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# Exposure to alcohol marketing among 17-year-olds

*A large majority of teenagers remember alcohol advertisements and a quarter of them remember the brand concerned. The Internet is now a major vehicle for exposure to alcohol marketing.*



In 2017, nine in ten 17-year-olds (85.7%) said that they had drunk alcohol at least once in their lifetime and one in ten (8.4%) reported they did it regularly, i.e., at least 10 times in a month [1]. Today, there is a consensus in the literature on the link between exposure to alcohol advertising and adolescent drinking behaviour [2, 3]. In France, despite legal restrictions on authorised media and content (see box), alcohol advertising is subject to significant private investment. In 2017, Kronenbourg and Heineken ranked 74<sup>th</sup> and 89<sup>th</sup> respectively among the top 100 French advertisers, posting advertising investments of 67 and 59 million euros respectively, of which 17 million euros were dedicated to Kronenbourg's only television channel (Kantar Media), a priori for its alcohol-free range. Apart from the ban on sponsorship (Article L. 3323-2), the French Public Health Code provides little guidance on other alcohol marketing strategies that minors may face (price promotion, product placement, packaging, etc.), while marketing aims to create sustainable and profitable customer relationships [4].

In order to measure exposure to alcohol marketing as perceived by adolescents, the OFDT has developed a set of questions (the French Alcohol Marketing Exposure Scale, FAMES) that can be used in general population surveys among adolescents. Introduced during the 2015 ESPAD<sup>1</sup> survey [5], this module was revised and then offered to a representative sample of 17-year-olds in the ESCAPAD survey<sup>2</sup> in 2017.

This issue of *Tendances* reports on the responses of 10 591 girls and boys aged 17 who recalled an advertisement for an alcoholic beverage. It first explores the level of remembrance of the last alcohol advertisement seen or heard by young people, as well as certain factors likely to influence their consumption (attractiveness or incentive, proximity of the product). The issue then looks at the different environments where young people report being exposed to marketing. The comparisons presented illustrate significant statistical differences.

1. European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs.

2. Survey on Health and Drug Use on National Defence and Citizenship Day.

## Legislative and regulatory framework for alcohol advertising

The Evin Law (10 January 1991) established and enshrined in the French Public Health Code (CSP) the exclusive list of media and formats authorised for direct and indirect alcohol advertising, mainly with a view to protecting minors (art. L. 3323-2). Today, this includes specialist publications, print or digital editions (since 2009) targeting adults, radio (fixed timetables), posters (since 1994) and signs, objects strictly reserved for the consumption of alcoholic beverages, beverage delivery vehicles (content restricted to the designation of products, manufacturers and dealers), but also the organisation of traditional festivals and fairs devoted to local alcoholic beverages or events related to wine tourism. Digital advertising for alcohol has been authorised from 2009 on condition that it is not intrusive and that it is excluded from digital spaces dedicated to young people (law of 21 July 2009).

In terms of content, advertising must be limited to objective arguments (specifications of the terroir, Protected Designation of Origin, olfactory and gustatory characteristics, etc.), thus excluding any positive suggestion or incentive, and must include the health warning "Alcohol abuse is dangerous to health" (art. L. 3323-4 of the CSP). The law on the modernisation of the French health system (January 26, 2016) has, however, relaxed the applicable rules under the pressure of economic issues. Since then, for any alcoholic beverage benefiting from a designation of quality or origin or linked to a local tradition, a wide range of promotional subjects (terroir, production area, know-how, cultural, gastronomic or landscape heritage, etc.) are not considered by the legislator as advertising and fall outside the scope of legal restrictions (art. L. 3323-3-1 of the CSP).

■ **Many brands were recalled**

By the age of 17, a large majority of teens (86.3% or 10 591 respondents) recall seeing or hearing an advertisement for an alcoholic beverage, with boys slightly more often than girls (87.8% vs 84.8%). Of these, 75.4% are able to specify what type of alcohol it was for. They mainly cite advertisements for a brand of beer (44.3%) or for a spirit (21.0%), while wine and champagne account for 7.4% of responses.

One-quarter of the 17-year-olds (24.8%) are able to name the brand promoted by this latest ad, with boys being twice as able to remember as girls (32.6% vs 16.7%). A total of 105 alcohol brands were cited by the adolescents, with a high concentration of responses around six brands (four of which were beer), which alone accounted for two-thirds of the citations, or 1 704 occurrences (Figure 1). The responses also underline the very great diversity of known brands, with 28 brands cited between 10 and 100 times and 71 between 1 and 10 times.

