends, lending them greater credibility, authenticity and persuasiveness. Alcohol marketing on SNS only shows alcohol consumption in a positive light, skewing social norms. Drinking and images of excess were often a central feature of the self-generated content that is widely accessed and shared on SNS. These practices not only provide a platform for endorsing specific alcohol brands, but also serve to normalise excessive consumption and potentially risky drinking behaviours.

A key finding from the study, observed in both the focus groups and the thematic content analysis, was that users associated alcohol brands with the same values and personality as those promoted by the brands themselves on SNS, proving that brands are successful in priming users to associate the brand with certain attributes and values. For example, comments on Budweiser's Facebook page revolved around football, users on the Bulmers Facebook page chatted about the summer, and images posted by users of Malibu products featured glamorous-looking cocktails in exotic locations. Similarly, when viewing alcohol packaging, young people were able to identify and evoke brand values: Budweiser was associated with watching football, Malibu with holidays abroad and Bulmers cider with consuming outdoors and at barbeques, illustrating how deeply-embedded these brand associations were in young people's everyday lives. Young people's dependence on SNS as a means of everyday social interaction has vast implications for marketers. The advent of social networking means that corporations can have direct access to, and form part of, a young person's social reality. If the ideal relationship between the consumer and the brand is a close one, the omnipresence of SNS means that brand are able to constantly reinforce their values, cementing the brand identity in consumers' minds. Current marketing regulations aimed at protecting vulnerable groups such as young people can be seen as ineffective because they seek to apply existing codes to the online environment rather than addressing the unique challenges posted by social media (Nicholls, 2012). In particular, the co-created nature of marketing messages on SNS – the way that marketing messages are created not only by brands but through interactions between brands and users and between users themselves – is not recognised in existing regulatory codes.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The consumption of alcohol plays an important part in the way in which people create desired identities and live their social lives. Through marketing practices, alcohol brands have become embedded in everyday life and this is amplified by the increase in new technologies which facilitate the transference of marketing messages. This research has sought to explore how alcohol brands use social networking sites and packaging as part of their repertoire of marketing activities, and how consumers respond to and engage with these activities. This chapter introduces the main issues of interest to this study.

### 1.1 Young people and alcohol consumption

The consumption of alcohol by young people is a major public health concern and has been linked with poor educational performance, risky sexual behaviour and teenage pregnancy, crime and disorder and a range of physical and psychological harms (Gordon et al., 2010). In addition, research has shown that the earlier a young person begins to drink alcohol, the greater the likelihood that they will develop alcohol dependency later in life (Bonomo et al., 2004; Newbury-Birch et al., 2009).

Recent surveys have found that 16-24 year-olds in the UK are drinking less often during the week. Between 2005 and 2012, the proportion of 16-24 year-old males and females drinking above the recommended low-risk guidelines fell from 46% to 30% and 41% to 30% respectively. However, 16-24 year-olds are more prone to heavy episodic drinking than other age groups. The proportion of 16-24 year old males and females drinking at least twice the recommended number of units in a session at least once a week remains above the total average for both sexes (ONS, 2014). Studies in England have shown that although the percentage of 11-15 year olds who drank alcohol during the last week reduced from 21% in 1990 to 10% in 2012, the average consumption of those who drink has increased by 136% from 5.3 to 12.5 units (Health and Social Care Information Centre, 2013).

Levels of drinking among 15 year olds in the United Kingdom remain significantly higher than the European average (Currie et al., 2012). The 'WHO *Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health 2014*' found that alcohol consumption in the UK by those aged 15+ is higher than the European average: 11.6 litres of alcohol per capita against 10.9 for Europe overall.

### 1.2 Alcohol marketing and young people

Alcohol marketing is an important focus for investigation by alcohol researchers because of its potential to influence drinking behaviour, particularly amongst young people. There is a wealth of evidence that exposure to alcohol advertising increases the likelihood that young people will start to consume alcohol and will drink more if they already do so (Smith and Foxcroft, 2009; Anderson et al., 2009).

The Advertising Standards Agency (ASA) code of practice states that alcohol advertising on TV and radio must not use be directed at or contain anything that is likely to appeal to audiences below the age of 18. However, studies have shown that young people are frequently exposed to alcohol advertising through a variety of media and there is evidence that young people are exposed to

more alcohol advertising than adults. Research conducted by the RAND Corporation for the European Commission shows that 10-15 year olds in the UK see 10% more alcohol advertising on TV than their parents do. In addition, when it comes to the specific marketing of alcopops, they see 50% more advertising than their parents (Winpenny et al., 2012).

A qualitative study on the impact of alcohol marketing on youth drinking suggested that some alcohol marketing might target young people. Focus groups with young people (aged 13–15 years) revealed a sophisticated level of awareness of, and involvement in, alcohol marketing across several channels. It was found that some marketing activities featured content that could appeal to young people and appeared to influence their, well-developed, brand attitudes (Gordon et al., 2010). Analysis of alcohol industry documents highlights the importance of young people to the alcohol industry. New generations are a key target for alcohol advertisers. Market research data on 15-16 year olds is used to guide and inform marketing campaigns and some alcoholic products are referred to in industry documents as “kids drinks” (Hastings et al., 2010).

In this study we examine how alcohol marketers are using new marketing tools to reach and engage with consumers, and how consumers in turn perceive and interact with this marketing.

### **1.3 How does marketing ‘work’?**

Marketing seeks to make consumers think in a particular way about a brand and ascribe meaning and emotion, this is known as ‘brand positioning’ or ‘brand capital’ (Saffer, 2002). A wide range of tools and processes are used to create the desired positioning - the desired set of associations within consumers’ minds. Every time a customer is in contact with a brand is a potential opportunity to say something about that brand and reinforce its positioning (Elliott and Leonard, 2004). These points of contact are provided not only through advertising, but through every aspect of marketing: how products are designed, how they are priced, how they are sold and displayed in shops, how they are packaged, where and how they are consumed in public and private places, and how they are talked about in conversations and popular culture (Babor et al., 2010).

All of these aspects are used to shape consumers’ thoughts and feelings about a brand in such a way that they want to purchase, consume, display and associate themselves with it. Marketing tools are used to communicate the brand’s attributes, both its tangible benefits (e.g. taste, affordable price) and its intangible emotional benefits – the emotions, images and values it evokes (Gigerenzer, 2007). In a product category such as alcohol where there are very few differences between brands in terms of their tangible characteristics, these intangible benefits are the main ways for brands to define themselves and differentiate themselves from other brands. Marketing seeks to confer personalities on brands and to associate them with values and experiences which will resonate with their target groups (Stead et al., 2011). The most effective marketing actions and messages are those which consistently reinforce the brand’s desired personality and set of associations.

A fundamental point about marketing is that these processes work in combination; they interact with one another to produce cumulative effects (Babor et al., 2010). The effect of one particular marketing channel or tool is incredibly difficult to isolate and to measure; furthermore, to measure one channel or tool in isolation is to examine only a fraction of marketing’s influence. Individual

encounters with a brand combine to produce a cumulative effect which cements the brand identity in consumers' minds (Gordon and Harris, 2009).

#### **1.4 Why brands matter to consumers**

Brands are important to consumers since they encapsulate the perceived value of attributes of products. Branding can also communicate social status and aspirations and is important to personal identity and peer acceptance (Jackson et al., 2000). Brands can market themselves as adventurous, fun-loving or sophisticated, reinforcing this identity through affiliations with popular culture, sports or music (Stead et al., 2011). Marketers build intangible emotional benefits into their brands in a bid to evoke certain feelings when consumers use their product. In essence, the brand becomes an extension of the consumers' self-identity through a process known as 'symbolic self-completion' whereby the meanings and values of the brand transfer to the individual who is seen to be consuming it (Belk, 1988; Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). Brands are increasingly presented as personalities with which the consumer can form a relationship (Hanby, 1999). The brand personality is an expression of the brand's core values and characteristics. From a marketers' point of view, the ideal relationship between the consumer and the brand is a close one.

Youth culture attaches great value to brand labels and symbols and young people use brands to create and present a desired identity (Casswell, 2004). The marketing of alcohol brands plays an increasingly integral part of young people's everyday lives at a stage where they are striving to achieve their own personal identity (Hill, 2001). Young people want to be seen to be drinking particular brands and often favour brands which appeal to them on an emotional level (Gordon, MacKintosh and Moodie, 2010). However, it is equally important for young people that they be seen to be consuming what their peer groups would consider 'the right brands' (Wooten, 2006). It is important not to deviate too far from accepted peer group norms as there are often social consequences for those who make the 'wrong' consumption choices (Valentine, 2000). Brands provide a means of negotiating these choppy waters by acting as a shortcut to certain values and lifestyle aspirations (Fournier, 1998; Hanby, 1999). Therefore, the consumption of brands serves two important functions for adolescents – it helps them create and present a desired identity, and it helps them fit in with their desired peer group (Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998; Patterson and O Malley, 2006).

Branding has also been found to have an effect on young people's future drinking habits. Research has shown that children as young as 10 are familiar with, and can identify alcohol company brands and logos (Alcohol Concern, 2012). A study examining the relationship between measures of awareness to marketing and drinking among a sample of young people in New Zealand aged between 13 and 14 found that brand allegiance (respondents were asked if they had a favourite brand of alcohol) increased the odds of being a drinker by 356%. Brand allegiance was also associated with more frequent alcohol consumption (1.65 times more drinking occasions per year) and 86% more alcohol consumed on a typical occasion (Lin et al., 2012). Other studies have found a link between liking of alcohol advertising and brand allegiance at age 18 and the volume of beer consumed at age 21 (Casswell and Zhang, 1998).

## 1.5 Branding and packaging

Packaging is a particularly important marketing lever for brands which are very similar to one another in their tangible attributes, such as alcohol. It is the most obvious means of differentiating one product from another on the supermarket shelf. As the experience with the packaging of tobacco products has shown, packaging is used as a key marketing tool for promoting brand image (Hammond, 2007). The packaging is intended to be an immediate and direct signifier of the brand's core values (Novak, 2004). The colours, images and font used on the packaging all contribute to the desired image of the brand. It is also particularly important for products which are consumed in public, and are often intended to be consumed in group and peer-contexts, and from the package itself (Casswell, 2004). Where a product is consumed in these circumstances, it has the potential to say something about the person consuming it.

Alcohol products are designed to be attractive to consumers and stand out from other similar products. Previous research has found that the way in which an alcoholic beverage is packaged can increase the acceptability and palatability of alcoholic beverages amongst young people (Copeland et al., 2007; Gates et al., 2007). Products such as alcopops and ready-to-drink beverages may be ostensibly designed for the young adult market. However, evidence has shown that these types of drinks also appeal to children and teenagers and can therefore encourage the early uptake of drinking (Hughes et al., 1997). Ready-to-drink beverages are more convenient and the alcohol is often disguised by fruit flavours. Screw-top products are also more convenient for underage drinkers who may be consuming the products outside the home and not have access to corkscrews or bottle openers (Casswell, 2004).

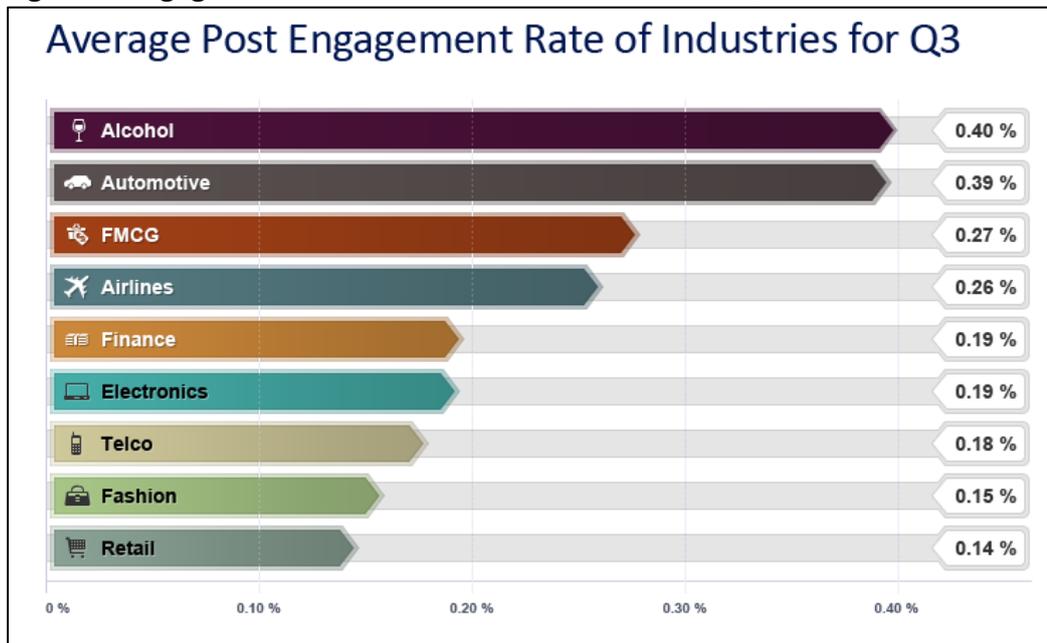
## 1.6 Marketing alcohol on social networking sites

Recent studies have demonstrated the power and ubiquity of social media in young people's lives (Chou and Edge, 2012; Paradise and Sullivan, 2012). Social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter provide a platform for users to establish and explore self-identity through interaction with others by providing users with feedback on their own behaviour and allowing them to monitor the behaviour of their peers and how others react to this behaviour. Social networks offer new avenues for young people to create 'consumer identities' by engaging with brands through consumption practices and the transference of symbolic meaning (McCreanor et al., 2005). SNS also help in the creation and maintenance of certain social norms and behaviours. This is particularly important when it comes to alcohol use because research has identified alcohol expectancies and perceptions of peer consumption habits as predictors of alcohol use (Moreno et al., 2009). Users are openly endorsing products to an audience comprised of their peers (Griffiths and Casswell, 2010). Recent studies looking at alcohol use on Facebook have found that alcohol is even more prevalent than previous research had suggested. Pictures showing alcohol consumption in a positive context and images featuring an alcohol brand logo were found to be more positively received by other users, receiving significantly more 'likes' than other images (Beullens and Schepers, 2013). Brands use a number of distinct marketing methods which undermine policies aimed at normative beliefs and normalise daily alcohol consumption (Nicholls, 2012, McCreanor et al., 2013).

The emergence of social networking sites has changed the nature of alcohol marketing. Alcohol companies have shifted their focus from traditional digital communication, such as branded

websites, to social network sites. In 2011, Diageo announced plans to strengthen its partnership with Facebook after reporting that their fan base had increased from 3.5 to 12 million in 2010-2011. This was alongside a 20% increase in sales over five brands including Smirnoff, which Diageo referred to as “the number one beverage alcohol brand on Facebook worldwide” (Diageo, 2011). In September 2011, alcohol brands had the third highest consumer ‘engagement rate’ on Facebook (based on likes, comments and shares) after the automotive industry and retail. However, as Figure 1 below illustrates, increased investment by alcohol brands has seen the alcohol industry displace the automotive industry as the industry with the highest rate of engagement on Facebook(<http://www.socialbakers.com/blog/1073-alcohol-brands-shake-up-engagement>).

**Figure 1: Engagement rate of industries on Facebook – Quarter 3 2012**



Source: socialbakers.com 05/09/14

Social networking sites have opened up new opportunities for alcohol brands to engage with consumers. Sites such as Facebook and Twitter provide brands with a whole new range of opportunities and tools for making contact with consumers and reinforcing their brand identity. They invest significant resources in producing content for their pages and appropriating content from the internet which they can then re-post to generate interaction with fans (Carah, 2014). SNS give brands a way of engaging with consumers in an ongoing conversation. For example, with Facebook, brand content is not just confined to paid advertising panels, but appears in a user’s news feed along with the other content from the user’s friends. As individuals ‘like’ brands and comment on them or share their content, brand messages are passed on to the news feeds of their friends (Nicholls, 2012; McCreanor et al., 2013). In turn, users comment on, appropriate and transform this content, effectively colluding with the brand in creating and distributing marketing messages; in effect, co-creating the branding. Figure 2 below, illustrates how brand-authored marketing communications and user-generated content interact on a brand’s Facebook page.

**Figure 2: Example of brand's Facebook page**



Social media marketing centres on the promotion of interaction and conversation amongst users (Nicholls, 2012). This new form of marketing is of profound importance to brands, for several key reasons. The distinction between marketing and non-marketing is blurred: marketing becomes an open-ended process running through different online platforms. Messages are no longer limited to a few active sources and many passive recipients. When users themselves create content or cause content to be distributed to their friends, it becomes unclear who is doing the marketing. Brands benefit from this, because messages and recommendations which are seen to originate from users may be perceived to have greater credibility, authenticity and persuasiveness than those perceived to have been created and paid for by commercial brands (Cover, 2012; McCreanor et al., 2013). By creating a virtual 'word-of-mouth', brands are able to utilise social media's capacity to harness users' creation and circulation of information in order to promote their brand. Although this user-generated content may appear to be unmediated and unmoderated, the reality is that brands control this process very tightly (Holt, 2002; Lury, 2009). Furthermore, social networking sites enable brands to move into spaces where they can interact with consumers in their everyday lives. Social networking sites can easily be accessed anywhere through the use of smartphones, computers and wearable technology. Brands circulate content which relates to popular culture and current events, which will both be of intrinsic interest to users – so that they wish to share it and be associated with it - and will also contribute to brand identity and values.

It is not just brands which benefit from these new forms and spaces for marketing, but consumers also. Brands are cultural signifiers which users can reference on social media, just as they do in real life when choosing to wear a particular brand of sports shoe or buy a particular type of phone, to signal something about the sort of person they wish to be perceived as. More subtly, brands

become conversational resources which become “part of consumer experiences, pastimes and memories” and part of the stories which consumers tell about their everyday lives (Carah 2014). In this way, the connections between brands and consumers’ lives and identities are deepened. SNS allow the user to create and share content which is meaningful to them and brands become part of this. By discussing and creating alcohol-related content on SNS, users are able to construct their desired identity in a space which is not constrained by existing social and structural barriers (Boyd and Ellison, 2007).

## **1.7 This study**

This study has not sought to examine the impact of marketing on behaviour; for this, different designs of study and much larger scale studies are required (see Pinsky et al., 2010; Gordon and Harris, 2009). Instead, it has sought to explore how brands use social networking sites and packaging as part of their repertoire of activities, and how users respond to these activities. The discussion of marketing and branding above illustrates how much marketing activity is directed not towards producing direct effects on consumers but towards creating and reinforcing powerful brands. In order to understand marketing, we need not only to examine evidence of direct effects – increased sales or consumption – but also to explore how marketing works: how marketing activities contribute to the creation and reinforcement of desired brand values. In other words, are the messages communicated by the brand consistent with the desired brand position? Are the associations created in consumers’ minds the desired associations? Are consumers’ responses to the brand in line with the emotions the brand wishes to evoke?

## 2. METHODS

Research in this new and little understood area needs to use approaches which are reflexive and inductive. There is great value to be had in combining traditional qualitative research methods, such as interviews and focus groups, with more recent innovations in the field of online research (Maclaran and Catterall, 2002). Therefore two qualitative methods, content analysis of brand activity on five social network sites over a seven day period and focus group discussions with 14-17 year-olds, were used in order to answer the following research questions:

- How do young people perceive and engage with alcohol packaging and labelling?
- In what ways do alcohol brands feature in community conversations on social media sites?
- How are alcohol brands used by young people in social media networks to construct desired identities?
- How do alcohol marketers encourage consumers to actively engage with alcohol brands through the use of web addresses and QR codes on packaging and labelling?
- How do alcohol marketers encourage user engagement on social media sites?
- What alcohol brands do young people find most appealing and would be most likely to engage with further through websites and social media pages?

### 2.1 Content analysis of social network sites

#### *Approach*

The first stage of the study sought to identify, observe and analyse on-line communications regarding alcohol products on SNS as a lens through which to understand how alcohol marketers encourage consumers to talk about alcohol brands online and also how alcohol brands are used by consumers in their conversations and sharing activities on SNS.

We examined these communications by conducting a content analysis informed by netnographic approaches. 'Netnography' applies ethnographic methods to the study of online cultures (Rokka, 2010), treating online communications, such as comments and images shared on social network sites, as a form of social interaction (Kozinets, 2010; Maclaran and Catterall, 2002). Data collection was conducted through non-participant observation, an approach which has previously been used to examine virtual communities in online settings (Hewer and Brownlie, 2007). The netnographic approach treats interactive, conversational data from online communities as qualitative data to be content analysed (Beaven and Laws, 2007; Brown, Kozinets and Sherry, 2003). Like ethnographic methods, netnography is concerned with naturalistic modes of inquiry offering greater levels of consumer understanding and insight. However, where netnography differs from regular, ethnographic research is in its ability to understand virtual communities and provide consumer insights from social media data. Netnography allows the researcher to learn the rules and norms of an online community. Online research allows the study of the many diverse and increasingly globalised consumer cultures which exist on social networking sites as well as a greater understanding of user-to-user communications that is a crucial part of online marketing strategies (Maclaran and Catterall, 2002). Netnography treats online communications as embedded expressions of meaning where users are sharing details and providing cultural insights. Themes and trends are not only gathered from the words present in online interactions but take into account the characteristics of the site, the language used and the type of interaction (Kozinets, 2010). It also examines symbols, images, photos and videos, using software tools such as NVivo to assist with the data collection and analysis. While some netnographic approaches involve the researcher

immersing themselves in a specific community (for example, if studying a chat room or self-help forum), our interest in this study was less in the processes and activities of particular communities, and more in how alcohol brands facilitate and are used in conversations and activities across a variety of platforms (Hewer and Brownlie, 2007). This meant that we were interested in interactions between brands and users – for example, answers to comments, sharing of images – and also in interactions between users where these directly alluded to specific brands.

We selected five social networking sites for analysis over a 7-day period (March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014 to March 10<sup>th</sup> 2014). This period of time was selected because a seven day period was felt to be sufficient to capture enough data including marketing messages from the brands for each day of the week. The observation period was also selected because it covered a national holiday (Shrove Tuesday) allowing for analysis of the way which brands included this event in their marketing.

### **Sample selection: social networking sites**

Five of the most popular social networking sites in the UK were selected to cover a range of brand activity and user-generated content. These SNS were: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest and Tumblr. A short summary of each of these sites is included as Appendix A, including details of brand involvement and examples of SNS pages.

### **Sample selection: alcohol brands**

Six alcohol brands were selected for analysis based on the following selection criteria

- They should be visible on all five SNS (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Tumblr and Pinterest)
- They should have more than 50,000 fans on Facebook
- Their packaging should promote online engagement through the use of web addresses, QR codes or augmented reality packaging (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Details of brands and how packaging promotes online engagement**

Brand name	Example of packaging	Type of beverage	Web address on packaging	QR code on packaging	Augmented reality packaging
Budweiser		Beer	✓		✓
Bulmers		Cider	✓		
Dragon Soop		Alcoholic energy drink		✓	
Malibu		Rum		✓	
Smirnoff		Vodka	✓		
WKD		Pre-mixed drink (alcopop)			✓

As illustrated in Table 3, the number of fans on Facebook ranged from 66,697 for Dragon Soop to 11,590,403 for Budweiser, reflecting the latter brand's global status. It is important for brands to have large fan bases on Facebook because the larger the fan base, the more people that brand

content will 'reach', appearing on the news feeds of more users (Carah, 2014). The reach of a Facebook page increases when people interact with it by leaving comments, sharing the page or liking a post. Facebook publishes statistics which measure 'people talking about this page', which displays the number of people who have interacted with that Facebook page over the last seven days. This number is provided in Table 2 for March 10<sup>th</sup> 2014.

Facebook also publishes the 'most popular age group' that follows the page. For the six brands included in the study, these age groups ranged from 18-24 (Bulmer's, Dragon Soop and WKD) to 25-34 (Budweiser, Malibu and Smirnoff). It is important to note that these age groups are based on the ages that Facebook users enter when they create their profile. A user needs to indicate that they are over 18 to see and like an alcohol brand's Facebook page.

WKD had the largest number of Twitter followers at 11,200 whilst Dragon Soop had the least with 1,493. The aim is to have 'engaged followers' who will interact with the brand on a regular basis and are likely to re-tweet any messages the brand posts. Although the number of Twitter followers should not be confused with engagement (users commenting, re-tweeting and 'favouriting'), having a large number of followers allows the brand's message to reach as many people as possible whilst increasing the chances of user engagement. The more followers a brand has, the larger their potential customer base.

**Table 2: SNS metrics as of March 10th 2014**

Brand	Facebook fans	People talking about it on Facebook	Most popular age group amongst Facebook followers	Twitter followers	Following on Twitter	Tweets	YouTube channel (Y or N)	YouTube subscribers
Budweiser UK	11,590,403	168,240	25-34	4,358	142	1,033	Y	1,136
Bulmer's	290,907	3,611	18-24	8,336	3,069	6,541	Y	221
Dragon Soop	66,697	896	18-24	1,493	430	876	Y	18
Malibu UK	2,076,725	47,534	25-34	9,431	351	3,193	Y	1,456
Smirnoff	10,715,764	146,894	25-34	2,484*	871	1,156	Y	2,349**
WKD	284,944	1,057	18-24	11,200	180	2,205	N	n/a

\*Smirnoff Twitter account was Smirnoff GB \*\*Smirnoff YouTube channel was SmirnoffEurope

**Table 3: Brand activity on SNS March 3rd to March 10th 2014**

Brand	Facebook Posts	Facebook Comments	Tweets	Re-tweets by brand	Twitter comments
Budweiser	2	2	5	1	0
Bulmer's	7	48	21	8	4
Dragon Soop	4	1	3	0	1
Malibu	5	5	10	4	0
Smirnoff	5	10	5	2	1
WKD	6	0	11	14	3

Table 3 shows the activity of the brands on Facebook and Twitter for the 7 days from 3<sup>rd</sup> March to 10 March. Bulmer's was the most active on Facebook posting 7 times on Facebook and commenting 48 times. Bulmer's was also the most active on Twitter, sending 21 tweets, re-tweeting posts by other users 8 times and commenting on its own page 4 times. Budweiser was the least active brand on Facebook, posting 2 times and commenting twice. Dragon Soop was the least active brand on

Twitter, posting 3 tweets, 0 re-tweets and making one comment. It is worth noting that although Budweiser and Smirnoff have the largest number of followers in Table 2, reflecting their global brand position, their SNS activity as illustrated in Table 3 was relatively small scale.

### ***Data collection and capture***

Different strategies were used to generate data for each SNS. For Facebook, all content, both brand-generated and user-generated, on the six alcohol brands' own Facebook pages was collected for the 7 day period March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014 to March 10<sup>th</sup> 2014. For Twitter, all content on the six alcohol brands' Twitter pages was collected for the 7 day period, including re-tweets of user-generated content. For Pinterest and Tumblr, key word searches were conducted on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2014, using the sites' own search function, to identify user-generated content tagged with any of the six alcohol brand names. For YouTube, searches were made of each alcohol brand's official channel (if one existed), and the top three results were retrieved. For those brands which did not have a dedicated YouTube channel, key word searches for the name of the brand were conducted on 10<sup>th</sup> March and the top three relevant search results were captured. Due to software constraints, user comments for each video were not collected.

All potentially relevant data were 'captured' using the web browser extension NCapture. This software allows the user to gather textual and visual material from the web to import into NVivo. The data were then scanned to identify relevant and irrelevant content. For example, the searches on Pinterest and Tumblr identified material which was tagged with the same name as the brand but did not appear to relate to the brand (for example, a designer with the name 'Bulmer', a lingerie company called 'WKD', references to 'wkd' meaning 'weekend', and so on). This irrelevant content was excluded from the analysis.

PDF images of full SNS pages were then saved in NVivo for coding.

### ***Coding and analysis***

A coding frame was developed and piloted by two researchers to assess consistency. The researchers met to discuss and resolve any discrepancies in coding and to refine the coding frame according to emerging practices and themes. To establish inter-rater reliability, findings were compared and any differences in interpretation resolved. Data were initially organised into two categories to reflect their origin, 'brand practices' and 'user practices'. Within each of these categories, sub-categories were identified to describe the nature of the practice (for example, providing information on new products, asking fans to 'like', comment or share a post, promoting brand sponsored events or campaigns, posting comments, tagging other users etc.). Further categories and sub-categories were then developed to describe the thematic content of the data, again distinguishing between themes relating to brand activity and themes relating to user activity. These themes related to cultural identity, humour, popular culture, displaying personality and creativity and references to lifestyle etc.). The coding frame is shown in the Appendix.

Unlike a traditional ethnography, netnography allows the researcher to return to review the original data long after it was produced. The data can then be coded, annotated with the researcher's interpretations, checked against new data to evaluate the persistence of social patterns, and used to develop a theory that is grounded in the data. The data was interpreted and synthesised using a 'grounded theory' approach – a systematic theory that is 'grounded' in observations. Codes were developed inductively, based on observations that were summarised into conceptual categories and gradually refined and linked to other conceptual categories (Glaser and

Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory is appropriate when the study of social interactions or experiences aims to explain a process, not to test or verify an existing theory (Lingard, Albert and Levinson 2008).

### ***Ethical issues***

Analysis of internet content raises ethical issues for researchers. On the one hand, content posted in forums or spaces on the internet that are intentionally public, such as Facebook or YouTube, could be considered 'in the public domain' and therefore treated in the same way as other publicly available content, such as newspaper articles. This would mean that a researcher could quote the content and source freely. However, there is a strong argument that content posted by individual users is of a different order to content posted by commercial entities, and that users' online identities should be protected unless they have consented to participate in a study and know that their content may be included in the study. In this study, it would have been impractical and inappropriate to attempt seek consent from all users whose content would potentially be included in the study. It was therefore decided that the most ethical way to proceed was to remove any identifier information which might enable a user to be traced. This research was approved by the university research ethics board.

## **2.2 Focus Groups**

### ***Approach***

The second stage of research consisted of qualitative focus group interviews with 14-17 year old males and females. It is difficult to explore people's perceptions of nebulous concepts such as branding through direct questioning techniques, and the benefit of using focus groups is that they enable the use of indirect and creative methods to elicit responses. A semi-structured interview schedule was developed looking to explore young people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour relating to alcohol packaging and labelling and their levels of awareness and engagement with alcohol marketing (attached as Appendix B).

Examples of alcohol packaging were available for participants to handle and further examples of alcohol marketing were shown using a tablet device (the full list of alcohol brands is included as Appendix G). Content from branded SNS and websites was also used to facilitate discussion and encourage participants to talk about socialising with reference to alcohol and marketing. The purpose of these focus groups was to explore how young peoples' experiences of social networking sites and alcohol brands.

### ***Sample and recruitment***

Eight focus groups (6 participants per group, n=48) were conducted involving single sex friendship groups of girls and boys aged 14-17, recruited in two categories: 14-15 year old 'starter drinkers' and 16-17 year old 'established drinkers' (MacKintosh et al., 1997). Groups were also divided according to social status. Friendship groups were used so that participants felt comfortable in reasonably homogenous groups. Friendship groups are effective ways of exploring how established groups interact in relation to the phenomenon under investigation, so are particularly valuable for looking at social phenomena such as how young people exchange brand images and messages using social/digital media. This helped to provide insight into the social value attached to this type of information and how the alcohol industry seeks to exploit this.

Groups were recruited using the Institute for Social Marketing's field force of experienced focus group recruiters using established methods for recruiting young people and friendship groups which have been used successfully in other projects. An information letter that outlined the nature of the study was provided to parents and participants (Appendix D). Participants were recruited using a detailed recruitment questionnaire (Appendix E). Groups were held in informal community settings in Edinburgh city centre and the south of Glasgow and were audio-recorded with participants' consent. The demographics of each group are detailed in Table 4 below.

**Table 4: Details of focus group participants**

Group Number	Location	Gender	Age	Social status
Group 1	Edinburgh	Male	14-15	ABC1
Group 2	Edinburgh	Male	16-17	C2DE
Group 3	Edinburgh	Female	14-15	ABC1
Group 4	Edinburgh	Female	16-17	C2DE
Group 5	Glasgow	Male	14-15	C2DE
Group 6	Glasgow	Male	16-17	ABC1
Group 7	Glasgow	Female	14-15	C2DE
Group 8	Glasgow	Female	16-17	ABC1

### ***Coding and analysis***

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and transferred for coding and analysis into the NVivo 10 software package. Each transcript was reviewed by two members of the research team to identify major themes and sub-themes through open coding (Braun and Clark, 2006). To establish inter-rater reliability, findings were compared and any discrepancies resolved. Findings were then grouped into major categories reflecting key topics (included as Appendix F). Again, codes were developed inductively, using grounded theory based on observations that were summarised into conceptual categories and gradually refined and linked to other conceptual categories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

### ***Ethical issues***

The primary ethical issues considered were informed consent, rights to withdraw, anonymity and confidentiality. Research with minors must always be undertaken with great care. Parental permission as well as informed consent was obtained for all participants. All participants were assured confidentiality and all efforts have been made to conceal the identity of the participants. Data was held on a secure server which can only be accessed by members of the research team. At the beginning of each group the researcher explained the aims of the study and set out the ethical guidelines and gave the young people an opportunity to ask questions about the research. Due to the participants being below the legal drinking age, it was made clear that it was not the researchers' intention to promote underage alcohol consumption of any kind. Information cards produced by NHS Scotland were handed out at the end of the groups to all participants, detailing the health consequences of underage drinking. Finally, all participants were given £15 for attending the focus group. This research was approved by the university research ethics board.

Findings are presented in 3 sections. Findings from the netnographic content analysis of SNS are presented in Sections 3 and 4: Section 3 discusses and analyses how alcohol brands use and benefit from SNS, and Section 4 discusses how users engage with alcohol brand related content on SNS. Section 5 presents the findings from the focus groups with young people.

### 3. FINDINGS: HOW ALCOHOL BRANDS USE AND BENEFIT FROM SNS

This section discusses and analyses the different ways in which alcohol brands used SNS and the benefits they derived from doing so. The section begins with a brief overview of the different types of actions the alcohol brands performed on SNS (3.1). We then discuss and analyse how the brands used SNS to communicate brand values and identity (section 3.2). In section 3.3, we discuss how the brands' uses of SNS can be seen to encourage and drive not just feelings about the particular brand but alcohol consumption in general.

#### 3.1 Brand uses of SNS

Alcohol brands performed a number of actions on SNS: they used SNS as an *advertising platform*, for product and distribution information; they used SNS to *solicit feedback from users* and open up a conversation; they used SNS to *encourage users to act* (for example, by 'liking', or posting comments, or entering competitions, or re-tweeting brand authored content); and they *used and co-opted user generated content* to support their own branding. Each of these is now briefly discussed.

##### **Advertising new products and distribution outlets**

SNS were used as a platform for distributing advertising (print and video) and providing information on new product developments, price promotions, distribution outlets and events. For example, in the two pictures below, Bulmers and WKD used Facebook and Twitter to promote advertisements for new products: the Bulmers example on the left informed users of two new low-alcohol flavours, and the WKD example on the right encouraged users to try its new Brazilian flavour at the weekend.

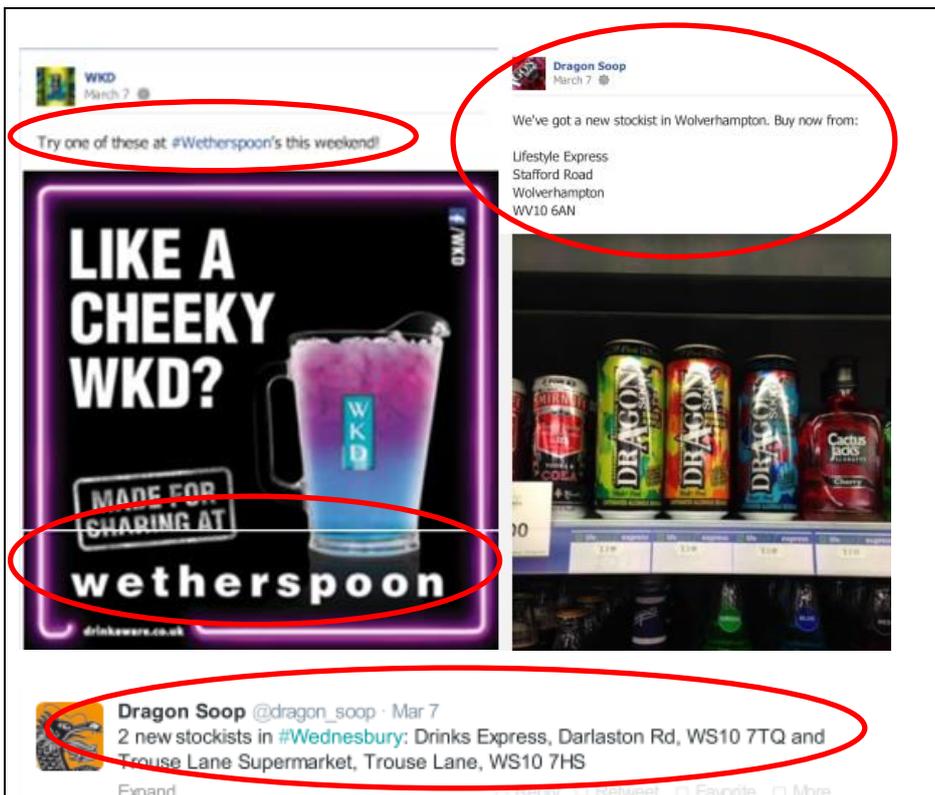


Brands also used YouTube as an opportunity to showcase video advertisements. The screen shots below were taken from videos posted by Dragon Soop, Smirnoff and Malibu on their YouTube channels to promote new products and new flavours to subscribers. The Dragon Soop video, below right, was very basic in its content, promoting its new 'Red Kola' flavour with an image of an animated dragon and some dance music. The Smirnoff YouTube channel featured a recent

television advertisement shown as part of a £4.5 million campaign to promote the brand's new product: Smirnoff Gold. This advert, below middle, told the story of two glamorous characters lost in a hotel. They entered a bar where a band played music in the background and golden snakes appeared from the sleeves of the barman's shirt before he mixed the couple a cocktail using Smirnoff Gold. The advert ended with a shot of the bottle and the aforementioned cocktail, entitled 'Smirnoff Apple Bite Gold'. The Malibu video, below right, featured their recent promotional campaign for 'Malibu Sparkler' a carbonated drink made with Malibu rum and coconut water. This video, entitled 'The Malibu Sparkler Experiment', featured a multitude of Malibu Sparkler bottles which had been set up so that when their corks popped they would hit a specific part of a drum kit. A DJ then added extra music over the percussion whilst young men and women danced to the beat.



Brands also used SNS to inform users of distribution outlets and promote the consumption of their products. For example, as illustrated below, WKD regularly mentioned the high street pub chain Wetherspoon's and encouraged users to purchase WKD products and cocktails in these outlets. The examples also illustrate how Dragon Soop, a brand still trying to gain a foothold in the marketplace, used both Facebook and Twitter to inform users of new stockists, providing full addresses including postcode.



### ***Soliciting feedback from users***

SNS provided the brands with a means to interact with and gather feedback from users. For example, brands exhorted users to ‘tell us what you think’ or would ask a specific user a direct question. In doing so, they not only could gather insight into users’ views but could also make users feel more directly connected to the brand – as if their views mattered – and encourage users to build a relationship with the brand.

The examples below illustrate how brands would solicit users’ comments and opinions. The Budweiser example given below asked Twitter users if they were excited at the prospect to the World Cup beginning 100 days from the time of the post, and encouraged users to post comments related to football and their excitement by including the hashtag ‘#100DaysToGo’. Hashtags allow brands to begin conversations to which other users can then contribute by sending tweets or comments using the existing hashtag. This expands the content reach, amplifies the brand identity and helps the brand target the market. The Bulmers examples, below right, illustrate how brands conversed directly with named users on Facebook. These questions could be as simple as asking a user what they had had to eat or what they thought of new flavours. Bulmers was particularly assiduous at picking up on and responding to user comments in this way, and at projecting the appearance of being interested in the minutiae of users’ lives. Such responses by brands can be seen not only as encouraging users to make further comments, but also as increasing users’ feelings of connection to the brand.



### ***Encouraging users to act***

Brands used SNS to encourage users to act – to enter competitions, to post comments, to ‘like’, to ‘share’, to ‘re-tweet’ or to post photos. In doing so, users not only became potentially more connected to the brand but also helped to promote the brand by making their interactions visible to their own SNS contacts. As we discuss in the Introduction, content which is seen to originate spontaneously from genuine users as opposed to from commercial operators can be seen to have more authenticity and credibility.

For example, as illustrated below left, Bulmers encouraged users to ‘like’ its Facebook post on Friday March 7<sup>th</sup> by asking them to give the post a “thumbs up”, capitalising on their anticipation of the weekend. WKD posted tweets which encouraged users to visit its ‘Sound Clash’ website in order to enter a competition where they could win VIP tickets to the event. These posts included hashtags featuring the event ‘#WKDSoundclash’ and its location ‘#Preston’. The WKD ‘Sound Clash’

event involved two DJs who went head-to-head to compete for the support of the crowd, with the loser of the ‘clash’ having their equipment ‘powered down’. It was supported by extensive digital and social media campaigns, including Spotify and Facebook where fans of WKD could choose playlists in advance of the club nights. One of the nightclubs where the event was to be held was also ‘tagged’ into the post: ‘@Rumes\_Nightclub’ which meant that the nightclub would be alerted to this post and could potentially re-tweet WKD’s original tweet.



By engaging with these brand messages through ‘likes’ and re-tweets, users spread brand-authored marketing communications to their friends and followers. In the example below, Malibu encouraged its Twitter followers to also ‘like’ the brand’s Facebook page so that they would have a chance to enter a future competition adding the hashtag ‘giveaway’. If users followed this instruction and liked the Malibu Facebook page, this would then be communicated to the user’s Facebook friends, spreading the brand content apparently willingly on to their own social contacts. Further examples of users spreading brand messages to their social contacts are given in Section 4.



### ***Using and co-opting user generated content to support their own branding***

Alcohol brands used and co-opted user-generated content which supported the brand. As mentioned previously, content from genuine users can be seen as a more credible source than brand-authored content. In the examples given below, WKD re-tweeted content posted by users mentioning its new Brazilian flavour, co-opting this user-generated content as part of its marketing campaign. In the example on the left, the user had posted a picture of herself at a promotional event for WKD’s new flavour and added the hashtag ‘#brazilian’. The user had also tagged WKD’s Twitter account ‘@WKDOfficial’ ensuring that the tweet would be visible to the brand. In the

example on the right, the user had tweeted about WKD's new flavour stating: "It's like a taste of Rio. Even if you're in Rochdale. Well played". This tweet validated WKD's marketing strapline for the new product and helped to spread the message to other users. Again, the user had tagged WKD's Twitter account '@WKDOfficial' so that the brand would be able to see the post and had also added the hashtags '#UpTheDale' and '#HometownGlory' in tribute to his/her home town of Rochdale.



### 3.2 Strategies to communicate brand values and identity

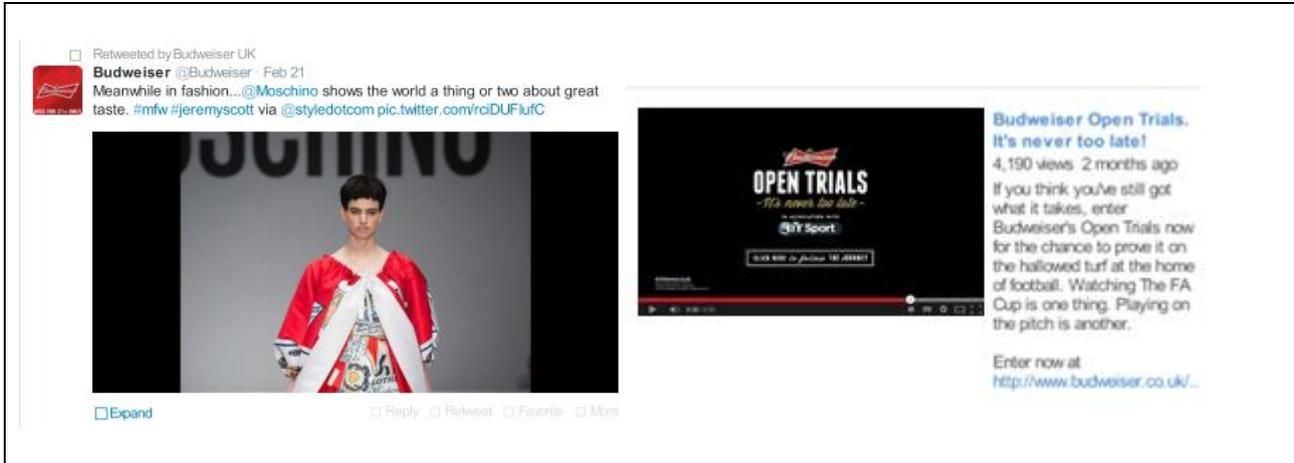
The types of brand actions described in the previous section, however simple they may appear, could all be seen as having been carefully designed to reinforce the values and identity of the brand. For example, when brands posted content or 'talked' to users, the tone of voice, the selection of images and wording, the cultural references and so on all appeared to have been carefully selected to evoke particular associations and emotional responses in users' minds which were consistent with what the brands were trying to achieve. The analysis identified five thematic headings under which these strategies could be discussed: crafting a personality; appealing to values; appealing to masculinity and femininity; creating desirable brand associations; and co-creation of brand value. Each of these is now discussed.

#### ***Crafting a personality***

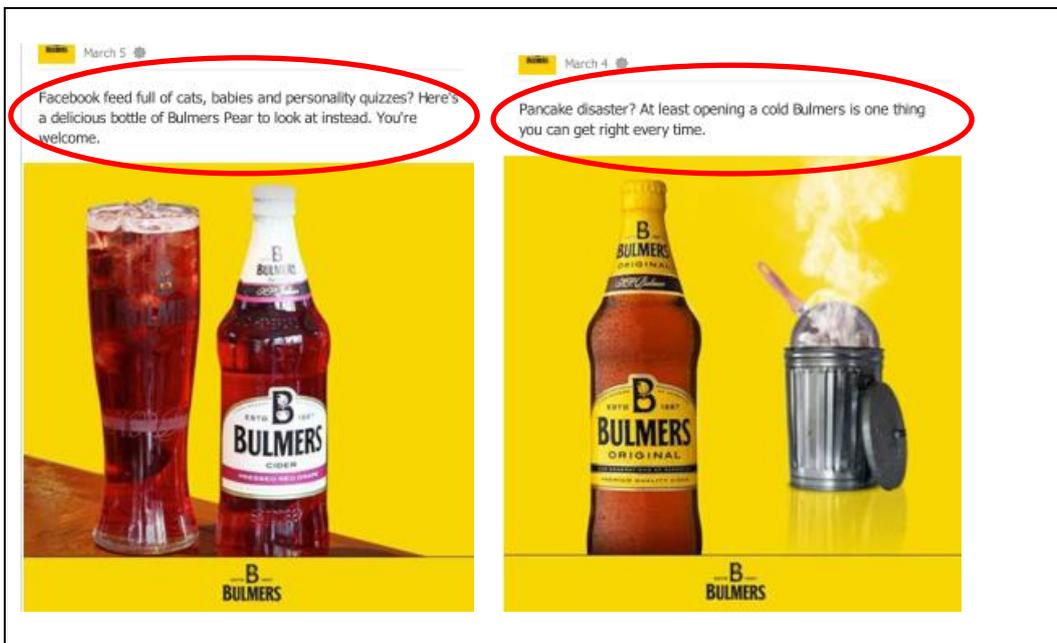
A key aspect of brand identity is the persona or personality which the brand chooses to project. Brand personality is an expression of the brand's core values and characteristics with an emphasis on human traits such as, for example, trustworthiness, excitement, stylishness or warmth. Brand personality can be seen to be constructed through the tone of voice which a brand uses when 'talking' to users, through cultural references which say something about the brand's values, through use of imagery and language designed to appeal to a particular gender or age group, and so on.