■ **Attractiveness and proximity, memory triggers**

The remembrance of the brand depends partly on the time that has passed since the last advertisement. Indeed, 36.2% of adolescents surveyed were able to identify the brand of alcohol when referring to an advertisement that was less than a week old, compared to 30.5% when referring to an advertisement that was more than a month old and 25.9% when referring to an advertisement that was more than a year old. However, these results indicate a good capacity for remembrance over time on the part of the adolescents as well as the potential for certain advertisements to make a lasting impression long after they have been broadcast.

The memory is particularly vivid when teenagers perceived the last advertisement as attractive. Thus, adolescents who found the advertisement “appealing” (25.8%, 31.6% of boys vs 19.8% of girls) were twice as likely to be able to name the brand of alcohol as those who did not find it “appealing” (44.1% vs 23.3%). Similarly, 22.9% of adolescents report having felt the urge to consume the

Figure 1. Wordcloud of alcohol brands cited by 17-year-olds in reference to the last advertisement remembered



Source: ESCAPAD 2017 (Metropolitan France), OFDT  
 Note for the reader: the larger the font size, the more frequently the corresponding brand was cited by adolescents. For example, the Heineken brand was named 426 times, Label 5 (left-hand side) 57 times.

advertised beverage, with boys slightly more frequently than girls (26.3% vs 19.4%). Those who had this urge are also twice as likely to remember the brand as those who were not tempted (44.9% vs 22.9%).

Moreover, the more familiar they are with the brand or type of alcohol, the more likely they remember the advertisement. When adolescents have already drunk the advertised beverage (40.5% which breaks down to 46.1% of boys and 34.7% of girls), they are 2.6 times more likely to have remembered the brand than those who have never tried it (45.1% vs 17.6%).

■ **A more marked remembrance among those who have drunk**

In 2017, when the ESCAPAD survey was conducted, 66.5% of the 17-year-olds had drunk at least one alcoholic beverage in the past 30 days and 8.4% drank regularly (having drunk 10 or more times in the same period). Alcohol consumption remains predominantly male, especially as it increases. Thus, 12.0% of boys and 4.6% of girls drink regularly. Remembering an advertisement, in the sense that adolescents remembered the brand shown in it, increases with the frequency of alcohol consumption.

Among adolescents who had not drunk in the past month, one-fifth (17.5%) of those who remembered an alcohol advertisement were able to identify the brand promoted (Table 1). This proportion rises to 26.0% when adolescents drank occasionally within the month (1 to 5 times) and is 36.3% among regular drinkers. The gradient according to the frequency of consumption is even sharper with regard to the urge to drink. Thus, while 7.2% of respondents who had not drunk alcohol in the month felt the urge to drink the alcoholic beverage when they saw the advertisement, this increased to 26.1% for occasional drinkers and 46.5% for regular drinkers. These gradients can be seen in both girls and boys.

■ **In addition to advertising, broad marketing exposure**

Beyond recollection of advertisements, adolescents report repeated exposure to alcohol marketing through a variety of media and environments, primarily the Internet and television. Indeed, 30.7% reported seeing weekly or daily images, videos or advertisements for alcohol on the Internet (Figure 2). As an unexpected result of the ban on alcohol advertising in the dedicated slots of this medium (so-called “advertising screens”), 30.2% reported having been exposed to television advertising at least once a week and a quarter also noted the presence of alcohol brands in films.

Three other environments are also frequently identified as conveying weekly exposure to advertising: the street (24.0%), public transport (16.9%) and supermarkets (19.9%). On the other hand, fewer adolescents report weekly exposure to alcohol advertising in magazines and newspapers (16.1%), on the radio (11.8%), at sporting events or concerts (10.3%) or on video games (6.7%).

Table 1. Percentage of adolescents who remembered the brand or felt the desire to drink by gender and frequency of drinking in the month (%)

	Remembered the brand of alcohol			Wanted to consume the alcoholic beverage in the advertisement		
	Together	Boys	Girls	Together	Boys	Girls
Frequency of consumption in the month	never	17.5	23.9	12.1	7.2	6.9
	1-5 times	26.0	33.9	18.6	26.1	24.1
	6-9 times	34.4	41.7	22.0	40.7	44.5
	10 times or more	36.3	41.3	22.7	46.5	48.9

Source: ESCAPAD 2017 (Metropolitan France), OFDT  
 Note for the reader: 17.5% of teens who remembered an advertisement and have not drunk in a month named a brand, 36.3% did so when they drank at least 10 times.