Distinct personalities were evoked through the brands' SNS content and activity. *Budweiser's* personality was distinctly masculine, with a strong focus on football, reflecting its core target group of young male beer drinkers aged 25-34 as described in Table 3. Budweiser did not tend to use a lot of humour in its posts but when it did it kept this well-mannered. For example, the Twitter post, below left, played with its audience's expectations by posting an image of a fashion show in amongst the other posts referring to football. The brand joked about the fashion brand showing "the world a thing or two about great taste" and featured an image of a model wearing a

Budweiser-inspired garment. The brand positioned itself as sociable and tended to use a ‘blokey’ tone of voice. It adopted informal phrases as illustrated in the example below right of a YouTube video which promoted the ‘Open Trials’ competition and referred to the Wembley pitch as “hallowed turf”, a phrase often used by football pundits and fans. The video also featured dramatic music and a voiceover which referred to “pub-team playmakers” and “Sunday league stars” before ending with the line “here’s to the dream”.



*Bulmers* could be seen to be trying to evoke a responsible and wholesome personality, with frequent allusions to the outdoors, summer, tradition and heritage. Visual images posted on Facebook and Twitter tended to be tasteful shots of the product in soft, golden outdoor lighting, and the tone of voice was similarly good-natured and polite. Several posts attempted a gentle humour, as the two Facebook examples below illustrate: in the left hand post, the brand made a knowing reference to the types of inane content which is frequent on Facebook (“cats, babies and personality quizzes”), and invited the user to take refuge in a drink of *Bulmers*, and in the right hand post, the brand made a mild joke about users having a “pancake disaster”.



Even critical posts from users expressing dislike of a new flavour or the introduction of lower alcohol products were met with courtesy. For example, one user posted the following:

- *what's the point in that?!*

Bulmers posted the following reply within the hour and tagged the user to make sure they saw the reply:

- *Hey (User), we wanted to offer a range of Bulmers flavours with a lower alcohol content but with the same great Bulmers taste for those interested in a more balanced lifestyle. There's still the five normal flavours to choose from if you prefer!*

Two of the brands sought to project a more female personality. *Malibu's* projected personality was fun-loving and female, with strong associations with holidays and the exotic as illustrated in the examples below taken from Malibu's Facebook page.

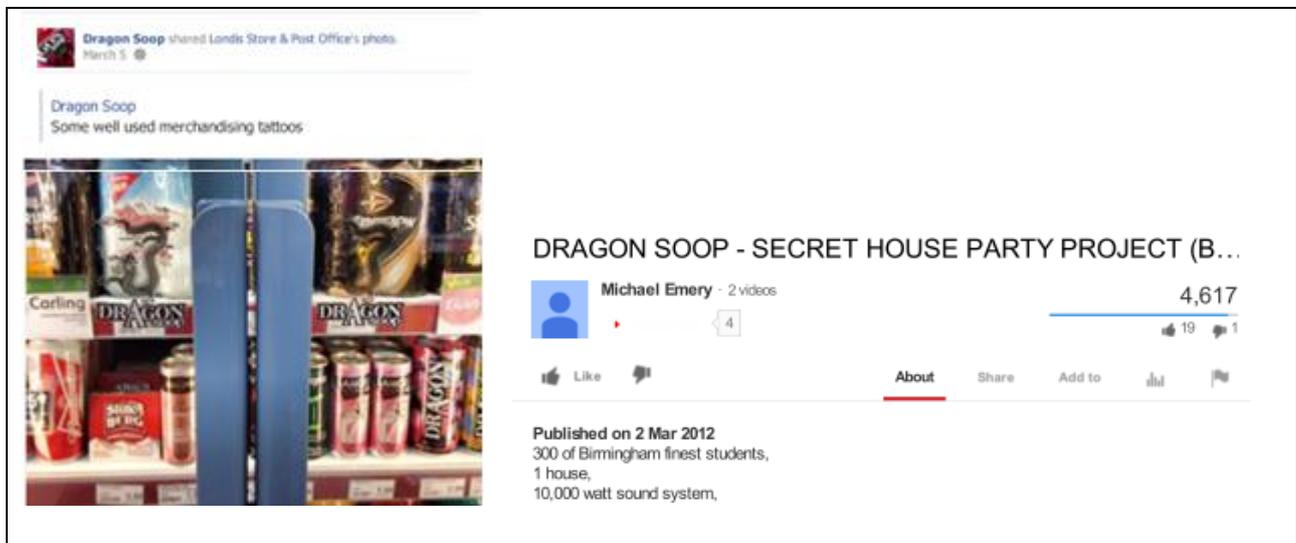


Frequent appeals were made to female-oriented treats and luxuries such as 'choccies' and cocktails. This tone of voice was very informal and sociable. Malibu wished users a happy birthday and used smiling emoticons at the end of their messages which gave the impression that the users were communicating directly with one of their friends as opposed to a brand.

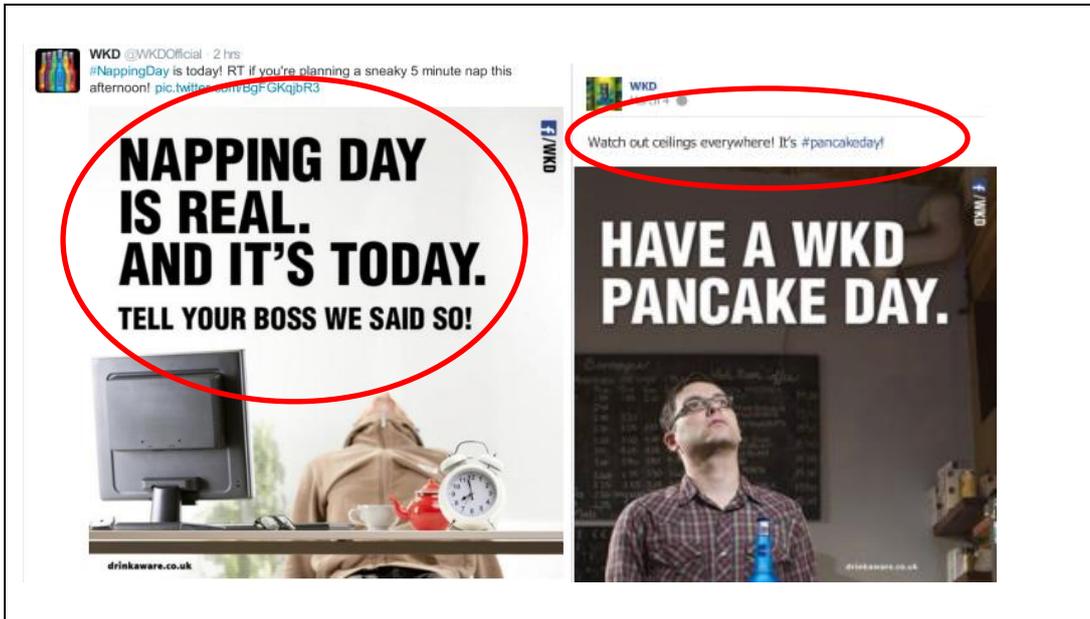
*Smirnoff's* projected personality on Facebook and Twitter was similarly female; for example, frequent references were made to making cocktails at home and images featured confectionary, but the overall tone tended to be slightly less informal and chatty than Malibu. Facebook posts by Smirnoff used the sort of silly puns friends might make when chatting together – see the two examples below – as to create the impression that users were speaking to a friend rather than a large company.



*Dragon Soop*, the smallest of the six brands in terms of market share, attempted to convey a rebellious personality, as illustrated by the example below left, where the brand had posted a picture on Facebook of “some well used merchandising tattoos” which a distributor had placed on a fridge where Dragon Soop was on display. The brand also associated itself with extreme sports, and a YouTube video (pictured below, right) featured the ‘Secret House Party Project’ in Birmingham, a nightclub event organised by Dragon Soop. Language used tended to be informal and colloquial, reflecting the brand’s intended edginess and ‘new kid on the block’ status.



*WKD* aimed to craft a cheeky, irreverent, matey personality with particular appeal to young males and females. Much of the SNS marketing material appeared to be explicitly targeting young males whilst other elements, such as the brand’s sponsorship of ‘The Only Way is Essex’ television show, were aimed at female users. Humour was a strong part of the brand’s personality, with references to unpretentious everyday activities such as eating kebabs and having a good night out. The brand’s personality was about not taking life too seriously and living for the weekend. In the Twitter and Facebook examples given below, posts referring to “napping day” poked fun at the idea of being conscientious at work, while the message “Watch out ceilings everywhere” suggested that *WKD* drinkers were more likely to flip their pancakes with such a force that they stuck to the ceiling. Both of these communications, with their suggestion that *WKD* drinkers subvert everyday activities, played to the brand’s strapline ‘Have you got a *WKD* side?’.

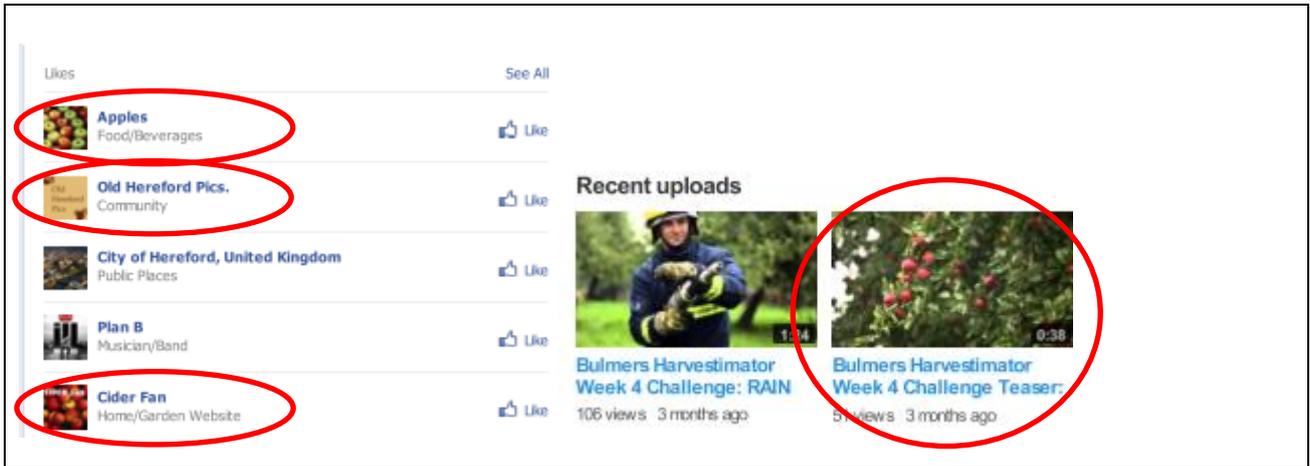


By using humour in brand-authored communications, alcohol brands are able to craft a personality and convey to users that the posts are not from faceless corporations but from friends with similar interests and a familiar outlook on life, making it easier for them to pass on the brand messages to other friends within their social network.

### ***Appealing to values***

As well as evoking a particular personality, the brands sought through their SNS communications to appeal to values which would resonate with their target users and which were consistent with the brand's identity. These values varied from brand to brand: for Bulmers, key values were around heritage and tradition, and for Smirnoff they were concerned with glamour and fun, while Dragon Soop, the youngest and least established of the brands, sought to communicate values around being a little bit alternative.

A particularly strong example of a brand communicating its values through SNS was Bulmers' presentation of itself as a premium brand with a traditional heritage. As the example below left illustrates, the brand's Facebook page displayed that Bulmers had 'liked' several other Facebook pages such as 'Apples', 'Old Hereford Pics' and 'Cider fan' in an effort to associate the brand with traditional cider making. In the example pictured below right, Bulmers' YouTube channel contained videos of the 'Bulmers Harvestimator Challenge' in which users were encouraged to guess how many kilos of apples would fall from a tree when subjected to various conditions such as wind, rain, or being shaken. This promotion was filmed on one of the Herefordshire farms which supplied Bulmers with apples, emphasising the brand's links with traditional cider making and featuring several images of trees laden with apples.



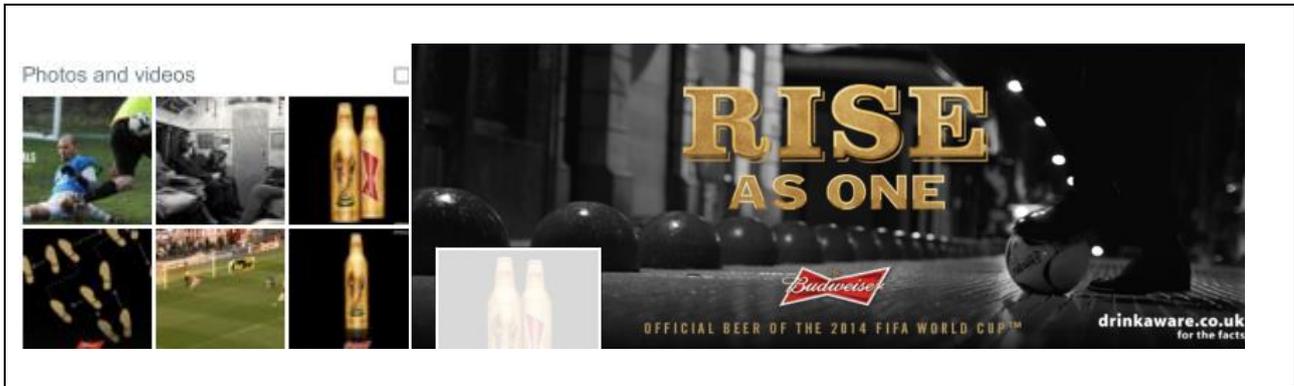
Alcohol brands commonly aligned themselves with musicians or certain types of music in order to convey a particular personality or taste. Examples illustrated below included Smirnoff's links with the Ministry of Sound, Bulmers promotional deal with the rapper Plan B, and Dragon Soop's sponsorship of the 'Secret House Party Project'.



These examples of illustrate how different brands used popular culture to communicate their values. The Ministry of Sound is a long-established nightclub in London; by aligning itself with a VIP experience at this establishment, Smirnoff was promoting a glamorous, high-end experience. By contrast, Dragon Soop, a less-established brand, associated itself with the 'Secret House Party Project'. This involved 300 students in Birmingham, a far cry from one of London's top nightclubs but more in keeping with Dragon Soop's rebellious brand identity.

### ***Appealing to masculinity and femininity***

Consistent with the personalities and lifestyles they wished to project, some of the brands appealed to 'masculine' and 'feminine' values through their SNS content. This was most evident in relation to Budweiser, the most overtly male-targeted of the six brands. Budweiser's Facebook and Twitter posts made frequent reference to football. The brand referred to its sponsorship of the FIFA World Cup and FA Cup tournaments in images of its limited edition World Cup bottle and text (as illustrated below), promoted its Open Trials competition, used footballing language and invited discussion on footballing matters.



The examples below illustrate the brand's 'Open Trials' promotion. This was a competition "Exclusively for men over 25" offering would-be footballers the chance to play at Wembley Stadium in a specially organised match. This promotion was the main focus of Budweiser's Facebook and Twitter posts during the observation period. These posts aimed to invite users to discuss footballing matters and prompt a conversation about the possibility of playing football at Wembley. By inviting opinions, Budweiser hoped that users would then interact with each other and tag other users into the post, spreading the message to their social network. The Twitter and Budweiser posts used the hashtag '#tothedream', playing on the fact that many men dreamed of playing football at Wembley one day.



By evoking masculine language such as "one last effort", Budweiser hoped to appeal to males who took football seriously, and to establish the brand's credibility as a footballing partner.

Although not as overtly masculine as Budweiser, WKD also attempted to appeal to masculine norms and values in much of its marketing communications by using typically 'laddish' humour in many of its posts. This was exemplified in its spoof promotion for 'National Salad Day' (pictured below left), which dismissed salad as "the stuff in the way of your kebab" – a knowing reference to fast food traditionally consumed by men late at night after an evening's drinking. Another attempt to appeal to males was WKD's re-tweeting of a post from a rugby club (pictured below right), which mentioned the "boys relaxing with a few WKD", positioning the brand as a drink for masculine, rugby-playing males.

WKD  
March 6

**IT'S NATIONAL SALAD DAY.**

**YOU KNOW, THE STUFF IN THE WAY OF YOUR KEBAB!**

Have you got a **WKD** side?

drinkaware.co.uk

ORIGINAL GREEN

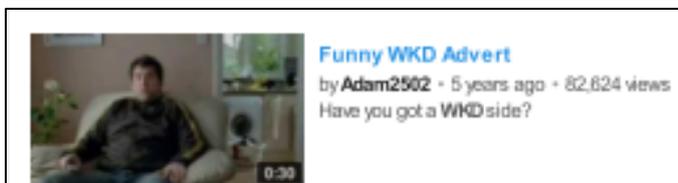
Retweeted by WKD

**Cheltenham RFC** @Cheltenhamrugby · Mar 8

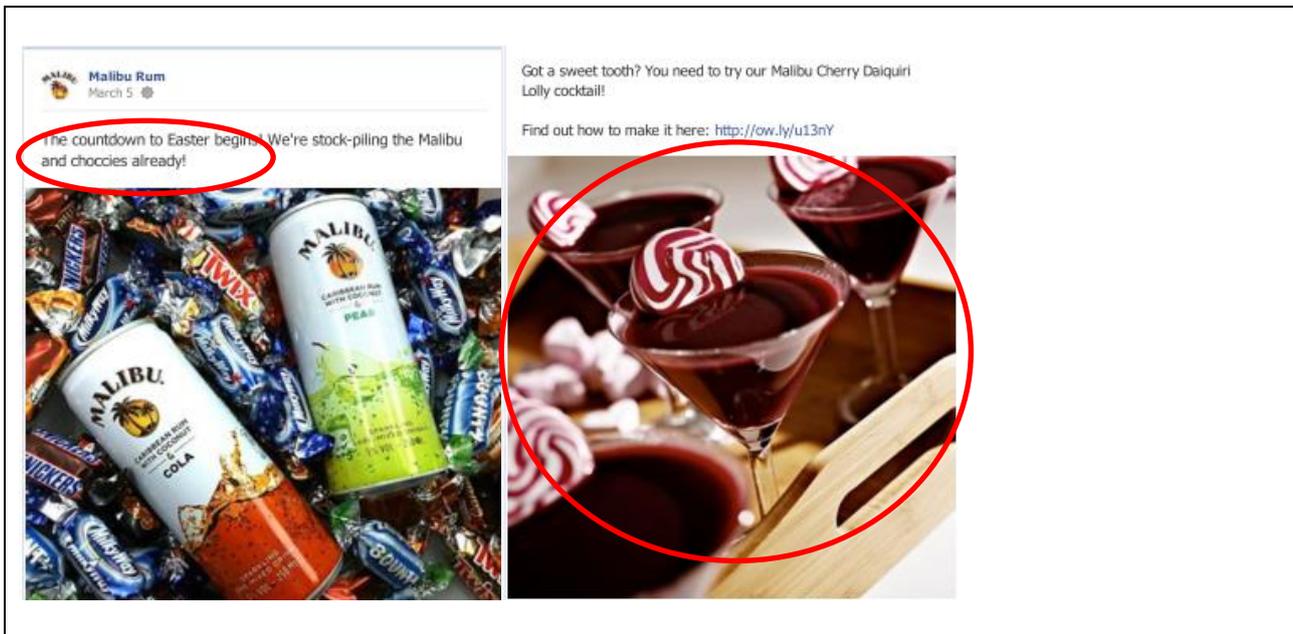
Tough day at the office. Disappointing second half. Boys now relaxing with a few [WKDOfficial](#) on the bus.

Expand

Television adverts for WKD were available for viewing on YouTube, and featured young males playing pranks on each other and generally behaving in a cheeky manner, finishing with the strapline “have you got a WKD side?” (as illustrated in the example below from YouTube). This was perhaps indicative of the brand’s desire to attract more male drinkers.



Other brands appealed to more typically ‘feminine’ tastes and reference points in their SNS communications. For example, Malibu’s Facebook page used phrases such as “yummy Malibu pancakes”, and “this fruity number” in brand-authored communications. The left hand example below featured an image of pre-mixed Malibu cans on a background of chocolates and used the word “choccies”, echoing the language of girly chat. Images of consumption suggestions featured on the brand’s SNS pages were also very feminine, with confectionary commonly featured, either as cocktail ingredients or in images alongside Malibu products. The right hand example given below featured lollipops as part of a ‘Malibu cherry daiquiri lolly cocktail’, aimed at those who have “a sweet tooth”.



### ***Creating desirable brand associations***

Another technique used by the brands on SNS was to associate themselves with particular cultural references and events or with particular organisations. By associating themselves with popular culture, brands can reinforce their identity and build intangible emotional benefits into the brand, evoking certain feelings in consumers and transferring these meanings and values to the individual. The expectation is that cultural references will be of intrinsic interest to users, who will in turn be happy to be associated with such references and share them with their social networks. Different types of associations were identified: associations with popular culture and music, association with sporting events, and association with other brands, retailers and producers. Each of these themes is now explored and illustrated.

#### Associations with popular culture and music

Obvious examples of this kind of association were where a brand was an official sponsor or promoter of a show or event. For example, WKD sponsored the scripted reality television show 'The Only Way Is Essex' (TOWIE). The example below on the right shows a tweet from a female user which mentions watching TOWIE whilst drinking WKD. This was re-tweeted by WKD to all of the brand's followers, and is an example of the user being involved in co-creation of the brand identity (discussed in greater detail later). WKD also promoted 'Sound Clash' – a nightclub event featuring two DJs who competed for the approval of the crowd. As illustrated below left, one of the DJs (Lauren Pope) was a regular cast member of TOWIE.

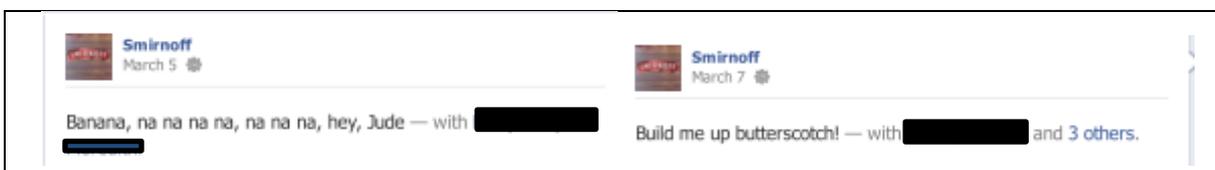


The association with TOWIE appeared to be slightly at odds with other WKD marketing material on SNS which appeared to be targeted a young male demographic. WKD re-tweeted posts in which users mentioned TOWIE or 'Sound Clash', and promoted both in Facebook posts and tweets. By sponsoring TOWIE, WKD provided users with a topic of conversation: for example, users were asked direct questions such as 'did you see last night's TOWIE?' in an effort to promote engagement and to start users talking amongst themselves on the brand's Facebook and Twitter pages.

Other brands featured more subtle associations with popular culture on their SNS pages. In the example below, Malibu's Twitter account re-tweeted an emoticon from Lauren Pope (TOWIE star as mentioned above) which subtly aligned the brand with the show and acted as a celebrity endorsement of the Malibu brand.