Regardless of the channel in question, boys report being exposed more frequently than girls, except for magazines or newspapers for which the proportions are similar (16.1% and 16.0% respectively). Compared to boys, girls are less likely to mention the appearance of alcohol brands through video games (9.8% *vs* 3.5%) and the Internet (35.2% *vs* 26.1%). However, the hierarchy of channels has not changed: both boys and girls cite the Internet, television, films or videos first.

### ■ Discussion

Questions about exposure to alcohol marketing highlight the sensitivity of adolescents to alcohol advertising. A quarter of adolescents state that the last alcohol advertisement that they remembered made them want to drink it. These results are consistent with those found internationally, establishing a relationship between advertising exposure and alcohol consumption [2, 3, 6].

It appears that advertising and alcohol consumption mirror each other. Remembering the name of an alcohol brand, having felt the desire to drink it after seeing an advertisement or finding said advertisement attractive are strongly correlated with the frequency of consumption, and increase with it. For example, regular drinkers reported that they were more likely to drink alcohol after seeing an advertisement compared to those who drink only occasionally. Again, these results are in line with previous work on an international level [7, 8].

Young people report being confronted with the promotion of alcoholic beverages or brands through a variety of modes and

contexts. This exposure is even stronger in environments that they are more familiar with: Internet, television, films, public spaces, etc. The preponderance of responses on alcohol advertising on the television may be surprising in that it is banned from this medium. It should be noted that this question was asked for international comparison purposes and was incorporated, in an exploratory manner, into the module on exposure frequencies by context, on the common mode «how often have you seen an advertisement for an alcoholic beverage on/in (...)». In the case of television, however, this formulation may have introduced a declarative bias, suggesting the presence of advertising on this medium as on all others. Initial qualitative analyses (OFDT, forthcoming) offer another insight: adolescents have a broad perception of advertising, sometimes leading them to interpret various displays of alcoholic beverages as «commercials». This does not rule out the possibility that some of the answers may have referred to advertisements or views on foreign channels, the Internet, etc. In any case, this result calls for further investigation in order to better identify the origins.

Moreover, the promotion of alcoholic beverages on digital media is growing, driven by professional advertisers but also by civil actors through self-produced promotional content on social media [9, 10]. This so-called “community content” is not subject to the legal restrictions imposed on producers and advertisers in France. Yet the exposure to advertising via the Internet or social networks also correlates with positive perceptions and expectations of alcohol and drinking among minors [11-14]. The Internet is omnipresent in the lives of adolescents today [15], and better regulation of this

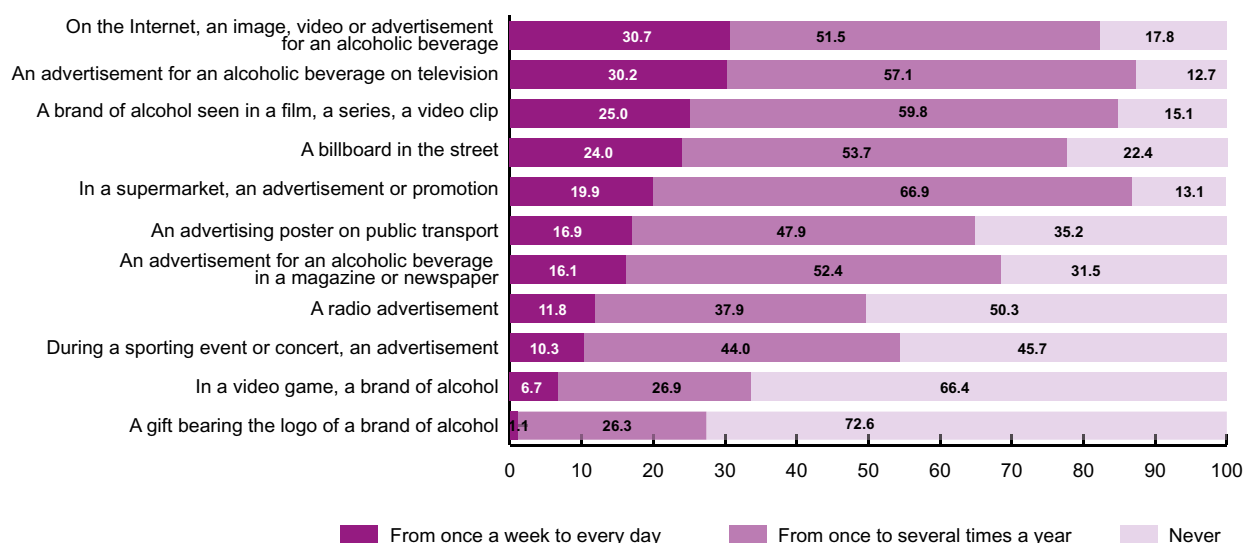
vehicle of alcohol promotion appears to be a challenge facing public health authorities. Over the past 30 years, legal restrictions on advertising have tended to become more flexible, in particular with the advent of digital media. Whether on the Internet, in the press or on the radio, alcohol advertising bans on only those programmes targeting young people do not effectively protect minors from exposure to advertising on these major media.