Smirnoff referenced popular songs such as 'Build me up Buttercup' and Hey Jude' in their Facebook posts featuring consumption suggestions. These references served two main functions: firstly, they gave users the impression that they were posted by a friend rather than a large alcohol company, and secondly, they functioned as a shortcut to certain values. By posting references to popular songs the brand invited those who recognised the references to take part in the conversation and promoted a sense of belonging.



The Bulmers Twitter account also referenced the film 'Inside Llewyn Davis' (see below) in an effort to appeal to fans of the Coen Brothers who directed the film. These directors had an extremely

dedicated fan-base who shared similar interests, and by referencing this film Bulmers wanted to associate itself with this type of 'indie' film rather than a big budget Hollywood blockbuster. This aligned with the brand's desire to craft an identity based around heritage and tradition.



### Associations with sporting events

Brands used associations with certain sporting events to promote their brand identity. Again, this acted as a shortcut to the brand's values in a bid to evoke certain feelings when consumers use the product. In this case, Budweiser wanted consumers to associate the brand with football, positioning the consumption of Budweiser as an essential accompaniment to watching the sport. Budweiser's association with football could be seen a way for the brand to gain credibility amongst users (particularly young males), as a way to stimulate conversation among users, and as means to establish an identity based on the shared currency of football and beer. The brand promoted this association in various ways through several SNS platforms. For example, Budweiser was an official sponsor of the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the FA Cup and the brand promoted its SNS pages as an essential source of information for both tournaments. As illustrated below, the brand's Twitter feed and YouTube channel stated: "Follow us for FA Cup & World Cup news".



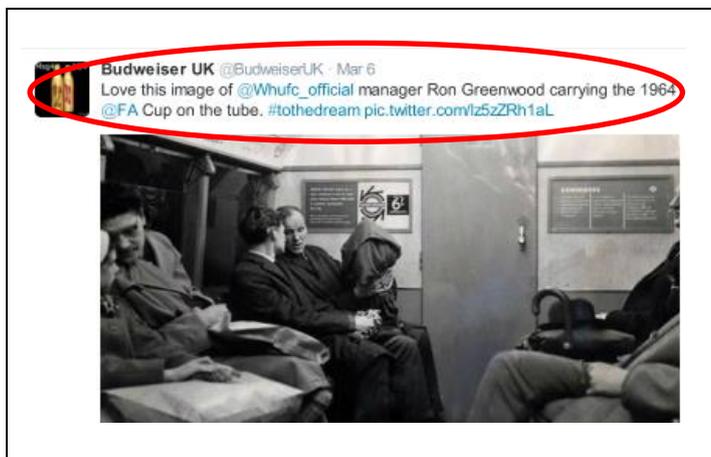
The Budweiser Facebook page featured a link to a FIFA World Cup Planner, allowing users to plan their match viewing and stay informed regarding the tournament. The examples below illustrates how the brand also used tweets and Facebook posts to build anticipation for the World Cup and to prompt users to engage with the brand through SNS.



Videos on the brand's YouTube channel included interviews and videos with football players and managers in a bid to promote the brand as an authentic source of information and opinion regarding football. By posting videos such as the examples below, the brand hoped to attract football fans who may have been interested in these interviews. Once these users watched the video, the brand's desire was to retain these users and have them subscribe to the Budweiser channel in order to receive notifications when new videos were posted. The brand could then directly send marketing content to these users.

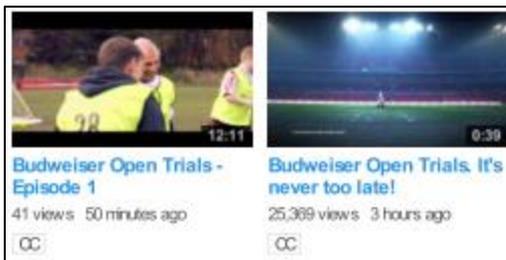


Budweiser began sponsoring the FA Cup at the beginning of the 2011-2012 season and, as illustrated in the Twitter post below, the brand used SNS to evoke the sense of tradition and heritage associated with the tournament by posting historical images and evoking memories from past tournaments.



By using historical images such as West Ham United manager Ron Greenwood from 1964, Budweiser was able to communicate directly with football fans, hoping that the novelty factor of a football manager carrying the FA Cup on the London Underground would mean that users would re-tweet the image to other football fans and spread the brand message that Budweiser and the FA Cup go hand in hand.

Another example of this association with football was the brand's Open Trials promotion (offering would-be footballers the chance to play at Wembley Stadium in a specially organised match). The Open Trials promotion was present across Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Budweiser's YouTube channel contained videos related to the Open Trial promotion, and users were encouraged to subscribe to this channel in order to keep up to date with the latest action.



On March 7<sup>th</sup>, Budweiser posted the following on Facebook. Although this post did not explicitly ask users to comment or share this post, it received 347 likes, 20 shares and 47 user comments, many of which ‘tagged’ friends into posts possibly because it was something they might be interested in. Budweiser had succeeded in provoking users’ interest by mentioning when the next round of their competition would take place. This resulted in users inviting other users to the Budweiser page.



It was clear from the ways that users responded that this promotion was of interest to them. For example, one user asked, regarding the broadcasting of the Open Trials footage:

- *I missed both broadcasts, I've tried going on the player in hope I could watch it back but no luck. Will it be on again?*

Budweiser responded directly to the user, tagging him into their response so that he would be directed back to the Facebook page whilst also promoting the brand’s YouTube channel:

- *We'll be putting it up on YouTube later today (User)*

In the examples below, in which users discussed the Budweiser Open Trials promotions, users tagged their friends into comments, apparently willingly spreading the marketing campaign throughout their social network and bringing the promotion to the attention of other users.

- *(User) you should have had a go at this*
- *Alright yeah I am (User) you gonna come?*
- *Go for it (User) #yourthemainman*

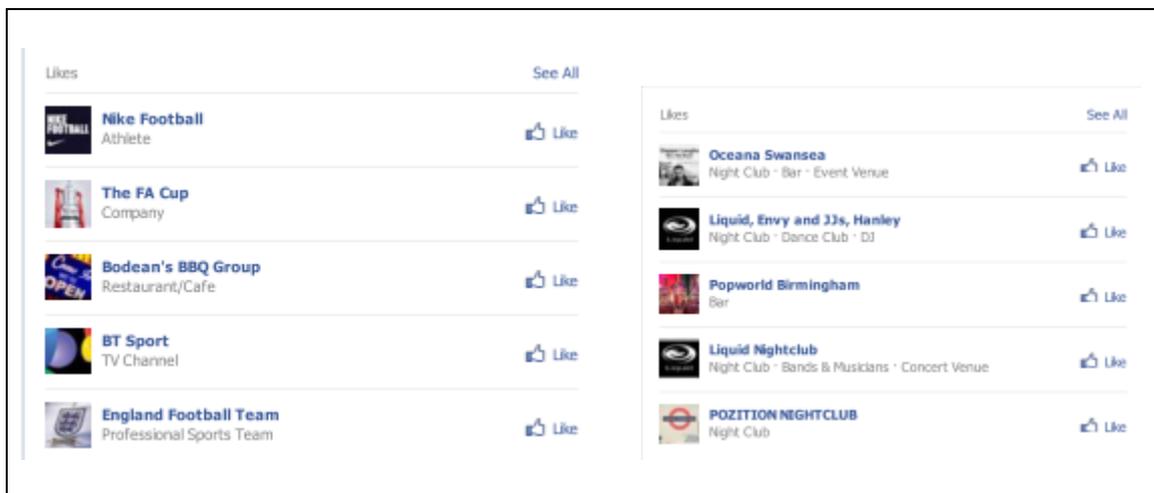
An example of a different kind of sports sponsorship was Dragon Soop’s sponsorship of the SnowSports Northumbria winter sports event. Snowsports was a student society based at Northumbria University. Dragon Soop regularly supported the society’s events by providing free

cans and branded merchandise. By posting a picture of the event, as illustrated below, Dragon Soop hoped to appeal to its target market of student drinkers and demonstrate that the brand could be part of the student lifestyle.

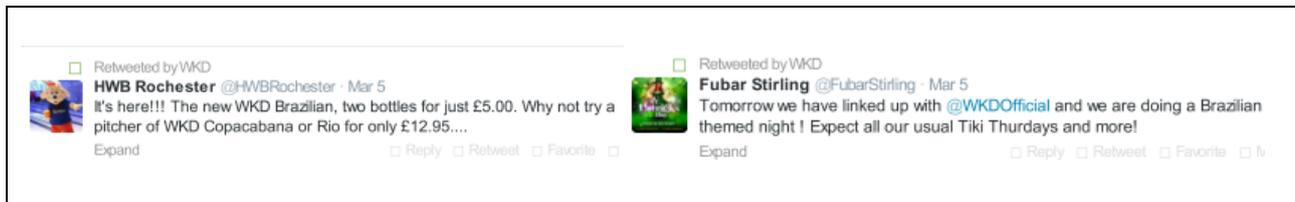


#### Association with other brands, retailers and producers

The brands also sought to associate themselves with other brands, retailers and producers which were seen to align with their values. For example, the brand Budweiser (below left) 'liked' pages which were associated with football such as Nike (a leading sportswear brand) and BT Sport (a popular sports channel which broadcasts football games and highlights). WKD (below right) had 'liked' pages for nightclubs and bars such as Liquid (a chain of nightclubs) and Oceana nightclub in Swansea. These associations were selected to mirror the interests of the brand's target market, for example, young males who wear Nike replica football shirts, have an interest in the FA Cup and watch BT Sports or individuals who frequent nightclubs.



WKD also aligned itself to certain retailers and distributors by re-tweeting posts from bars and clubs. In the examples below, WKD had re-tweeted posts from the Hollywood Bowl (HWB) bowling alley in Rochester and the Fubar nightclub in Stirling. These posts promoted consuming WKD in these establishments and helped to position WKD as something which could be consumed in several different environments and at all stages of a night out.



### Co-creation of brand value

As discussed in the introduction, a particular strategic benefit of SNS for brands is that they can work *with* SNS users to create social media content. In effect, brand-authored content and user-generated content work together to create and distribute marketing messages. Brand messages are passed on, commented on and transformed by users who become part of the marketing, co-creating the branding. This section examines how brand and user content work in synergy to create marketing messages.

### Smirnoff: cocktails at home

One example of co-creation involved the Smirnoff #yoursforthemaking campaign mentioned above. User comments on Smirnoff's Facebook page suggested that users intended to make the suggested cocktails at home and consume them as 'pre-drinks' before going out. The images below featured images of these consumption suggestions served in Martini glasses and featured alongside a bottle of Smirnoff vodka. These images invited users to make these cocktails at home and demonstrated what they could look like.



Reacting to the 'Cosmojito' post (March 6<sup>th</sup>) pictured above left, users posted the following comments.

- *By the time we've made it it'll be time to go out lol x*
- *Lets do this as pre drinks*
- *look at these! We need to make them all!!*

Users commented on the post regarding Smirnoff ice cream (March 3<sup>rd</sup>), pictured above right, in much the same way:

- *this could so be new predrink!*

- *next pre drinks I suggest we eat our alcohol haaha*
- *y'know what happened last time xxx*

These examples demonstrate how users will pick up an idea from a brand and run with it, co-creating marketing content by tagging their friends and discussing alcohol brands, new products and consumption suggestions.

### Malibu: 'MALIZEBALLS'

Another example of co-creation involved consumption suggestions posted by the brand Malibu on its Facebook page. In the image below, Malibu posted a picture of a cocktail and invited users who had a 'sweet tooth' to follow the link provided in order to find out how to make it.



One user posted the following comment related to Malibu's 'Cherry Daiquiri Lolly cocktail' suggestion, pictured above:

- *Looks MALIMAZEBALLS we can indeed – my kitchen lol xx*

Malibu repeated the joke, making sure the user knew they found it funny and added a hashtag:

- *Hahahaha - #MALIMAZEBALLS!*

This small example encapsulates co-creation on social media. A recipe suggestion posted by the brand is enthusiastically embraced by a user who expresses their appreciation with a new coinage, 'MALIMAZEBALLS', which neatly brings together the brand name and the slang term 'amazeballs'. The brand in turn embraces the coinage and 'rewards' the user by turning it into a hashtag – a compliment designed to make the user feel as if they are an important and valued customer with a personal connection with the product. By adding a hashtag, the brand hopes that other users will then pick up on, repeat and circulate the reference.

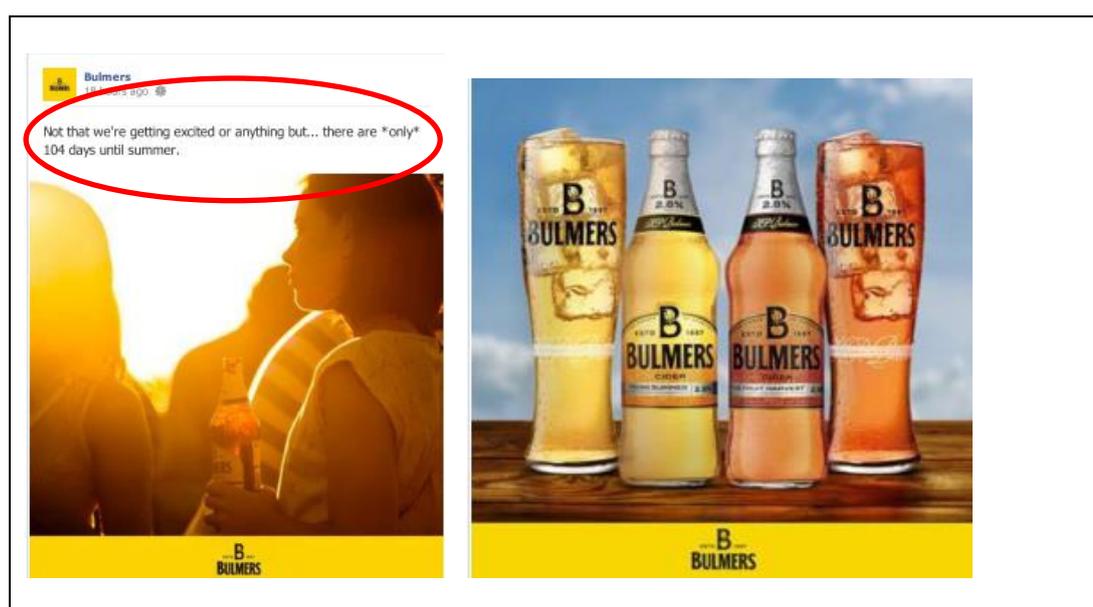
### **3.3 Driving consumption**

As discussed in the Introduction, brands engage with SNS because these platforms provide new ways of engaging with users to build strong and appealing brands. However, our analysis suggested that some of the brands' uses of SNS could be seen to encourage and drive not just feelings about

the particular brand but alcohol consumption in general. Two strategies were identified, co-opting seasonal events and occasions, and positioning the product as part of every-day life.

### ***Co-opting seasonal events or occasions***

Several examples were identified of brands co-opting seasonal events in their SNS content. During the period studied, these included Pancake Day, large sporting tournaments such as the World Cup and FA Cup and summer. For example, much of Bulmers' SNS content sought to create associations in users' minds between summer, good weather, outdoor drinking and cider. As illustrated below, posts on Facebook and Twitter asked users if were excited at the prospect of the summer, counting down the days and building anticipation in order to promote engagement and conversation amongst users. Images of Bulmers products were commonly featured against blue skies or on wooden tables, which resembled tables in beer gardens or picnic tables, priming users to associate Bulmers, and cider in general, with the summer.



The observation period covered Shrove Tuesday, a day more commonly known in the UK as 'Pancake Day'. Two of the brands, Bulmers and WKD, posted SNS content which linked alcohol consumption to the day. For example, the image and text below were posted by Bulmers on Facebook and Twitter on Tuesday March 4th, featuring a frying pan being put in the bin and the words "Pancake disaster? At least opening a cold Bulmers is one thing you can get right every time".



Pancake Day was also co-opted by WKD in Facebook and Twitter posts. In keeping with the brand's cheeky, irreverent humour, its coverage of Pancake Day did not feature any images of pancakes but instead featured a man looking at the ceiling and the strapline: "Watch out ceilings everywhere". Just as the brand's 'napping day' content, discussed earlier, could be seen as poking fun at conscientiousness at work, this post could be seen as saying it's more important to have fun than to be a careful cook. Another Twitter post (below right) asked users if they had a "pancake phobia" and made a bad pun ("crepe us out").



Both of these examples can be seen as attempts to link alcohol consumption to an event not typically seen as alcohol-fuelled, and to tie alcohol into the annually recurring rituals and milestones of people's lives.

### ***Positioning the brand as part of everyday activities***

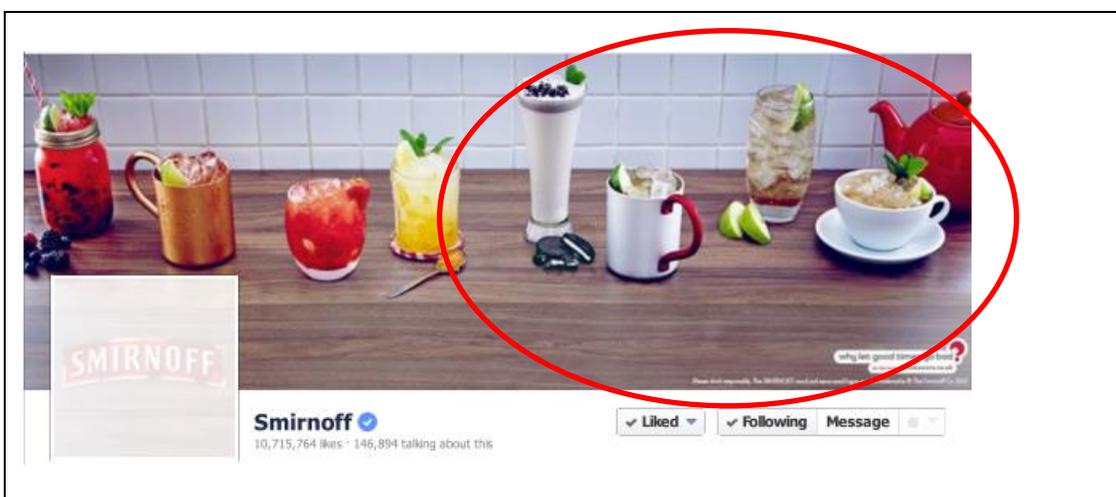
Alcohol brands used SNS to normalise alcohol consumption by positioning themselves, and drinking in general, as part of everyday activities. In the example below, Budweiser urged Facebook users to 'Grab a Bud tonight'. This was posted on Tuesday, March 4<sup>th</sup>, emphasising that beer can and should be consumed any day of the week.



Bulmers also posted content which promoted mid-week consumption. On Wednesday, March 5<sup>th</sup> the brand posted the example below asking Twitter users which flavour of Bulmers they would be consuming.



Images of Smirnoff products and official consumption suggestions featured on the brand's SNS pages could be seen as promoting drinking in the home. As illustrated below, images of different cocktails were photographed on what appeared to be a kitchen worktop complete with teapot. Cocktails were displayed in different domestic cups, glasses and even jars.

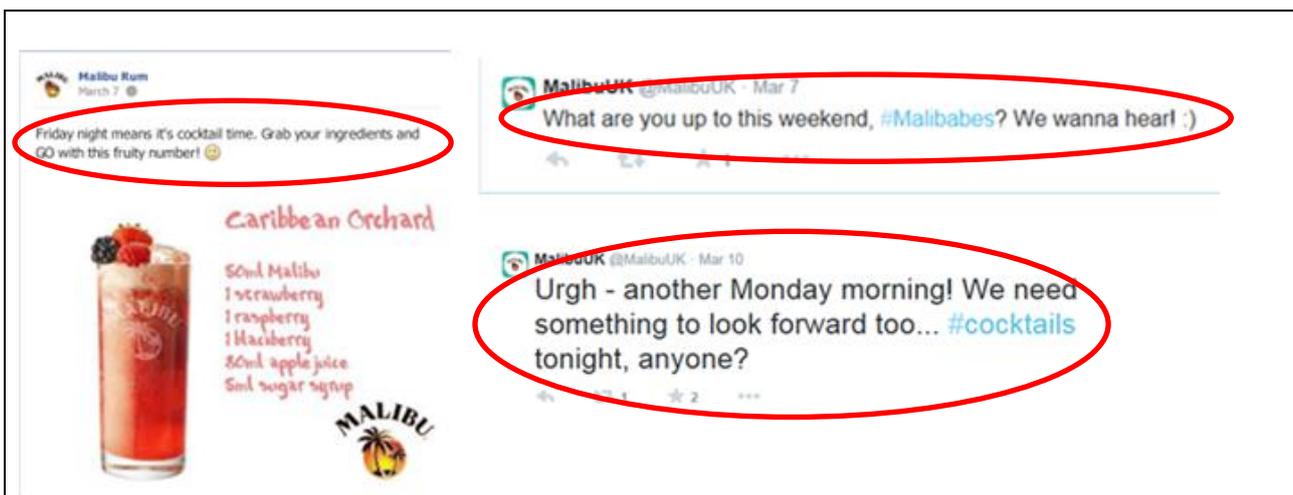


Smirnoff's message was that the user could create these cocktails at home. The brand regularly provided recipes and consumption suggestions, encouraging users to create their own versions. The examples below were posted on Smirnoff's Facebook page as comments underneath images of the cocktails.



A recent Smirnoff campaign was entitled ‘#yoursforthemaking’ and Smirnoff’s brand message on Facebook and Twitter was “Smirnoff inspires creativity through drinks and experiences”. The message was that cocktails can be recreated in the home any day of the week and that users do not have to wait until the weekend.

Brands frequently referred to the weekend, planting the seed that users should be consuming their products. In the examples below, Malibu labelled Friday night as “cocktail time”, a reward for users for getting through the working week. Users were asked about their plans for the weekend (thereby encouraging responses on SNS) and were addressed colloquially as ‘Malibabes’ (creating the impression of a special club or gang); the brand also tapped into the universal dislike of Mondays (‘Urgh’) as a way to connect with users, and offered a welcome compensation in the form of cocktails.



Malibu utilised Facebook and Twitter posts to prime users into linking the weekend with alcohol. This theme clearly resonated with female users, as evident in their responses which shared stories of their own consumption practices, such as pre-loading before a night out, incorporating cocktails into a hen night, or enjoying Malibu on holiday:

- *this looks yum should keep a note for hen shenanigans*
- *Girls we need these! To start the night*
- *Omg we need these on our London trip xx*
- *We are soooo trying this when we go away*

## 4. FINDINGS: USER ACTIVITY ON SNS

This section discusses and analyses how users engage with, respond to and create alcohol brand related content on SNS. Three broad types of engagement were identified in the analysis. The first category of engagement, direct responses to the brand, included responses to advertising, new flavours and promotions, and direct questions or answers in response to brand content. This is discussed in Section 4.1. A second type of engagement was labelled 'self-presentation' in the analysis. This referred to the ways in which users used alcohol brand related content to say something about themselves, their tastes, personality and lifestyle on SNS. This is discussed in Section 4.2. The third type of engagement, labelled a 'space for conversation', referred to the ways in which users conversed and shared with one another content which did not directly refer to the brands or even to alcohol. While this content did not at first appear directly relevant, it was important because it took place on platforms linked to the alcohol brands. This is discussed in Section 4.3.

### 4.1 Direct responses to the brand

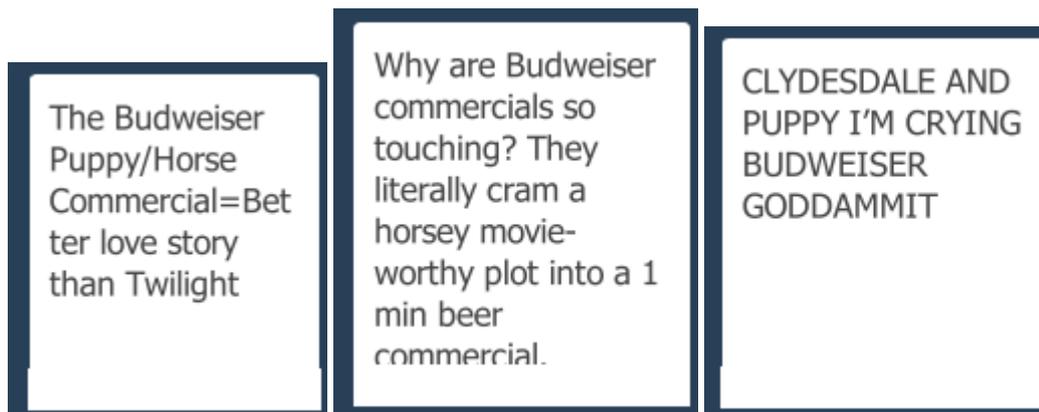
Social Networking Sites gives users the ability to communicate directly with the alcohol brand. This allowed them to respond directly to brand-generated content regarding advertising campaigns, new flavours or product ranges or to ask questions related to brand content.

The SNS Tumblr provided users with a platform to react to and comment on recent advertising campaigns. One such example featured the brand Budweiser which used the 'Super-Bowl' (the showcase event in the American Football calendar) as the opportunity to launch their latest campaign. The example below, posted by a user on Tumblr, featured an image taken from the television advert which featured a puppy who enjoys spending time with Budweiser's famous Clydesdale horses, continually escaping from the other puppies to visit the horses, ending with the tagline #bestbuds.



Micro-blogs posted by Tumblr users (such as those below) revealed examples of the positive response this marketing campaign had received, particularly from female users. The reactions from the users hinted at a real emotional connection between the marketing campaign and those who had seen the advert. Although these posts did not mention consuming Budweiser, they fostered

loyalty to the brand by showing appreciation for the marketing campaign, and also served to spread this marketing content to their own contacts.



These examples demonstrated the way users engaged with alcohol brand-related content to express their opinions, engaging with other users who had similar opinions and using SNS as a direct link to the brand with which they felt they had a personal connection.

Social networking sites were also used to express opinions regarding new products. One example this was found on the Bulmers Facebook page where many users expressed disapproval of the brand's decision to release a low-alcohol range of ciders. Examples of user comments included:

- *Omg.....we can't be having any of this low alcohol stuff!! It's not a concept I understand!!*
- *Not very happy about the lower alcohol bulmers*
- *Lower Alcohol,,, Who disgusting,, What ever Next,, You'll be calling them Fruit Shoot next,,,,*
- *Does that say 2.8% vol??? Might as well drink Fanta!*
- *I prefer real cider which has percentages of 7,8,9%*

In turn, Bulmers responded with instant feedback in a bid to placate users and maintain good relations. The brand justified its decision to produce lower alcohol products but also ensured that users were aware they could still purchase the regular products:

- *Hey (user) we'd noticed that our fans are becoming more and more interested in a balanced lifestyle so we wanted to offer a range of Bulmers flavours with a lower alcohol content but with the same great Bulmers taste. Are you planning on trying them?*
- *Hey (user), we've still got the five flavours of the standard range going so no need to worry!*

One Malibu user posted the following on the brand's Facebook page, requesting the introduction of non-sparkling flavours.

- *I love Malibu and I love the cans, i'm not able to drink anything fizzy though, the pear looks nice and I like the idea of mango that Sophie mentioned below, can we have some flavours that are non sparkling for those of us that drink 'flat' drinks thank you kindly*

Malibu responded with the following comment, ensuring the user felt valued and giving the impression that they would seriously consider their suggestion.

- *Thanks for the feedback, Emma! We'll definitely keep this in mind 😊*

Users also used branded Facebook pages to comment on product availability. For example, on 7<sup>th</sup> March Bulmers posted the image below on their Facebook page.



User reactions to the post included two comments expressing frustration that they were unable to find Bulmers locally:

- *I was very disappointed stupid tesco*
- *Ye except my shop had none left*

Bulmers responded to these comments, urging the users to continue trying to buy the brand:

- *No luck? Sorry to hear that, (User), try again this evening!*
- *Booo! We hope you find some soon, (User)!*

Some user comments simply expressed appreciation of the product and the benefits it provided to them. As mentioned above, a post urging users to 'Grab a Bud tonight' was posted on Tuesday March 4<sup>th</sup>. Users responded to this message with enthusiasm

- *Could do with a case now ?*
- *I'll drink to that*
- *Why tonight?do it now!!!*
- *I do every night ..... be rude not to !*
- *I cant wait till tonight can I have 1 now*

The key point here is that users will respond voluntarily and with enthusiasm to brand content. SNS users willingly co-create marketing content alongside the brand by responding directly to brand-generated content and often spread this content to their friends and wider social network.

## 4.2 Self-presentation

The analysis uncovered many examples of users engaging with alcohol-brand related SNS to portray something about themselves to others. Posting content about the brand and alcohol consumption in general could be seen to be providing the user with shortcuts or symbols to convey something about the sort of person they would like to be perceived as.

Three broad themes were identified in the analysis related to self-presentation: displaying taste (including content showing appreciation of the flavour, quality and strength of a brand), demonstrating personality (including demonstrations of humour, creativity and knowledge), and

presenting a lifestyle (including images and micro-blogs about consumption practices, going out or going on holiday). Each of these themes is now discussed.

On sites such as Tumblr and Pinterest, users do not tend to converse in the same way they would on Facebook and Twitter, but rather assemble and display images and micro-blogs which serve a similar purpose. A YouTube profile functions in a similar manner to a Facebook and Twitter profile whereby a user can like and comment on videos which they identify with, building a profile based on their interests.

### ***Displaying taste***

Users used SNS to express their appreciation of alcohol products and to identify themselves as the sort of person who has particular taste and brand preferences. In the comments below, posted on the Bulmers Facebook page, users expressed views of the product's different flavour variants. The third comment alluded to 'the good old snake bite days', suggesting that the taste of Bulmers black cherry flavour evoked for them a particular set of memories and associations:

- *Hmmm.... Red grape...hmmm*
- *Bulmers Original over ice ggggrrrrrrrrreeeeeeaaaaaatTTTTTTTT*
- *Love the black cherry - reminds me of the good old snake bite days!*

In brand-authored marketing communications, Bulmers presented itself as an upmarket brand with a traditional heritage. Images of Bulmers products posted by users echoed this theme. The examples below were posted on Tumblr, and feature traditional cider barrels and wooden signs with the Bulmers logo surrounded by berries, evoking a sense of history and tradition.



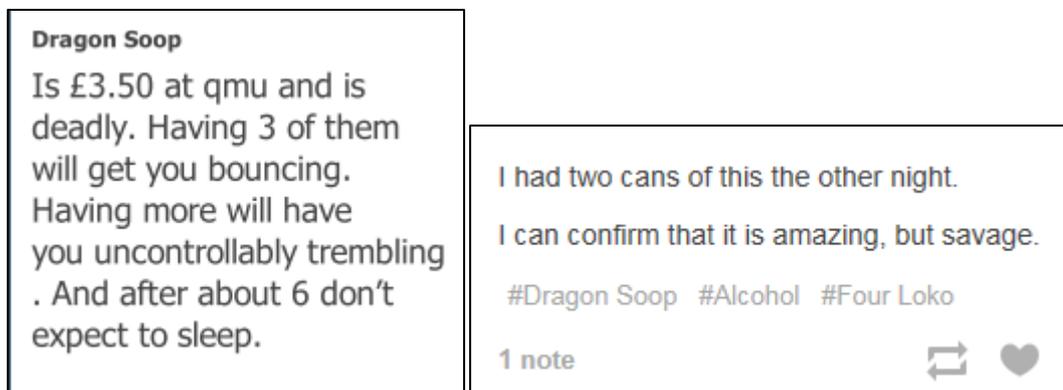
By posting images of Bulmers products and images such as those above, users expressed their appreciation of and desire to be associated with the quality and heritage of the product. As illustrated in the examples below, images of Bulmers posted by users also featured alongside pints of Guinness in pubs and bars. Both of these brands assert their heritage in their marketing campaigns; by displaying both these brands together, users displayed their own personal taste and desire to be associated with these brands and their qualities. These images also suggested that brand-generated content was successful in priming users to associate the brand with the desired values.



Several users commented on Bulmers Facebook page regarding their preference for products with higher alcohol content, in response to the brand announcing its launch of new 2.8% ABV products. These users wanted to be identified with stronger drinks, and to give the impression to other users that they could handle drinking them:

- *Whack the alcohol up....i had some rekordelig in Greece that was 8%...I'm told I enjoyed my evening in the bar*
- *I prefer real cider which has percentages of 7,8,9%*
- *2.8% not worth bothering with it, I like my cider to have a bit of a kick, might as well drink water.*

Users posting micro-blogs on Tumblr regarding the brand Dragon Soop focused almost exclusively on the strength and potency of the product. In these comments, users were unconcerned with the flavour or quality of the product, only with its affordability and ability to induce feelings of intoxication and energy. The product was described evocatively as “amazing”, “savage” and “deadly”, with the ability to “get you bouncing” and “have you uncontrollably trembling”.



Although it was unclear whether the comments above were intended to be positive or serious, users did suggest drinking half a dozen cans of Dragon Soop as a realistic prospect. These types of comments had a very different tone to those related to other brands. The users were not interested in the flavour or quality of the product but in how cheaply they can get extremely intoxicated. Another micro-blog on Tumblr, pictured below, questioned whether to take 4 cans of

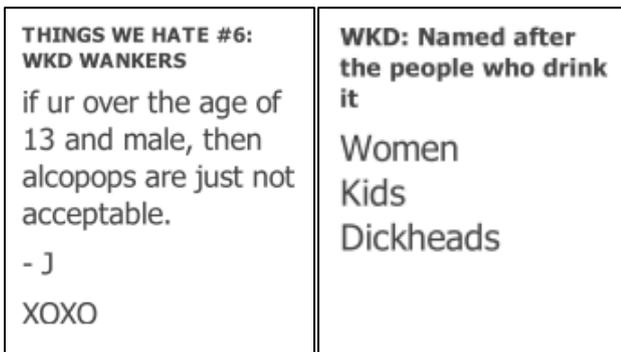
Dragon Soop or vodka to a party, equating Dragon Soop with a spirit which had a greater alcohol content.



User comments about 'their' brand often displayed strong loyalty and emotion, suggestive of a close attachment. For example, the following comments were posted on Budweiser's Facebook page:

- *I'll drink to that*
- *My fave beer....,,*
- *I love you Budweiser*

Just as users allied themselves with favoured brands, they also took to SNS to proclaim their distance from un-favoured brands. Micro-blogs on Tumblr such as those featured below were used to voice users' contempt for WKD and those who drank it. Here, users again identified themselves in relation to a brand, but negatively, as if to say 'I am **not** a WKD drinker'.



### ***Demonstrating personality***

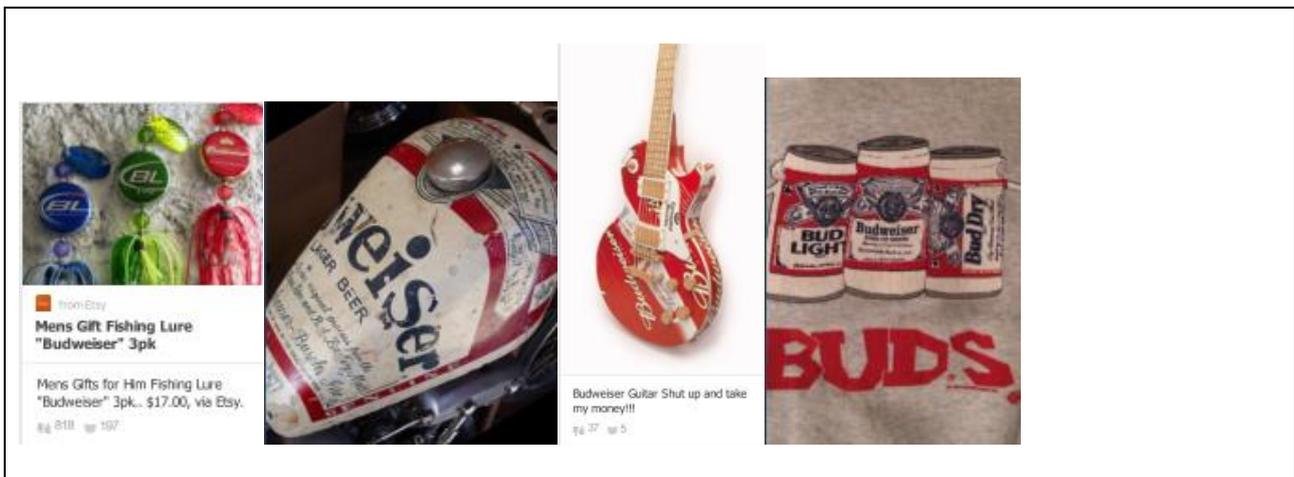
The SNS of alcohol brands also provided an opportunity for users to display facets of their personality. Budweiser's Facebook page often featured football-related content, which enabled users to demonstrate their knowledge. In the comment below, a user comments on the possibility of those taking part in the Open Trials promotion being picked up by football talent scouts:

- *No hoppers, if u aint spotted by 14, youve no chance.. Unless yr lan wright of course.*

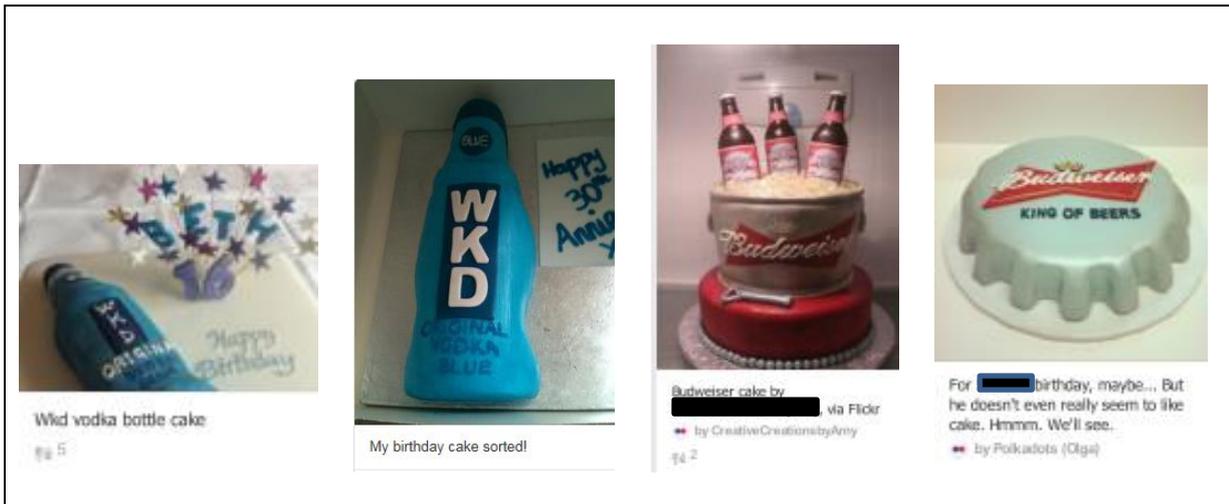
Images of alcohol-related merchandise (both official and fan-made) posted by users on Tumblr and Pinterest, such as the examples using WKD below, were used to demonstrate a sense of humour and personality, as well as to express brand appreciation and loyalty.



Much user-generated content on Pinterest and Tumblr represented possessions or themes which were important to the user: favourite items of clothing, places, food and so on, or images which the user particularly liked and wanted to share, and to be seen sharing. Alcohol brand related merchandise and images frequently featured in these posts. The examples below show several such images: Budweiser branded fishing lures, an image of vehicle detailing on a motorcycle, a Budweiser branded guitar, and a t-shirt featuring Budweiser cans and the word 'Buds', a shortened form of the Budweiser brand name and also a term meaning friends. By posting such content, users could be seen to be signifying that they identified with, and wanted their own personality to be seen to reflect, the values represented by the brand: masculinity, masculine pursuits, American rock and roll, driving, the outdoors.

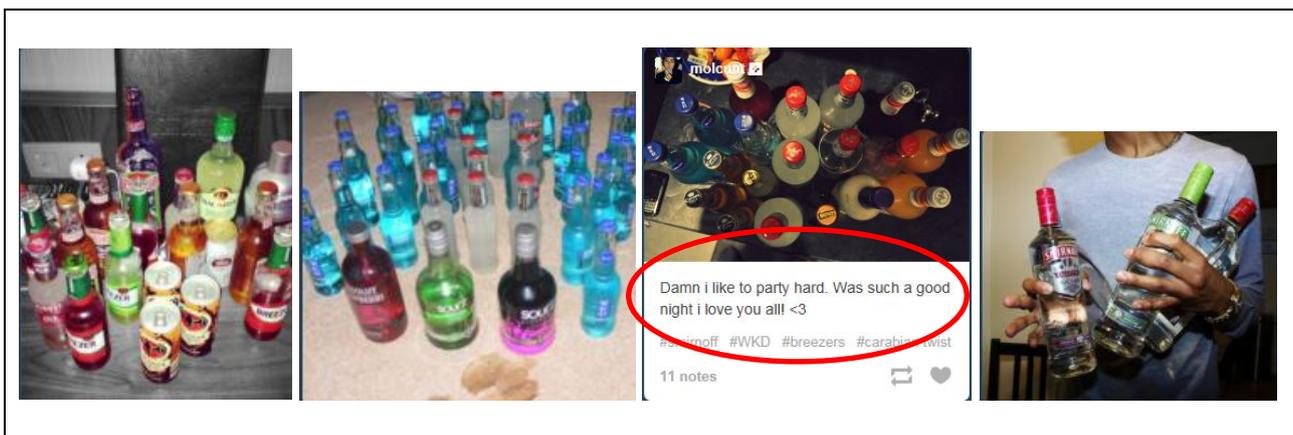


A particularly interesting phenomenon was the number of images of cakes posted by users on Tumblr. Cakes were shown which incorporated brand logos and which were made in the shape of branded packaging. In posting images of WKD and Budweiser-branded cakes, such as those shown below, users could display their creativity (if they were the maker of the cake), their sense of humour, their taste and their personality (typically, a birthday cake design is chosen to reflect something fundamental about the recipient's character or interests; in this case, the recipients were defined by their consumption of an alcohol brand). Particularly noteworthy was the cake on the left-hand side, made for a 16-year old girl, and the one second to the left, for a 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, also female. These images implied a strong female fan base for WKD which was at odds with the brand-generated content which was primarily aimed at young males.



### Presenting a lifestyle

Just as users used alcohol brand related content to project something about their personality, they also used it to present a certain lifestyle to other users. This was particularly evident in images and micro-blogs demonstrating consumption practices. Images of branded products posted on Tumblr often featured alongside other alcohol brands, giving the impression that the user habitually consumed large quantities of alcohol and enjoyed a party lifestyle (see images below). One example featured the quote “Damn I like to party hard”, presenting a hard-drinking lifestyle to other users. Another example featured a user holding several bottles of Smirnoff vodka.



Micro blogs on Tumblr mentioned Dragon Soop as a ‘pre drink’ and part of a user’s routine alcohol consumption. In the examples given below, users refer to their “pre show ritual of drinking Dragon Soop” and mention drinking Dragon Soop on their way to a venue. The image below left also mentioned “the pretty cans”, referencing the bright colours and attractive design of the Dragon Soop cans which resembled other brands of non-alcoholic energy drinks. These micro-blogs also revealed details about the users’ lifestyle and attitude, such as the fact that they were drinking at a train station and outside before they went to a concert, that they were already “tipsy” by the time they arrived at the venue, and that they thought “getting kicked out would suck”.

We met [redacted] at the station and headed to the venue. Obviously the pre show ritual of drinking Dragon soop had begun at this point. I mean look at the pretty cans



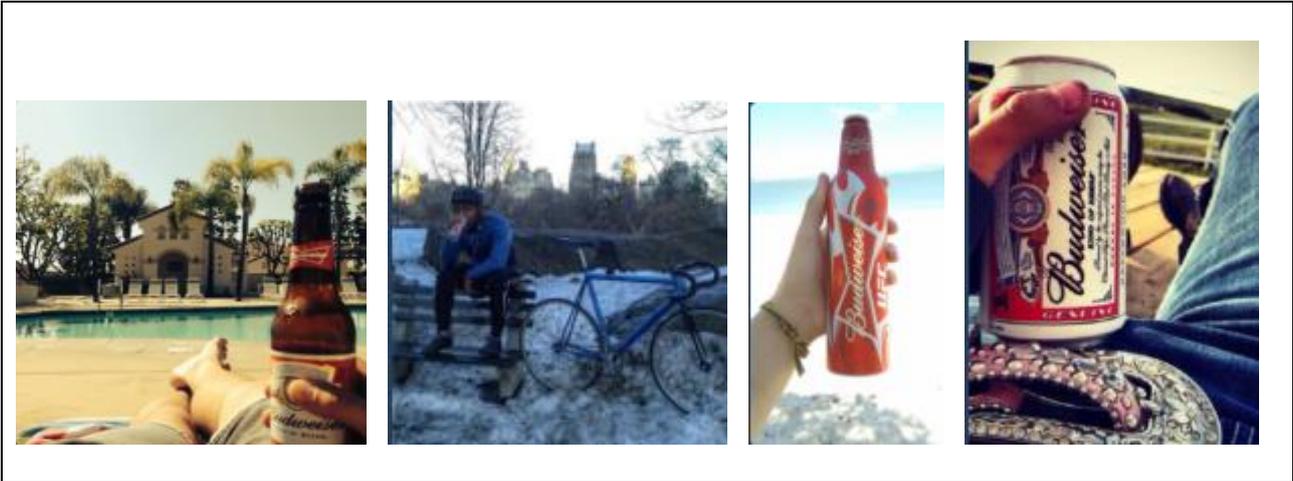
When we got into the show we were pretty tipsy but not too drunk, which is always good because getting kicked out would suck. Throughout the Natives set and

We headed back to the hotel and had our food and began pre drinks. Eventually we left our hotel and continued to drink outside the venue, obviously dragon soop. I was

Images of Bulmers products posted by users (such as those shown below) often featured the product outdoors or on wooden tables. In these images, users could be seen to be evoking a pleasant outdoor lifestyle of picnics, days out and sitting outside pubs in warm weather. Other images showed the product in traditional pub settings with wax candles, stools and dim lighting. Interestingly, these images often echoed the style of Bulmers' official imagery, which displays the product tastefully in such outdoor and traditional settings. This again suggested that the brand-generated content had been successful in priming consumers to associate Bulmers with outdoor drinking in fine weather.



User-generated images featuring Budweiser showed the product being consumed outdoors, primarily by males, associating the product with leisure relaxation and masculine pursuits. The examples below show Budweiser being consumed by a swimming pool, whilst taking a break from riding a bicycle, on the beach and being held by a man wearing cowboy boots and a rhinestone belt. This last image in particular, portrays Budweiser's desired image by featuring what looks like a cowboy (the distillation of American values) in close proximity to the brand.



As illustrated by the examples below, images featuring Malibu posted by users on Pinterest promoting consumption suggestions were very colourful and featured names such as “Tropical Dream”, “Blue polka dot bikini martini” and “Paradise drink”. Other examples featured the product outdoors or in exotic locations.



Whilst the user-generated images of Budweiser and Malibu echoed to some extent the style of the brand’s advertising or appeared intended to be ‘arty’ or ‘tasteful’, images posted of WKD had a very different feel to them. In these images, users showed themselves and their friends not just drinking but drinking to get drunk and potentially out of control. The three images below appeared to depict parties at home and young people in varying stages of inebriation. In choosing to post images such as this, users gave the impression that they enjoyed a hedonistic and wild lifestyle, surrounded by friends.



These examples demonstrate how SNS users appropriate user-generated content featuring alcohol brands and alcohol consumption to convey details about the sort of person they would like to be perceived as and the sort of lifestyle they would like other people to believe they live. Alcohol brands play an important role on SNS by acting as shortcuts for certain values which in turn reflect aspects of the users' personality.

### 4.3 To use the brand as a space or platform for conversation

As well as providing users with a platform for projecting aspects of their taste, personality and lifestyle, SNS also provide users with a space for conversation and interaction with other users. This conversation and interaction could be directly about the brand, or inspired by the brand, as shown in the previous two sections. The analysis also picked up conversations and interactions which were not immediately relevant, in that they did not explicitly refer to alcohol brands or alcohol consumption. However, what was important about these sorts of interactions was that they took place on platforms linked to the alcohol brands.

For example, many brand-authored posts on Bulmers Facebook page mentioned the countdown to summer. These in turn provided a platform for users to interact with each other by talking about the weather. In the exchange below, one user made a joke regarding the weather in Scotland and another user replied in a similar vein.

- *Only 104 days? Get outside guys its getting nice already.*
- *technically, it's summer at the end of the month when the clocks go forwards...!*
- *Lucky you, peeing down most of the day in Scotland .Spring starts 30/03 !*
- *Heh, (user) - it ends some time that afternoon, unfortunately*

The tone and content of conversations often reflected or were imbued with brand values, even where the brand was not being discussed. In the example above, although users were not talking specifically about the brand, they were continuing the conversation started by Bulmers in a similarly light-hearted, humorous and friendly vein.

The following example below was taken from Budweiser's Facebook page, and demonstrates the success of Budweiser in bringing together users to talk about their Open Trials promotion. Although the brand is not mentioned in these posts, it is clear that the branding has resonated with the target group. One user uses the hashtag #tothedream and the users address each other as "lads".

- *Looking forward to meeting the other trialists at st georges park on monday #thedream*
  - *Where's st georges park ??*

- *St Georges park is in burton upon trent*
- *Its for 25yrs+ boys it was first trial february so guys goin on monday was put through giod luck lads*
- *The first trials have been and gone and monday is the final trial to reach wembley lads*

Comments included many which used humour to make fun of other footballers:

- *If lee cattermole can make it, I should be fine*
- *If heskey once got capped for england im sure to be a world superstar soon*

In these posts, Budweiser fans used masculine, colloquial language typical of sports commentary, such as “get in there”, “have a go”, and “go for it”. Humour was also used to demonstrate drinking prowess and this was often combined with football references, such as in the example below.

- *If I can drink Andy Carroll under the table I can sure score as many goals as he can*

Reacting to WKD’s post referring to ‘Salad Day’, discussed earlier, users on the WKD page posted the comments below. Although they were not specifically talking about the WKD product, the language used in these comments reflected the brand values of WKD, subverting norms and exhibiting a cheeky ‘laddish’ personality.

- *Surely if it's green it counts as salad ...*
- *It's "Pie Week" too much prefer a pie to salad!!*

These examples are significant because they reveal the subtlety and complexity of branding and of marketing on SNS. In each example, users have chosen to continue conversations which might have been begun by or inspired by the brand, but in which the brand is no longer present and which are not necessarily even focused on alcohol. This suggests that the users feel comfortable conversing in these digital environments and enjoy spending time interacting there. In other words, the brands have created spaces in which users can bond with other users. The brands can be seen as having provided a ‘glue’ which brings users together on social media. This helps create social and emotional bonds between users which are in themselves beneficial, creating a feeling of belonging and enjoyment, and from which brands also benefit by association.

## 5. FINDINGS: FOCUS GROUPS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

The findings from the focus groups with young people address four broad questions: firstly, how do young people use social network sites and what importance do they attach to them (5.1); secondly, how brand literate are young people and to what extent are they able to interpret and understand alcohol brands (5.2); thirdly, what role does digital media, and in particular SNS, play in building brand identities and communicating brand messages relating to alcohol products (5.3), and fourthly, what representations of alcohol consumption do digital media convey to young people (5.4). Each of these questions is addressed in turn.

### 5.1 Use and importance of social networking sites to young people

The findings identified three main uses of social networking sites by young people: maintaining contact with and expanding friendship groups; providing a shared space to establishing a sense of belonging; and a means of building and expressing a sense of self-identity and allegiance with friendship groups.

#### *Maintaining contact with and expanding friendship groups*

When the focus groups participants were asked to describe what they understood by the term social network sites, they made reference to a number of websites including “Facebook”, “Twitter”, “YouTube”, “Bebo”, “Tumblr”, “Instagram”, “Snapchat” and “Vine”. These sites vary in the extent to which they incorporate information and communication tools such as blogging and photo-sharing, but they all allow the user to create a profile and attach content in the form of blogs, images and videos.

Although the term ‘network’ implies these sites make it possible for users to make contact with strangers and befriend them, the findings suggested that most SNS were used primarily to support pre-existing social relations as opposed to meeting new people. For example, there were typically common offline connections with those they interacted with online, such as attending the same school or being in the same class. This was significant as it confirmed that SNS formed part of and consolidated participants’ existing social reality.

In addition to consolidating existing relations, SNS were important to building new connections and extending social networks. For example, SNS were often used by young people to find out more about people with whom they had recently met. It was therefore considered extremely important for their SNS profile to accurately reflect their desired identity and image. Or as this female teenager indicated when discussing meeting a boy offline: “he will just go on Facebook and find you” (Female, 16-17, C2DE). In this sense, the content they shared with their friends online was also being shared with a wider social group, and was important to forming a person’s ‘real’ social world.

Social network sites were omnipresent in young people’s lives. It was evident that for many the use of social network sites was a common feature of everyday life. Teenagers reported checking their SNS profiles “constantly” (Male, 14-15, C2DE), or “at least every 10 minutes” (Male, 16-17, C2DE), with some remarking on its addictive qualities: “It’s like a drug man, you need it” (Male, 16-17, C2DE). As previously noted the primary motivation for using SNS was to maintain existing social connections, “to get in contact with people” or for “socialising” (Female, 16-17, C2DE). These online interactions played an important role in keeping participants up to date with relevant news content

and to “see what is going on” (Male, 14-15, C2DE). This ranged from accessing topical news stories and celebrity gossip, to finding out about the latest goings on at school.

Some features of SNS were particularly prominent, none more so than the messenger application on Facebook, which allowed users to send text messages to those they had friended on the SNS site. It was an extremely popular way of organising social activities and for keeping in touch with friends. It was generally felt that if you did not have this application by your side there was a risk that you could be missing out on social occasions or general chat which could result in you being excluded from certain groups. The implications of this dependence are extremely important as it illustrates how corporations using SNS can have direct access to, and indeed form part of, a young person’s social reality. In this way commercial brands and messages can establish a presence in young people’s everyday life.

### ***A shared space to establish a sense of belonging***

Youth identities are created in a process of self-formation which includes that which takes place online. SNS were used by young people for expressing aspects of their personalities and for articulating identity-based interests by identifying with objects, activities and with other SNS users. Profile management, friending, ‘liking’ specific pages, tagging and updating statuses all contributed to this process. In addition, the choice of SNS was also important to constructing self-identity. It was not just what you did on the SNS that was important, but also what site or platform you choose to be seen on.

SNS, as with other forms of media, are subject to trends and fashions. Several factors influence the life cycle of a social networking site. Once a site becomes unfashionable with its target market, many abandon it for another. The Bebo social networking site was one such example. It was launched in 2005 and became extremely popular in the United Kingdom reaching 10 million users by 2007. However, users began abandoning the site for rivals such as Facebook and Twitter, leading to the company filing for bankruptcy in 2013. Participants mentioned using “Bebo, back in 2000 eh” (Female, 16-17, C2DE), describing the site as “ancient”. Some had used Bebo before they started using Facebook because “Facebook was just for the adults back then and none of us would go on it” (Female, 16-17, C2DE). When Bebo began losing users to Facebook it was noted that it tried to mimic the more popular site by “updating it so it looks a lot like Facebook” (Male, 16-17, C2DE), but without success. This illustrates how users switch between social network sites over time based on its perceived popularity amongst their peer group. In this sense a social network site’s life is finite unless it continues to evolve.

Facebook was the most popular SNS amongst this sample of young people, many of whom admitted to using it many times a day. A central reason for this was its popularity among those in their social circle. They felt it was simply easier and more socially acceptable to use something which was already popular than risk adopting an alternative site which was not established.

“Everybody has it, so it’s like if you have all you friends on it then it’s just easier that using one that nobody really has” (Female, 14-15, ABC1)

Who used a particular site could also influence its popularity and could potentially lead to its demise. In this sense respondents felt that they had to be cautious about who and what they made contact with as this could reflect negatively on them and their identity. For example, participants valued SNS as a forum to express themselves without parental surveillance. However, it was noted

that increasing numbers of adults and parents had access to Facebook and that this could place restrictions on user's freedom. Accepting a parent as a friend could be viewed negatively, as it limited people's willingness to talk openly about their social lives. Some simply viewed accepting adults as friends as "weird" (Male, 14-15, C2DE) and expressed feelings of distrust because they were believed to be attempting to infiltrate young people's social groups. Ultimately, SNS were primarily about communicating and forming relationships with people their own age and the presence of older people and parents on the likes of Facebook was seen to make the site feel less attractive and to undermine its appeal as a place to meet and talk.

Some respondents also saw the involvement of commercial agencies and organisation as a factor effecting engagement with social networking sites, and that some SNS sites such as Facebook were becoming too commercial and too widely used:

"I've sort of come off it (Facebook) a wee bit, just because there is so much spam on it and a lot of rubbish on it. People are just over-using it now. It's getting a bit boring now I think" (Male, 14-15, C2DE)

These views were reflected by what was seen as the increased presence of commercial marketing in the form of videos and advertisements on Facebook, much of which clogged up users' News Feeds: "Mine (News Feed) is just full of adverts as well. It's a load of rubbish really" (Male, 14-15, C2DE). Over commercialisation and too much unsolicited advertising was believed to damage the intimacy of the site undermining the feeling that this was somewhere to meet and chat with your mates when you were at a loose end, not somewhere you wanted to be bombarded by a lot of 'random crap'.

### ***Building a sense of self-identity and allegiance with friendship groups***

Users' SNS profiles were important to expressing their desired image and self-identity. Who and what a person associated themselves with on SNS could influence their ability to make new friends and contacts. The brands 'liked' by respondents were often carefully selected to reflect their desired values and identity. All were aware that once a user made a decision to 'like' a commercial SNS page, this preference was available for all of their friends to see, so it was considered important that they associated themselves with what were considered accepted brands. For example, one female participants described how she felt comfortable posting a 'like' for the high-street fashion chain 'Top Shop' as it was viewed as a widely accepted brand, with many of her peer group also shopping there and posting similar allegiances. In this way they could use the post to keep up to date with and share the latest news and celebrity gossip.

Similarly, SNS were also important to screening potential new friends and contacts, with the brands and organisations a person chose to 'like' or 'follow' on SNS providing a way of making a judgement as to whether or not that person shared similar values. The reasons for choosing to associate with some brands were not always that straightforward though. One participant mentioned that she had deliberately 'liked' a neighbourhood grocery shop because she and her friends had heard that the shop owner sent birthday messages on Facebook to all her loyal customers and followers and she wanted to demonstrate to her friends that this was indeed the case. Whilst liking an apparently random unbranded and unfashionable store appeared at face value to carry certain social risks, this example illustrates the relatively diverse uses young people can make of the like function and how it can form part of a much more sophisticated social narrative.

It was also apparent that different groups appeared to hold different rules about the kinds of things a person should and should not say online. This was especially true with regards to gender. Respondents related stories of other SNS users, particularly females, who shared what were regarded as very personal details on SNS and used these sites as a forum to air personal grievances and intimate details regarding their private lives. For many sharing such personal details on SNS for all to see was akin to “telling every other person your private business” (Female, 16-17, C2DE), and was a source of potential ridicule; “there is no need for them to post it on Facebook” (Male, 14-15, C2DE). This demonstrated the delicate balance that can exist between what was deemed acceptable and what was viewed as unacceptable with regards to what to post on SNS, and could determine how individuals were judged and accepted by those around them.

## **5.2 Young people’s ability to interpret alcohol brands**

It was apparent that respondents could attach value to brand labels and symbols, with brand packaging acting as a trigger, signifying a brand’s values. This could be particularly significant for products such as alcohol which are consumed publicly, and where brand preference can be used to say something about the consumer to those around them. As detailed in Section 2, participants were shown examples of alcohol packaging and products to facilitate discussion regarding the importance of alcohol brands; to describe their perceptions of the brand, who they thought the brand was aimed at and the values they associated with people who consumed the brand. The full list of examples is also reported in Appendix G.

### ***Brand values and their appeal***

Gender emerged as a an important dimension for differentiating between brands, with respondents distinguishing alcohol brands they believed were aimed at males from those aimed at females. It was widely believed that beers were marketed at men who “watch the football” (Female, 16-17, ABC1) or “rugby” (Male, 16-17, C2DE) and who enjoyed “drinking for pleasure” (Male, 14-15, ABC1). Simplicity was seen as the key characteristic here, with male participants stating that they preferred the established brand names of Budweiser and Heineken (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Examples of Budweiser and Heineken cans**



These brands were seen to adopt “simpler” designs which were liked by the young males because they were “not trying as hard” as other brands which used more colourful strident pack designs to stand out (Male, 14-15, ABC1). Budweiser was considered particularly attractive for these reasons:

“Looking at these (lager cans) you would look better with a Bud in your hand because it’s just red and white and it looks better” (Male, 14-15, C2DE)

The overriding view was that these products were “normal” and “known drinks” (Male, 14-15, ABC1) and were regarded as “the most socially acceptable” due to their wide popularity amongst young male drinkers (Male, 14-15, C2DE). This was particularly appealing for young males in the sample, who wished to present an image of a more mature self-assured drinker, an image of drinking that these brands were felt to personify. In this sense male participants aspired to a “more laid back” style of alcohol consumption as it aligned with their desire to project an outward appearance of maturity and control, and not having to try too hard to fit in (Male, 14-15, ABC1).

Consequently drinking an established brand of beer was seen as “normal” and meant you were less likely to stand out amongst your peers. Although not articulated as part of these discussions, these narratives appeared to point towards a need amongst young males to find familiar or safe brands to help counter an apparent lack of confidence with drinking, which perhaps reflects the young male drinker’s life stage and level of experience.

Heavy episodic drinking or drinking with the sole intention of getting drunk tended to be viewed negatively by male respondents, many of whom wished to associate themselves with more moderate styles of alcohol consumption, such as “drinking for pleasure” or finding something you could “drink all week around” (Male, 16-17, C2DE). Drunken and loutish behaviour was associated with young, immature drinkers. Consequently, garish products such as WKD blue (Figure 4) and Mwahh test tube shots and bottles (Figure 5) which were perceived as promoting this type of drinking were often rejected as “unacceptable” (Male, 16-17, ABC1), or simply as “trying to get you drunk and drink more” (Male, 14-15, ABC1). To many male participants, these products represented the opposite of the kind of drinking ideals to which they aspired, a distinction that was further reinforced by the colourful pack designs and the types of drinking they signified.

**Figure 4: Example of WKD blue packaging**



**Figure 5: Examples of Mmwhah packaging**



By contrast, many female participants were attracted to “colourful”, “bright” and “eye-catching” packaging (Female, 14-15, ABC1), which they described as “fun”, “cool”, and “unusual”. A favourite amongst the female participants were the Mmwhah test tube shots (pictured in Figure 5 above), which were chosen because “they don’t look like a normal drink” (Female, 16-17, ABC1). The appeal of brightly-coloured packaging amongst female respondents was in stark contrast to male preferences for simpler designs and well-established brands. While male tastes and preferences were generally very conservative female choices were more likely to be driven by a desire to try something new, to experiment and to take risks: “I would be intrigued to try cos it (Mmwhah) looks quite dangerous – just to see what happens” (Female, 14-15, C2DE).

Although some of the male participants did admit to being curious to try the likes of the test tube shots, they stated that they “wouldn’t brag about it” (Male, 14-15, C2DE) because they believed these products were primarily aimed at females and they did not “want to look like a bunch of saps” (Male, 16-17, C2DE).

In direct opposition to the male desire to fit in, the females preferred drinks which stood out, inviting attention and wanting people to ask where they got them.

“I would just want to walk about with a wee pink can, it’s so cool” (Female, 14-15, C2DE)

In this sense, female respondents tended to view these alcohol products as fashion accessories, for example describing the slim, pink Lamcello can (Figure 6) as “girly”, “pretty” and “feminine”.

**Figure 6: Examples of WKD Remix and Lamcello cans**



As well as conveying brand values, the size and shape of the container was also believed to influence consumption. Smaller, slimmer cans such as the WKD Remix and the Lamcello (Figure 6) were believed to be more feminine and less harmful by both males and females. However, due to its small size it was thought that in practice consumers were likely to consume more portions; “you would probably have quite a few if you were drinking that” (Male, 14-15, ABC1). It was also believed that these smaller cans promoted rapid consumption, and distracted from consumption guidelines:

“I’ve never heard of it but it’s a tiny little can telling you to drink responsibly, I am not being funny but I could finish a can like that in two seconds” (Female, 16-17, C2DE)

In contrast, the Mwahh test tube shots and bottles were associated with heavy drinking because of their shape and bright colours: “because they are bright colours, (it’s saying) party, let’s get drunk” (Male, 14-15, ABC1). As discussed above, these types of drinks brought with them a sense of danger and a sense of trying something new. Some participants associated this type of product with clubbing and girls having their drinks spiked; these containers are “used for date rapes” .... “Aye they open it, they put the date rape in and they shake it because it is still in the bottle they are not going to think” (Female, 16-17, C2DE).

There was a belief amongst female participants that alcohol related assaults and rapes were a very real prospect for those who did not drink responsibly and were often perpetrated by males who had too much to drink. For this reason some of the young females were wary of products which they felt were developed with the sole intention of getting people drunk.

### ***The importance of alcohol brands to peer acceptance***

Findings indicate that alcohol brands communicate social status and can appeal to individual aspirations and are important to identity formation and peer acceptance. Again, significant differences emerged by gender. Male participants avoided product such as WKD or Lamcello which were seen to be aimed at the opposite sex or regarded as “girly” or “feminine”, and which drinkers ran the risk of “being bullied” (Male, 14-15, ABC1) and committing social suicide “You wouldn’t want to be caught drinking that (WKD) if you were a guy....you’d get pelters (insults) thrown at you” (Male, 14-15, C2DE). Such behaviour was viewed as akin to cross-dressing and was seen as socially unacceptable unless it was being consumed ironically.

These risks also extended to other behaviours which indicated allegiance with alcohol brands, for example one respondent indicated that if anyone were to post a picture of WKD on Facebook they would be instantly “deleted” (Male, 14-15, C2DE). Although expressed in a light-hearted manner, accounts such as this did serve to demonstrate the importance of being seen with the right alcohol brand and its importance to social status.

Age also emerged as an important factor differentiating brand allegiance. Some products were seen to be aimed at people who were too young compared to those in the sample group (e.g. WKD, Sourz Fusion), while other products, such as Beefeater Gin or Lambrini (Figure 7) were felt to be aimed at people who were much older.

**Figure 7: Examples of Lambrini Forest Fruits cider and Beefeater Gin packaging**



Participants typically associated these products with older people and family members for example, describing Lambrini as “more for ladies, I don’t think people our age would buy that” (Female, 16-17, ABC1). Views regarding the Beefeater limited edition product were more mixed (shown in Figure 5) While some described the packaging as “attractive” and “appealing”, most took the view that no-one their age would drink gin: “You don’t really see many teens drinking dry gin” (Male, 14-15, ABC1).

Because these drinks were not popular amongst their peer group, participants generally distanced themselves from these products: “You wouldn’t want to be caught walking about with that – no way” (Male, 14-15, C2DE).

Other alcohol products were thought to be designed to specifically appeal to younger drinkers and were more likely to be consumed by those younger than themselves. Bright colours and images used by brands such as WKD were described as “attractive” and it was believed the intention was to “grab your attention”; “they’re meant to make it look exciting like a party”(Male, 14-15, ABC1). The target market for this brand was believed to be “very young girls” (Female, 16-17, ABC1) which was reflected in a belief that the product was designed to look like a soft drink, “like a Fanta or a Coca Cola”, “like kid’s juice” and to taste “like fruit” (Male, 14-15, ABC1).

Although some participants admitted to finding brightly-coloured packaging attractive, many felt that these types of products did not fit with the identity they sought to create or aspire to. Low alcohol drinks such as WKD in general were regarded negatively and were seen as starter drinks for

the very young who were striving to look cool, but were out of touch. Consequently being seen drinking it carried significant social risks:

“If you go out and drink it (WKD) on the streets you will either get leathered for being a gimp, or you will just get the piss taken straight out of you” (Female, 16-17, C2DE)

Few products appeared to appeal to both genders with Dragon Soop packaging (Figure 8) the only exception to emerge from the study. This packaging was described as colourful but not in a way which was perceived to be overtly feminine or masculine. Instead the branding and packaging of this product conveyed associations with certain sub-groups most notably “goths” or “skaters”. These associations were responsible for giving the product a sense of rebelliousness, qualities which appealed to both boys and girls.

### ***Interpreting alcohol packaging***

Whilst most participants were able to correctly identify products presented to them, exploration of the pack designs and their associations revealed how brands can borrow from other product themes in order to enhance their appeal. For example, the Mwahh test tube shots were believed to deliberately resemble and borrow from confectionary products such as “sweets” or “sherbet” to make them more appealing to younger consumers. Some participants argued that this could cause confusion amongst younger children leading to potential harm; “that looks like it would be sherbet or something when you open it they would be like, ‘oh it must be like a juice’, and they would drink it probably not knowing what it is” (Female, 16-17, C2DE).

**Figure 8: Examples of Dragon Soop packaging**



In other cases respondents themselves struggled to correctly interpret the contents of the product. The pack design of the alcoholic energy drink Dragon Soop (Figure 8) was believed to be deliberately intended to look like a regular, non-alcoholic energy drink, and in some cases it was only after close inspection that respondents determined that it actually contained alcohol. It was subsequently argued that this was a deliberate strategy on the part of the producer to enhance its appeal to younger drinkers:

“It just shows you who it’s really appealing to. The Dragon’s Soup – that looks like an energy juice, so younger people would buy it” (Male, 16-17, ABC1)

Some argued that disguising the fact that it contained alcohol meant that it had particular appeal to some young drinkers as it could be consumed without adults being aware or as one respondent said it could be taken to school without teachers questioning you. The effectiveness of this strategy

was borne out by experience with some respondents relating stories of people they knew who had purchased the product believing it to be a regular non-alcoholic energy drink and only afterwards discovering that it contained alcohol. There was also a belief that the packaging was deliberately designed so that the product could be positioned in shops alongside or in the vicinity of soft drinks or non-alcoholic energy drinks:

“Yeah they put it close to it because...in the shop they have actually got some of the alcohol in the same bit as where you buy your juice” (Female, 16-17, C2DE)

Whilst the rationale for this was often unclear it might be reasonable to assume that such confusion in time could serve to enhance the products irreverent and rebellious brand values and its status and appeal as a drink of choice to under-age street drinkers.

### 5.3 Representations of alcohol marketing on social networking sites

The focus groups identified several marketing strategies used by alcohol brands which relate to SNS web content. These were: the placing of unsolicited advertising messages for alcohol on social network sites; engagement with alcohol marketing on social network sites; user-generated images which can be co-opted by alcohol SNS pages; and linking with SNS alcohol pages through new pack technologies. Each of these strategies is now examined in turn.

#### *Unsolicited advertising messages for alcohol on SNS*

Respondents reported seeing large volumes of commercial marketing on SNS sites, a significant proportion of which were seen to include advertisements for alcohol products. Some described alcohol marketing as being “everywhere”, with a feeling that alcohol was “advertised far too much” (Female, 16-17, C2DE). It was reported that adverts for alcohol products “pop up on your newsfeed all the time” alongside posts from friends (Female, 16-17, C2DE) and also featured prominently on multiple SNS such as YouTube and Facebook.

**Figure 9: Example of sponsored alcohol advert on Facebook**



Participants stated that they regularly saw examples of friends having ‘liked’ or ‘re-tweeted’ a post from an alcohol brand such as Figure 9, above. And that this led to advertisements for alcohol

appearing in their News Feed. As a consequence many of these brand messages appeared to come from or to be endorsed by a trusted friend or source with the exchange of user generated messages and information between friends becoming entangled with marketing content.

Some participants described friends who frequently 'liked' alcohol brands and that promotions or advertisements featuring alcohol products would then appear on their Facebook news feeds. This also happened on Twitter where "some people will re-tweet stuff, just like to re-tweet it" (Female, 16-17, ABC1). Interactions like this were recognised as being important to the circulation of marketing content on SNS and the number of times it is displayed on users' networks.

There was a general acceptance amongst participants that alcohol marketing was an inevitable part of SNS and that it had become just another part of the daily content. This aspect of SNS was characterised by tolerance rather than something they sought to actively engage with. YouTube was the most commonly cited source of alcohol adverts. These adverts were not triggered by 'liking' or signing up to a specific brand but rather, they tended to automatically play before the user's selected video. It was reported that "there are loads of adverts for alcohol on YouTube" (Male, 16-17, ABC1). Sometimes the user was able to skip an advert after watching the advert for a few seconds but on other occasions they would have to watch the entire advert in order to access the video:

"Sometimes the advert is before it, I think it was for beer or something it was just like a thirty second advert" (Female, 14-15, ABC1)

These adverts were reported to be commonplace and the general feeling amongst respondents was that they could be screened out or easily ignored:

"You get used to it, it's just there all the time, you just stop noticing it" (Male, 16-17, C2DE)

However, the level of exposure to these brand messages was extremely high, even amongst the underage teenagers involved in this study. The fact that they were exposed to such a high level of alcohol marketing led participants to question the amount of alcohol advertising they saw in everyday life and the apparent mixed messages they were receiving from different sources about the attractions and dangers of consumption:

"What are you meant to do when you see it everywhere?" (Female, 16-17, C2DE)

"If you are going to advertise it and show how good it is, they are going to do it, but if you are going to show how bad it is they are not going to do it" (Female, 16-17, C2DE)

Viewed in the context concerns expressed in the wider society about under-age drinking, the ubiquity and overwhelming amount of commercial marketing online led some to question the fairness of what they saw as blaming young people when little was being done to control the normalising effect of alcohol marketing on social media:

"They moan about like young people drinking, but then they know that when they use Facebook and Twitter, so why advertise it if they know, young people are obviously going to think, oh well they are advertising it on my Facebook" (Female, 16-17, C2DE)

“They blame us for peer pressuring people to drink, but see to be honest with you, what are you meant to do when you see it everywhere” (Female, 16-17, C2DE)

### **Engagement with alcohol marketing on SNS**

Most young people expressed wariness about engaging with alcohol brands on SNS pages. This was something few admitted to having considered doing before and questioned why anybody would choose to do such a thing: “why would anybody look up the drink they are going to be drinking on a web page!?” (Male, 14-15, ABC1). When questioned regarding the types of people they thought would engage with alcohol brands online, the general view was that it would be people who wanted to demonstrate that they consumed the product to their social network. Some participants did admit to knowing people who had ‘liked’ and ‘followed’ alcohol brands on SNS. However, ‘liking’ or ‘following’ a brand carried with it certain risks, most specifically that it could be viewed negatively by friends, particularly if it was an odd or unpopular brand. For example, one young male drinker described how a person who opted to express a ‘like’ for the WKD page (see Figure 10) would be regarded as a “chavvy ned” and would expose himself to ridicule; “he’d be like saying, ‘oh mate look how hard I am, liking an alcohol page’” (Male, 16-17, C2DE).

**Figure 10: Example of WKD Facebook Page**

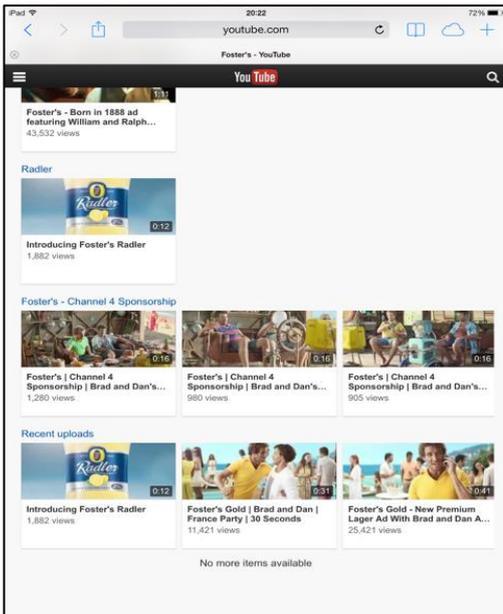


Liking the Facebook page for WKD Facebook page was widely regarded as a “pretty embarrassing” thing to do, not just because the individual would be declaring that they drank WKD, but also because they would be indicating that they thought it was cool to do so.

“they’d be like (saying) oh he drinks it” (Male, 16-17, ABC1)

Importantly these attitudes softened somewhat when participants were invited to consider content from other more widely accepted brands. For example, when shown a webpage from the current Foster’s lager site which illustrated how users could access and view the brands TV advertising (see Figure 11), some took a completely different position arguing that they would probably subscribe to that YouTube channel in order to watch the videos because “they are quite funny adverts” (Male, 14-15, ABC1).

**Figure 11: Example of Foster's YouTube channel**



## 5.4 User-generated images and co-opting onto alcohol SNS pages

### *Images featuring users and alcohol brands*

Pictures and status updates posted by users relating to use of alcohol were described as commonplace on SNS. Participants stated that they had seen numerous examples of their 'friends' posting content related to their alcohol consumption (see Figure 12), particularly in relation to weekend drinking:

"I see other people talking about it, or pictures with alcohol in it" (Female, 14-15, C2DE)

"(It's often) someone with a bottle in their hand" (Female, 16-17, ABC1)

"(They) put it on a table and take a picture of their drink" (Female, 16-17, C2DE)

**Figure 12: Examples of user-generated posts on SNS featuring alcohol brands**



Despite its popularity, participants were often keen to maintain a social distance between themselves and those who posted these kinds of pictures as it was seen to be embarrassing and immature: “it’s for fifteen year olds” (Male, 16-17, C2DE). These kinds of images were often associated with groups or types of drinker that were frowned upon, for example ‘neds’ and the tonic wine Buckfast: “Neds put photos up with friends and they’ve all got Buckie” (Female, 14-15, C2DE).

A common theme underlying many of these images was the focus on strong or high alcohol products “stuff that basically gets you rubbered” (Female, 16-17, C2DE) and posts or videos portraying excess. It was widely understood that people who bought into this kind of thing were trying to show that they were able to drink the strongest drinks. It was apparent that even though this kind of behaviour was widely ridiculed and many disassociated themselves from the type of person who posted this kind of material, these types of images were of huge interest to young people, and were much talked about and shared, particularly if it was someone whom they knew.

The recent ‘Necknomination’ trend, where users posted online videos of themselves drinking alcohol and then nominated other online friends to take up the challenge exemplified the level of interest that images of alcohol excess could generate. Indeed it was noteworthy that this phenomena was responsible for images of excessive consumption and risky behaviour escalating, for example, from drinking a can of beer in one go to more extreme levels of consumption involving “protein shakes”, “bleach” and “petrol”:

“There was one I seen and it was a guy fae Liverpool and he got nominated off his pal and he drank a can of beer, he then got a dead baby chicken and he bit the head off it and then he poured a pint of vodka into a pint glass, he cracked two eggs in it, burnt his fag on his tongue and put his fag in his glass and drank the pint. And at the end he just went I nominate James from Newcastle and then James from Newcastle has to do something” (Male, 14-15, C2DE)

For the majority their involvement was limited to participating as spectators and commentators, with most taking the position that posting a video of this nature made the user “look stupid” (Female, 14-15, C2DE) and that the kind of people that did it were weak willed or “felt the need just to follow the crowd” (Female, 14-15, C2DE). They were also acutely aware of the dangers of this type of behaviour, with some quoting extreme consequences and in the case of the Necknomination phenomena, actual fatalities: “a guy done it in Australia and it killed him” (Female, 14-15, C2DE). It was also believed to be “mostly boys” that chose to actively engage in this type of behaviour. However, there were also examples of girls featuring in this kind of content. Most of these cases took the form of women drinking to excess, typically at a party, and a friend or acquaintance posting an embarrassing photograph of them online the following day without their knowledge or consent. Several participants reported instances where pictures of them drinking alcohol had ended up online:

“If you’re at a party and you’re having a drink and you put a picture on Facebook or whatever, obviously people are going to see it but I don’t purposely do it to show that I am drinking, it’s just, something you do. That is how I see most people drinking, on pictures” (Female, 14-15, C2DE)

Appearing drunk on SNS was viewed in negative terms by most participants, and in particular by young women who were especially fearful of being photographed in an embarrassing situation, “I would kill someone if they done that to me” (Female, 14-15, C2DE). However, it was noteworthy that many accepted that this was an inevitable part of having fun and partying, and that nearly everyone at some point ran the risk of getting caught out, ‘it’s just something you do’.

These findings illustrate how drinking and images of excess were often a central feature of the self-generated content that was widely accessed and shared on SNS, and that these practices not only served to normalise excessive consumption and potentially risky drinking behaviours, but also to provide a platform for endorsing specific alcohol brands, many of which were chosen because of their high alcohol content.

### ***Linking with SNS alcohol web pages through new pack technologies***

As previously outlined, new pack technologies that are emerging enable consumers to directly access online content and in particular SNS pages or websites for specific alcohol brands. These technologies include Quick Response (QR) codes and augmented reality advertising (virtual enhancement of the physical object) which allows consumers to interact with the physical product using smartphones or tablet computers, and promote greater engagement by providing access to electronic games and challenges which can then be shared on SNS.

To explore these new technologies, participants were shown examples of alcohol packaging with QR codes and Facebook or Twitter addresses printed on the cans and bottles. The examples were often greeted with a muted response, as many had only a very rudimentary understanding of how the technology worked and its possible applications. For example, participants’ experience of QR codes was limited to their use on “bus stops” which allowed travellers to “track the bus by scanning the bar code” (Female, 16-17, C2DE). Hence, because this technology was associated with very practical applications and not necessarily with marketing, the participants struggled to grasp its value to drinkers, or why someone “on a night out would think ‘oh, let’s scan this and go to the website!’” (Male, 14-15, ABC1). Or as another respondent in the same group said; “Who off their face would want to really see what the website was like!?” (Male, 14-15, ABC1).

This scepticism was further compounded by QR codes which led the user directly to the product’s SNS page or as one respondent saw it; “where it’s forcing you onto its Facebook page” (Male, 14-15, ABC1). Only where the content was considered interesting or useful, for example if you were at a party and you wanted to access some cocktails ideas – and where the brand itself was seen as attractive or ‘cool’, were respondents prepared to consider engaging with the technology. Taken together these findings would appear to confirm the technology is still at an early experimental stage and its applications as a marketing tool are still largely untested.

Examples of augmented reality packaging elicited far more positive responses. This was also a new technology to most participants. However, in this case its novelty value appeared to actually heighten its appeal. This was illustrated by participants’ response to the Budweiser FA Cup promotion (see Figure 13). It required consumers to point their mobiles at promotional Budweiser beer can and then to view the can through their mobile screen, which converted the can into a 3D hologram of the FA Cup trophy. Users were then encouraged to take pictures of their friends

holding the can which would appear on the smartphone screen as an image of them holding the FA Cup. These pictures could then be uploaded and shared on SNS. This promotion appealed particularly to young males (the group to whom it was presumably designed for), who described it as “a good laugh” and as something that “you would probably buy, just to do it”.

**Figure 13: Example of Budweiser augmented reality promotion**



The technology also had the potential to attract consumers to what were widely seen as unfashionable or relatively unattractive brands. Despite being viewed as a brand for ‘chavvy neds’, the augmented reality promotion attached to WKD was viewed in positive terms with many participants keen to experiment with the 3D images it generated (see Figure 14). In this case the augmented reality packaging involved a promotional multipack which users could point their smartphones and tablets at to watch the hologram of an animated character called ‘Head of Weekends’ dance around the box.

**Figure 14: Example of WKD augmented reality promotion**



This promotional packaging formed part of WKD’s biggest ever promotional campaign for which they enlisted the services of augmented reality experts Blippar to create a series of augmented reality experiences, linked to various marketing platforms; packaging, point of sale, print advertising and an augmented reality t-shirt (Figure 15).

**Figure 15: Example of WKD augmented reality t-shirt using Blippar**



The packaging hologram also provided links to the WKD website and encouraged users to post photos of themselves or their friends holding the pack and share them on Facebook and Twitter. The female participants found this example more appealing than the Budweiser example with many describing it as “quite cool”. There was a strong feeling amongst the groups that “if more people knew about it” it could draw more people in and ultimately encourage people to look out for and try other new examples:

“I could just walk into a shop with my iPad and just see what kind of music comes up with different bottles” (Male, 16-17, C2DE)

These examples and the positive response they received provide a clear illustration of how augmented technologies such as these have the potential not only to enhance product packaging as an advertising platform, but also to reposition it as a new channel for generating branded user-led content on social media.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This study has used thematic content analysis of digital media content to explore how six alcohol brands – Budweiser, Bulmers, Dragon Soop, Malibu, Smirnoff and WKD - use social network sites (SNS) and packaging as part of their marketing activities, and how users respond to and engage with these activities. It has also explored, through focus groups, how young people perceive alcohol brands, the ways in which young people perceive alcohol content on social media and alcohol packaging, and the role that alcohol brands play in adolescent identity formation.

The study has illustrated how the six brands used a range of strategies to promote brand values and to encourage online engagement. SNS were used as an interactive marketing channel to showcase new products, advertising campaigns and distribution outlets, and to receive feedback from users almost instantaneously. More subtly, SNS were used to build a relationship with users and to make them feel appreciated and valued, through conversation, through appreciation of user-generated content, and through sharing of users' interests and values.

By appealing to certain values and creating desirable brand associations, the six alcohol brands studied were able to craft a personality and convey to users the impression that their online content was not from faceless corporations but from friends with similar interests and a familiar outlook on life, making it easier for users to pass on the brand messages to other friends within their social network and thereby to extend the reach of the brand's marketing and to lend it an authenticity and persuasiveness. On SNS, marketing content becomes entangled with the exchange of user-generated messages and information between friends and as a consequence, many brand messages appear to come from or be endorsed by a trusted friend. In turn, brands co-opt user generated content – for example, particularly amusing tweets or attractive images - which supports their brand values. Thus, marketing and branding can be seen to be co-created on SNS.

The analysis suggests that all of the alcohol brands' actions on SNS were designed to reinforce the values and identity of the brand. Brands adopted a particular tone of voice, appealed to certain values, used humour and associated themselves with cultural references points such as sport or music which would be of intrinsic interest to users and would encourage them to feel comfortable in the brand's presence. The online spaces created by alcohol brands could be seen to function as 'glue', bringing users together who shared similar interests or views. This creates social and emotional bonds between users which are beneficial in creating a feeling of belonging and acceptance. Although these conversations may not always revolve around alcohol consumption, they reflect brand values, revealing the subtlety and complexity of branding. The analysis also suggests that the brands used SNS to position the brand as part of everyday activities, framing alcohol consumption as a positive, everyday activity. Even seasonal events such as Pancake Day were co-opted as alcohol consumption occasions.

Consumers also derive benefits from interacting with alcohol brands on SNS. The analysis of user generated content on SNS suggested that users were able to respond directly to the brand, expressing opinions on new products, advertising campaigns and promotions. They appeared to respond voluntarily and with enthusiasm to brand content, spreading it to their wider social network and further increasing its reach. More subtly, users were also able to engage with alcohol

brands in order to portray something about themselves to others. Alcohol brands worked as shortcuts or symbols with which users could display taste and demonstrate personality or lifestyle. In the focus groups, packaging was found to have a similar function. The pack was an embodiment of the brand values and carried extra significance for young people, who would often consume their product directly from the packaging and in the company of their peers. New packaging technologies have the potential to not only enhance product packaging as an advertising platform, but also to reposition it as a new channel for generating branded user-led content on social media.

The focus groups suggested that social networking sites played a very important role in young people's lives and were important to self-image and constructing identity. SNS formed part of and helped to consolidate young people's existing social reality, functioning as an extension of their real-life social networks. SNS were omnipresent in young people's lives and vital to maintaining social connections. The content they shared with their friends online was also being shared with a wider social group, forming a person's 'real' social world.

Alcohol marketing was a part of young people's everyday life. Messages from alcohol marketers on SNS appear alongside comments and images from friends, lending them greater credibility, authenticity and persuasiveness. In the focus groups, young people spoke about regularly seeing examples of friends 'liking' or 'following' alcohol brands, spreading the marketing messages to their social group. Alcohol marketing on SNS only shows alcohol consumption in a positive light, skewing social norms. User-generated images of friends consuming alcohol or appearing in images in close proximity to alcohol brands was a common occurrence, particularly at the weekend. Drinking and images of excess were often a central feature of the self-generated content that is widely accessed and shared on SNS. These practices not only provide a platform for endorsing specific alcohol brands, but also serve to normalise excessive consumption and potentially risky drinking behaviours. The overwhelming imbalance in the amount of commercial marketing online may lead young people to question whether they should be blamed for underage drinking when there is a belief that little is being done to control the normalising effect of alcohol marketing on social media.

A key finding from the study, observed in both the focus groups and the thematic content analysis, was that users associated alcohol brands with the same values and personality as those promoted by the brands themselves on SNS, proving that brands are successful in priming users to associate the brand with certain attributes and values. For example, comments on Budweiser's Facebook page revolved around football, users on the Bulmers Facebook page chatted about the summer, and images posted by users of Malibu products featured glamorous-looking cocktails in exotic locations. Similarly, when viewing alcohol packaging, young people were able to identify and evoke brand values: Budweiser was associated with watching football, Malibu with holidays abroad and Bulmers cider with consuming outdoors and at barbeques, illustrating how deeply embedded these brand associations were in young people's everyday lives.

Young people's dependence on SNS as a means of everyday social interaction has vast implications for marketers. The advent of social networking means that corporations can have direct access to, and form part of, a young person's social reality. If the ideal relationship between the consumer and the brand is a close one, the omnipresence of SNS means that brand are able to

constantly reinforce their values, cementing the brand identity in consumers' minds. Current marketing regulations aimed at protecting vulnerable groups such as young people can be seen as ineffective because they seek to apply existing codes to the online environment rather than addressing the unique challenges posted by social media (Nicholls, 2012). In particular, the co-created nature of marketing messages on SNS – the way that marketing messages are created not only by brands but through interactions between brands and users and between users themselves – is not recognised in existing regulatory codes.

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Sample selection: social networking sites

SNS	Description	Number of users in UK	Key components	Brand involvement	Current regulations concerning alcohol brands	Example of page featuring alcohol brands
Facebook	Allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues.	31 million	The News Feed is the constantly updating list of stories in the middle of a user's home page. News Feed displays friends' status updates, photos, videos, links, app activity and likes from people, pages and groups that the user follows on Facebook.	Brands can create a Facebook page, gain 'likes' and produce content and interact with its fans. When a user 'likes' a brand, any content posted by the brand flows directly into the users' News Feed alongside updates, photos and videos posted by their friends	Users add their date of birth when creating a Facebook profile. You must be 18 or over to like, comment on or share, content on an alcohol brand's Facebook page.	
Twitter	Twitter is an online social networking service that allows users to send messages of up to 140 characters called 'tweets'.	15 million	Twitter allows users to register and create a profile which enables them to send tweets which are publicly visible by default. Once registered, users can subscribe to others' tweets in a process known as 'following' which is similar to 'liking' a page on Facebook. When a user chooses to follow another user on Twitter, their tweets appear on the user's home page.	Brands can create an account and update their profile with regular tweets which can include links to images and videos. Those who choose to 'follow' these brands will then be able to view the brand's tweets as part of their home page. Twitter also offers paid advertising for companies who want to reach a wider group of users or spark engagement from their existing followers by offering "Promoted Tweets".	To follow an alcohol brand on Twitter, users must respond to a direct message within 24 hours confirming they are over 18. This message takes the user to an authentication page where they must enter their date of birth.	

SNS	Description	Number of users in UK	Key components	Brand involvement	Current regulations concerning alcohol brands	Example of page featuring alcohol brands
<b>YouTube</b>	YouTube is a video sharing website which allows users to upload, view, and share videos and comment on the videos.	19 million	Users can register to create a profile or 'channel'. Unregistered users can watch videos, and registered users can upload videos to their channels. Users can subscribe to a video channel which enables them to receive updates whenever the channel uploads new videos.	Brand channels are exclusively available to YouTube advertisers who pay for the privilege. Brand channels allow marketers to customise the look and feel of their YouTube channel.	Users must add a date of birth when registering to create a profile. Users need to sign in to view or subscribe to an alcohol brand's channel. Alcohol adverts located using the site's search function can be viewed without signing in.	
<b>Pinterest</b>	Pinterest allows users to upload, save and sort images, videos, comments, links and gifs as visual bookmarks, called 'pins'.	Over 2 million	These pins are typically organised around a central topic or theme and shared on 'boards'. Users can then search for a specific topic and then save individual pins to their own boards.	Users can create a business account and create a range of boards that showcase the brand's personality and taste. People can choose which boards they want to follow.	No regulations concerning alcohol brands.	
<b>Tumblr</b>	Tumblr is a micro-blogging platform which allows users to post multimedia content such as pictures, videos or pieces of writing to a short form blog.	Over 1 million	Users can also 'follow' other users' blogs and this content will appear on their 'dashboard'.	Brands can create content for users to see and pay for sponsored Posts which are just like regular Tumblr posts but are more visible and targetable based on gender, location, and interest. Brands can also pay to be put in the trending tab on the Tumblr mobile app.	No regulations concerning alcohol brands	

### Young People, Alcohol Packaging and Digital Media

#### FOCUS GROUP TOPIC GUIDE

**Participants:** 8 single sex friendship groups comprising of 14-15 year olds and 16-17 year olds (6 participants per group). The discussion will cover the topic areas outlined below, but will vary in focus in accordance with participant's range of experience. These topics should not be seen as a rigid structure, but as a checklist, providing participants with the freedom to express their views and experiences.

**Consent:** Ensure prospective participants have received a copy of the study information sheet; have been given an opportunity to ask questions; and written consent has been given to take part and for the discussion to be recorded. Parental consent will also be required. Participants should be informed that all comments made as part of the focus group discussion will remain confidential and that their identities will not be disclosed as part of the reporting and dissemination process.

Specific Research Questions to be addressed:

- How do young people perceive and engage with alcohol packaging and labelling?
- In what ways do alcohol brands feature in community conversations on social media sites?
- How are alcohol brands used by young people in social media networks to construct desired identities?
- How do alcohol marketers encourage consumers to actively engage with alcohol brands through the use of web addresses and QR codes on packaging and labelling?
- How do alcohol marketers encourage user engagement on social media sites?
- What alcohol brands do young people find most appealing and would be most likely to engage with further through websites and social media pages?

#### 1. Introductions, openers and warm-up questions

Introduce researcher

Overview of research

- Has anyone been to a discussion group before?
- Do you know what will happen today?
- At the University of Stirling we research a range of topics with a range of different people but today we want to begin by asking what you think about social network sites. We will also be talking about alcohol brands and how these are packaged and marketed. Don't worry, I'm not going to ask about your drinking behaviour whether you drink or not. If you would like to talk about that then it is fine, everything said here is entirely confidential, but what I am really interested in is you reactions to alcohol marketing.
- We need to hear what you think, so just say whatever comes to mind, there are no right or wrong answers.

- If there are any questions that you don't want to answer, then you don't need to do so but it would be great if you guys did most of the talking.
- If you are ok with it, the discussion will be recorded but we will not use any names or any of your personal details in the research. This is for my benefit. I'll be doing 8 of these groups and this is so I remember what was said in each group.
- Any questions before we begin?

**2. Begin with general discussion on social network sites** (explore spontaneous thoughts and experiences of digital media)

- To begin with, what do you understand by the term 'social media'?
- Do any of you use social media? How often?
- What is the main reason(s) for using social media?
- Which sites do you use and why do you think they are popular?
- Do you ever go on commercial pages? What sort of things do you look at?
- Do you ever 'like' commercial pages or follow commercial tweets? What pages/tweets? Why?
- Do you ever go on alcohol brand pages? What brands? Why?
- Do you ever 'like' alcohol brand pages?
- Do you see a lot of alcohol marketing online? What have you seen? What do you think about this?
- Do you ever go on 'fan' pages (unofficial alcohol pages)? What pages? Why?
- Do you feel there is a difference between official brand pages and 'fan' pages?

**3. Descriptions of alcohol brands on social network sites** (explore participants' reaction to alcohol marketing on social network sites and how alcohol brands feature in online conversations)

- Do you or your friends ever talk about alcohol brands online? If so, how and where?
- Do you ever talk about specific brands? What brands?
- Have you ever seen anyone posting pictures of alcohol brands or alcohol use on their profile? Any examples? How often?

**Show examples of branded SNS pages using I Pad**

- Reactions to specific examples of online alcohol marketing on SNS
- Have any of you seen these pages before?
- What sort of person would go on this page?
- Do participants find any of the examples appealing? If so, why?
- Could you rank the SNS pages in order from most appealing to least appealing? Why are some appealing and others not? What would make you likely to go on this page (competitions, giveaways etc.)?

#### 4. General descriptions of alcohol packaging and labelling (explore reactions, attitudes and descriptions)

I'd now like to talk about packaging. Can you think about the packaging for things that you buy?

- Can you think of anything that you particularly liked or that you particularly remember? What was it that you liked about it?
- Are there any types of products for which the packaging stands out? What? Why? What features?
- Are there any types of products where a great deal of effort has been put into the packaging? What? Why? What features?

Think about alcohol products and the way they are packaged. The shape, the colours, the label etc.

- Do you think packaging is important for alcohol brands? Why?
- Can you describe any examples of alcohol packaging for me? Any specific brands which come to mind?

I've got some examples of alcohol packaging to show you. **Place items on table.**

- Have you seen any of these items before? Where? What situation?

**Focus on specific examples (*Lambrini, WKD, Heineken, Dragon Soop, Bulmers, Malibu*)**

- What springs to mind when you see this pack? What words would you use to describe this pack?
- Imagine this pack is a person – can you describe them? What do they look like/wear/like to do?

**Ordering (use showcards)**

1. Order from most appealing to least appealing

*Discuss order/reasoning behind order. Target products – why X is different from Y*

*What is it you like/dislike about them?*

*What are the good/bad features?*

2. Order for someone like me/not like me
3. Order from pleasant taste/unpleasant taste
4. Order from most harmful (strongest)/least harmful (weakest).

- Choose your favourite pack. Why have you chosen this?
- Choose your least favourite pack. Why have you chosen this?
- What is it about the pack that makes you feel that way?

**5. Reaction to interactivity of the packaging and labelling** (participants' reaction to QR codes, web addresses etc. and their likelihood of further engagement with brands online)

- Have any of you noticed any web addresses, Facebook or Twitter addresses on the packaging? (*Show Budweiser and Malibu as example*)
- Would you ever be likely to go to these addresses? Why/why not?
  
- Do any of you own smartphones?
- Do any of you know what QR codes are?
- Have you seen these before? Where?
- Have any of you used QR codes before?
- Have you ever seen them on alcohol packaging?

**Demonstrate examples of QR codes (*Dragon Soup, Malibu and Bulmers*)**

- What do you think of this type of technology?
- Do you find any of the examples appealing? What? Why?
- Would you be likely to scan these codes in the future? Why? (curiosity, competitions etc.) Who do you think would?
  
- Do any if you know what augmented reality is? Have any of you used Blippar, Augment or other A.R. apps before?
- Have you seen these before? Where?
- Have you ever scanned anything with A.R packaging?
- Have you ever seen them on alcohol packaging?

**Demonstrate examples of AR packaging. (WKD Blippar, Youtube vids on I Pad)**

- What do you think of this type of technology?
- Do you find any of the examples appealing? What? Why?
- Would you be likely to scan this packaging in the future?
- Who do you think would be likely to use this kind of technology? Why?

## Coding table for SNS content analysis

## A. Brands' practices

	Code	Description
<b>A1</b>	Ask	Posts which call on fans to do something: <b>A1.1</b> - Asking fans to like, comment or share a post. <b>A1.2</b> - Posts that ask fans a question. <b>A1.3</b> - Quizzes. <b>A1.4</b> - Polls. "Which one is your fave?" <b>A1.5</b> - Competitions that asked people to create content or answer questions
<b>A2</b>	Real world tie ins	Refers to a branded event (club night, sporting event etc.) or something the brand does in 'real life'. This content can include: <b>A1.1</b> - Posts promoting brand sponsored events or campaigns. <b>A1.2</b> - Photo albums from branded events. <b>A1.3</b> - Videos promoting brand sponsored events or campaigns
<b>A3</b>	Advertisements	Images or videos which were brand advertisements used in other media (like television or print), or images that could easily appear elsewhere because they included product image and/or brand logo. Promoting new products.
<b>A4</b>	Consumption suggestion	Posts that suggest consumption methods for the product, including cocktail and food recipes. Associations with other products (sweets, snack foods).
<b>A5</b>	Time and Event Specific Drinking (TESD)	Posts that link a particular time or event to drinking. This most often involved posts about drinking after work, on the weekends, or on public holidays. Are drinks associated with specific times (evenings) or events (summer, BBQ, clubs). Shrove Tuesday.
<b>A6</b>	Competition	Posts that promote or give details about a competition.
<b>A7</b>	Consumers	<b>A7.1</b> - Images of consumers, including consumer-generated content that the brand posted to its page <b>A7.2</b> - Replies to user enquiries, can include a further question e.g. 'Sounds good David, what did you have to eat?'. Brand often tries to mimic users' language and tone.
<b>A8</b>	Responsible drinking practices	Posts or messages that promote responsible consumption or feature a drinkaware logo or message.
<b>A9</b>	Distribution	Distribution strategies and locations, stockists, promotions involving pubs (WKD Wetherspoons), special pricing offers.
<b>A10</b>	Tagging	Brands tag users into posts
<b>A11</b>	Retweets	Brands will retweet images featuring their products, events, themed nights or offers.
<b>A12</b>	Association	Brands will 'like' or re-tweet other pages, products or locations they feel reflect their values.

## B. Brand themes

	Code	Description
<b>B1</b>	Cultural identity	<p>Posts where the brand creates a distinct identity</p> <p><b>B1.1</b> - Invoking masculine or feminine norms and values</p> <p><b>B1.2</b> - Where the brand invokes a sense of tradition or heritage connected with a place or a way of life.</p> <p><b>B1.3</b> - Where the brand positions itself as part of everyday activities or cultural pastimes such as sporting events or national holidays.</p> <p><b>B1.4</b> - Where the brand is associated with a particular drinking environment (outdoors, nightclub etc.)</p> <p><b>B1.5</b> – Brand associated itself with a certain lifestyle, e.g. interested in a ‘balanced lifestyle’.</p>
<b>B2</b>	Humour	Posts where brands craft a personality by displaying a sense of humour by posting viral images, videos and jokes.
<b>B3</b>	Popular culture	Posts where brands craft a personality by displaying a sense of taste in music, sport, film, or television programs.
<b>B4</b>	Music	Posts where brands engage with popular music. This includes partnering with music festivals, posting music news and video clips, asking fans about their taste in music, running music-related competitions, music-related consumption suggestions, and photo albums from music events.
<b>B5</b>	Sport	Posts relating to sporting events or sportspeople.
<b>B6</b>	Vernacular	Posts where brands use certain terms or informal language in a bid to appeal to a specific population.
<b>B7</b>	Demonstrating engagement	Posts where the brand demonstrates an interest in individuals by responding to their comments

## C. Users’ practices

	Code	Description
<b>C1</b>	Official images	<p>Users have re-pinned or posted the following:</p> <p><b>C1.1</b> - Official images or videos from advertising campaigns or promotions</p> <p><b>C1.2</b> - Brand logo</p> <p><b>C1.3</b> - Sports sponsorship</p> <p><b>C1.4</b> - Historical ad campaigns or images</p> <p><b>C1.5</b> - Ltd edition packaging</p> <p><b>C1.6</b> - Official consumption suggestions (e.g. Smirnoff cocktail recipes)</p>
<b>C2</b>	Photos	<p>Users have uploaded photos featuring the following:</p> <p><b>C2.1</b> - Images of consumers in proximity to the product (holding or drinking).</p> <p><b>C2.2</b> - Images of user-created products featuring the brand logo.</p> <p><b>C2.3</b> - Images of consumption suggestions (cocktails, cakes, sweets)</p> <p><b>C2.4</b> - Branded merchandise</p>
<b>C3</b>	Comments	<p>User comments on branded and user-generated comment. Can include:</p> <p><b>C3.1</b> - Positive reinforcement of brand messages (new products, advertising campaigns, pricing, availability, packaging)</p> <p><b>C3.2</b> - Negative responses or views of the product</p> <p><b>C3.3</b> - Consumption suggestions</p>

<b>C4</b>	Videos	User-generated video content. Includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• User-generated reviews of the product or comparing it to another alcoholic product</li> </ul>
<b>C5</b>	Blogs	Users post in the form of micro-blogs.
<b>C6</b>	Tagging	Users will tag other users in posts or photos.
<b>C7</b>	Interaction with other users	Users will respond to other users' posts rather than interacting directly with the brand.
<b>C8</b>	Unconnected content	Users have posted content which is unconnected with the brand but has been picked up by searching for the brand name, e.g. 'What Katie Did'.
<b>C9</b>	Potentially connected language	Content which also isn't explicitly linked to the brand but which uses language potentially relating to the brand, i.e. 'wkd' as a term of approval. Reflects that the brand itself draws on popular language.
<b>C10</b>	Users with professional interests	Content which is posted by users who seem to be ad agencies, graphic designers, or alcohol retailers.

#### D. User themes

	<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>D1</b>	Personality	Users try to create a desired identity using alcohol products. Personality traits include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sophisticated</li> <li>• Rebellious</li> <li>• Individual</li> <li>• Masculine or feminine</li> <li>• Humorous</li> </ul>
<b>D2</b>	Lifestyle	Comments and images are used to convey a certain lifestyle, can feature the following along with the branded product: <p><b>D2.1</b> - Other alcoholic products</p> <p><b>D2.2</b> - Tobacco products</p> <p><b>D2.3</b> - Drugs or drug-related paraphernalia</p> <p><b>D2.4</b> – Jewellery</p> <p><b>D2.5</b> - Snack foods</p> <p><b>D2.6</b> - Junk foods</p> <p><b>D2.7</b> - Images of sex</p> <p><b>D2.8</b> - Celebrities</p> <p><u>Location of images</u></p> <p><b>D2.9</b> - Bar/pub</p> <p><b>D2.10</b> - Club</p> <p><b>D2.11</b> - Home</p> <p><b>D2.12</b> - Music venue/festival</p> <p><b>D2.13</b> - Restaurants</p> <p><b>D2.14</b> - Outdoors (park, beer garden/BBQ)</p> <p><u>Consumption practices</u></p> <p><b>D2.15</b> - Getting drunk - Is this represented as a positive or a negative thing?</p>

<b>D3</b>	Creativity	<p>Images are used to show creative ways of using the brand. Examples of fan art featuring the product logo or packaging include:</p> <p><b>D3.1</b> - Cakes  <b>D3.2</b> - Costumes  <b>D3.4</b> - Clothes (unofficial)  <b>D3.5</b> - Decorations  <b>D3.6</b> - Paintings  <b>D3.7</b> - Vehicle detailing  <b>D3.8</b> - Official or Fan-made photos featuring animals  <b>D3.9</b> - Cartoon imagery featuring the branded product.</p>
<b>D4</b>	Relationship with the brand	<p>Users' posts reflect their relationship with the brand. Can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thanking the brand</li> <li>• Identification</li> <li>• Expressing disappointment with the brand</li> </ul>
<b>D5</b>	Simple association	<p>Content which is a simple association with the brand but unable to infer anything from it about the user's desired lifestyle, personality, etc. – e.g. if someone just posts a picture of the product with no comment.</p>



### Young People, Alcohol Packaging and Digital Media

We would like to invite you (your child) to take part in a research study. Here is some information about the study but if there is anything you don't understand or if you want to know more, please contact Richard Purves using the details below.

#### What is this study about?

This study is about young people's views of alcohol packaging and websites for alcohol drinks, including sites that feature alcohol and drinking such as Facebook and Twitter. This research is being conducted by researchers from the Institute for Social Marketing based at the University of Stirling and is funded by Alcohol Research UK.

#### Why am I invited?

We want to speak to young people in particular because research indicates that they spend a lot of time online.

#### Do I have to take part?

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to drop out at any point without giving a reason.

#### What will I be asked to do?

There will be a one-off group discussion with around five other young people of your age from your area. You will be given an opportunity to chat about your thoughts about alcohol labelling and packaging and your experiences of these online. To make things more interesting we will bring along different examples of alcohol packaging and a tablet computer to access things online.

#### How will the group discussion take place?

A room will be booked locally and the researcher will chat to you there. It will last about an hour altogether. If you agree, we would like to digitally record the conversation so we have a clear record of what is said. This will be transferred to a password protected computer at the University of Stirling.

#### How confidential are the interviews?

All information gathered will be treated confidentially. We won't share information about you with anyone other than the people doing the research, and your name won't appear on any reports which we write about the research. If you tell us anything in the group discussion which suggests that you or someone else is at risk of harm, we may decide to tell someone else about it, but we will discuss this with you first.

#### Who can I contact for further information?

If you have any questions or would like to discuss the study in more detail please contact Richard Purves, the University researcher responsible for this part of the study on 01786 467352. Or if you would prefer, you can email Richard on [r.i.purves@stir.ac.uk](mailto:r.i.purves@stir.ac.uk).

Thank you very much for reading this.

If you and your parent or guardian agree that you will take part, please sign the consent forms provided.



The Open University

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## Young People, Alcohol Packaging and Digital Marketing: Focus Group Recruitment Questionnaire

### INTRODUCTION

Hello / good evening, my name is .... I am doing some research for the University of Stirling who are interested in young people's views about alcohol packaging and digital marketing. They would like to invite young people to take part in a focus group discussion.

Name of Prospective Child  
Respondent

Name of Parent

Address

Post Code

Contact Number

#### **INDEX CHILD:**

**ELIGIBLE IF FITS GENDER (Q1), AGE BAND (Q2), DRINKING BEHAVIOUR (Q7) USE OF DIGITAL MEDIA (Q8 & Q9) AND IF PARENT FITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS (Q3)**

#### **INVITED CHILD:**

**ELIGIBLE IF FRIEND OF INDEX CHILD, SAME GENDER AND WITHIN 1 YEAR OF AGE OF INDEX CHILD BUT NO YOUNGER THAN 14 AND NO OLDER THAN 17 YEARS OF AGE**

**IF SPEAKING WITH AN INVITED CHILD IDENTIFIED AS A FRIEND OF THE INDEX CHILD, THANK THE CHILD AND PARENT FOR THEIR CO-OPERATION AND ASK IF YOU CAN ASK A FEW QUESTIONS**

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

**The following questions are for classification purposes only; we need this information to check that you are eligible to take part:**

**Q1 Gender of respondent:**

Male

Female

**SEE QUOTA SAMPLE FOR GENDER REQUIREMENTS  
IF RESPONDENT IS NOT OF RIGHT SEX THANK & CLOSE**

**Q2 Can you tell me how old your child was at their last birthday?**

Age: .....

**If respondent does not wish to give age *ASK*: Can you tell me what age group you are in from the following list?**

***READ OUT***

13 or less  Thank and close

14-15  ELIGIBLE

16-17  ELIGIBLE

18+  Thank and close

**SEE QUOTA SAMPLE FOR AGE REQUIREMENTS  
IF RESPONDENT IS NOT RIGHT AGE THANK & CLOSE**

**Q3 What is the occupation of the main Income Earner\* in your household?**

\*Person in the household who has the largest income based on employment, pensions, state benefits, investment or any other sources

Write in: .....

A

B

C1

C2

D

E

**SEE QUOTA SAMPLE FOR SOCIAL GRADE REQUIREMENTS  
IF RESPONDENT IS NOT IN THE RIGHT GRADE RANGE THANK & CLOSE  
(APPLICABLE TO INDEX PARENTS ONLY)**

**Q4 Has your child ever taken part in a research focus group discussion?**

Yes  Go to Q5

No  Go TO Q7

**Q5 When was the last time they took part in a research group discussion?**

Within the last 6 months  Thank and close

6 months or more  Go to Q6

**Q6 What were the main subjects discussed at the group discussion(s) you have attended in the past?**

Subject: .....

**THANK & CLOSE IF RESPONDENT HAS ATTENDED A DISCUSSION ON ANY  
SUBJECT RELATED TO ALCOHOL**

### **QUESTIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

Now I need to ask you one or two questions about your drinking habits and whether you use social network sites, would that be okay? If no, thank and close.

**Q7 Can you tell me which of the following best describes how often you have an alcoholic drink by choosing a letter from this card?**

**Please tell me the letter which matches your answer  
SHOWCARD 1**

I drink alcohol at least once a week X  ELIGIBLE

I drink alcohol at least once a month Y  ELIGIBLE

I drink alcohol at least twice a year Z  ELIGIBLE

I drink alcohol once a year or less A  ELIGIBLE

I never drink alcohol B  Thank and close

**Q8 Do you own a smartphone?**

Yes  Go to Q9

No  Thank and close

**Q9 Are you familiar with social network sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc?**

Yes  Go to Q10

No  Thank and close

**Q10 Which of the following social network sites do you visit and how often?**

	Several times a day	Once a day	Several times a week	Once a week	Once a month	Less than once a month
Facebook						
Twitter						
YouTube						
Tumblr						
Pinterest						
Other						

If eligible, invite the respondent to attend the discussion and provide them with a copy of the participant information sheet and both parent and participant consent forms.

**Name of interviewer:** .....

**Interviewer No:** .....

**I have undertaken this interview in accordance with the guidelines set down by the Market Research Society and I have adhered to its Code of Conduct.**

**Signed:** .....

## Coding template for focus groups

A1	<b>Motivations for using SNS</b>	Why do participants use SNS? What are their main reasons? Keeping up to date? Making connections with friends? Why do they think certain SNS are popular? How do they use SNS? Do they post a lot or do they just look at things?
A2	<b>Alcohol use on SNS profiles</b>	Do they see people posting examples of alcohol use on their profiles? Do they have any examples? Have the participants posted these sorts of things themselves? What do they think of people who do?
B1	<b>Exposure to alcohol marketing</b>	Do participants see a lot of marketing? Where/when do they see this? What is the content of this marketing? What are their reactions to being exposed to this kind of marketing?
B2	<b>Perceptions of alcohol marketing on SNS</b>	Do participants see a lot of alcohol marketing on SNS? Where/when do they see this? Any SNS in particular? What is the content of this marketing? What are their reactions to being exposed to this kind of marketing?
B3	<b>Motivations of alcohol marketers</b>	What do the participants think the marketers are trying to do on SNS? Who do they think the marketing is aimed at? Do they have a sophisticated understanding of the marketing intent to mislead? Are they able to interpret the marketing? Are they sceptical about marketing gimmicks?
B4	<b>Motivations for engaging with alcohol marketing</b>	Why do they think people would do this? What sort of people do they think would engage with the marketing through SNS and interactive packaging? What would be their main reasons for doing this? Are some marketing campaigns more appealing than others? Are they sceptical of SNS pages and interacting with the brands? How is this viewed, is it 'uncool'? What would be the benefits or problems for the identity of those who do?
C1	<b>Perceptions of product</b>	From the marketing, what are their perceptions of the product with regards to taste, strength, harm etc.? In what way is this influenced by the colour of the packaging, font used, brand name or shape of the packaging? Which products are most appealing?
C2	<b>Similarity to other products (non-alcoholic)</b>	Do the alcohol products remind the participants of other products? Are they marketed in similar ways? Does this result in any confusion?
C3	<b>Product and identity</b>	Are certain products more in keeping with their desired identity? Why is this? Why are some products described as 'trying too hard'? Is this appealing or not? What are their perceptions of people who drink certain products? Are there certain products they have outgrown or are too young for? What would be the consequences for deviating from these norms?
D1	<b>Attitudes to drinking behaviour</b>	What sort of drinking behaviour do the participants aspire to? Is binge drinking desirable? What do they think of people who drink heavily? Is the way that certain drinks are consumed used to present certain aspects of identity? Are some a rite of passage?

D2	<b>Previous drinking experiences</b>	Do the participants give examples of previous drinking experiences? Are these perceived as good or bad? Have these influenced their perceptions of the product or of those who drink the product? Does this influence their reaction to the marketing? Do the young people want to appear knowledgeable about certain drinks? Is this desirable for their identity?
E1	<b>Drinking environments</b>	Are different drinks suited to different environments, e.g. garden, pub, club etc.? What is the perceived value or function of the product?
F1	<b>Femininity and Masculinity</b>	Do they think certain products or marketing are aimed at males or females? What would happen if these norms were not adhered to?
F2	<b>Social norms and alcohol</b>	Do the participants think there is such a thing as 'normal' drinks, what does this mean? Is it desirable? Is the aspiration not to stand out? The novelty is not necessarily desirable for everyone. Think about reputation, desired image.
G1	<b>Body language</b>	Were the participants eager to hold the packaging examples? Did they sit with arms folded? Did this differ between different groups (age, sex, social group)?

### List of alcohol products shown to focus group participants

#### Pre-mixes

- Jack Daniel's and Cola (330ml can)
- Archers and lemonade (250ml can)
- Smirnoff and cranberry (250ml can)
- WKD vodka re-mix apple cut (250ml can)
- WKD Blue (275ml bottle)
- Sourz Fusionz (275ml bottle)

#### Perry

- Lamcello (250ml can)

#### Alcoholic energy drink

- Dragon Soop (500ml can)

#### Beers

- Foster's Lager (440ml can)
- Tennent's Lager (440ml can)
- Budweiser (440ml can)
- Heineken (440ml can)
- Foster's Radler cut with cloudy lemonade (300ml bottle)

#### Ciders

- Kopparberg (568ml bottle)
- Bulmers original (568ml bottle)
- Magners Orchard Berries (568ml bottle)
- Lambrini cider (750ml bottle)

#### Spirits

- Malibu Red (700ml bottle)
- Beefeater Gin (700ml bottle)
- Smirnoff vodka (700ml bottle)

#### Shots

- Mmwah shots (20ml plastic test tubes and 25ml bottles)
- Sourz shots (25ml plastic shot glasses)