### ■ Conclusion

Three-quarters of adolescents are able to remember the type of alcohol in the last advertisement they saw or heard, and one-quarter even remember the brand being promoted. These tendencies are all the more marked as young people have found advertising appealing and drink alcohol more frequently. Remembrance of and response to alcohol advertising are potentially affected by a variety of factors, particularly the adolescents' drinking experience. Boys report greater sensitivity to alcohol advertising – twice as many boys as girls report remembering the brands of alcohol advertised – most likely due to higher consumption levels than girls. More broadly, according to their statements, 17-year-old French adolescents are exposed to alcohol marketing in most of the spaces they frequent (food stores, public spaces, concert and sports venues) but also through tools such as the Internet, video games, films and videos, etc.

Like the 2015 ESPAD survey results, these findings highlight the need to better understand the origins of reported exposure to alcohol marketing. With this in mind, with the financial support of the French National Cancer Institute (INCa),

Figure 2. Exposure to alcohol marketing in different environments and media over the past 12 months (%)



Source: ESCAPAD 2017 (Metropolitan France), OFDT

Note for the reader: 30.7% of teens who remember an advertisement report being exposed to an image, video or advertisement for an alcoholic beverage on the Internet, at least once a week. Due to rounding, the sum of the percentages may differ slightly sometimes from 100%.

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the OFDT has undertaken a study from 2017 to 2019 to further describe the marketing strategies that young people may be confronted with and which they may point out in a retrospective questionnaire survey. This work was carried out through direct observations in four environments familiar or popular with young people: retail (convenience stores and super/hypermarkets), music festivals and large sports venues and their surroundings (during national or international competitions in 2018)

and finally the Internet. In addition, semi-directive interviews with young people aged 17 to 25 and focus groups with secondary school students helped to better understand young people's perceptions of advertising and marketing and, more generally, their exposure. This research (forthcoming) will provide additional insights into these issues.

### Methodological note

Since 2000, the ESCAPAD survey, conducted in close collaboration with the Department of National Service and Youth (DSNJ), has been questioning 17-year-old French adolescents on Defence and Citizenship Day (JDC). ESCAPAD is based on an anonymous, self-administered questionnaire that aims primarily to quantify the use of drugs, both legal and illegal, in the adolescent population.

In 2017, the ESCAPAD survey involved 42 751 adolescents. However, in order to limit the time required to complete the survey, the FAMES exploratory module involved only a randomly selected sub-sample of 13 330 individuals. After poorly or inadequately completed questionnaires were removed, age filtering was performed, and data was cleaned and recoded, 10 591 adolescents out of 12 303 respondents analysed said that they remembered an advertisement for an alcoholic beverage, the same number of girls as boys. The average age was 17.3 years. To find out more about the methodology of the survey (in French): <https://www.ofdt.fr/BDD/publications/docs/epfxeasza.pdf>.

Questions about advertising: [These questions concern ADVERTISING for alcoholic beverages: it could be a poster in the street, an image on the Internet or in a film, a video clip or a video game, etc.]

Q1 - Have you ever SEEN or HEARD an advertisement for an ALCOHOLIC DRINK, for example beer, wine, champagne, cider or a spirit such as whiskey, rum, vodka...? [No / Yes / I don't remember]

Q2 - Think back to the LAST advertisement you remember: what type of alcoholic beverage was it? (only one possible answer) [It was for beer / It was for wine / It was for cider / It was for champagne / It was for a spirit / It was for an alcopop / It was for another type of alcoholic beverage (specify) / I don't remember]

Q3 - Do you remember the brand of the alcoholic beverage in this LAST advertisement? [No / Yes] If YES, can you name the brand: / \_\_\_\_\_/

Q4 - Regarding this LAST advertisement for an alcoholic beverage that you saw or heard...

- Had you ever drunk the drink in that advertisement?

- Did you feel like drinking it?

- Did you like this advertisement or did you find it appealing? [No/Yes/I don't remember]

Q5 - WHEN did you see or hear this LAST advertisement? [Less than a week ago / More than a week but less than a month ago / More than a month but less than a year ago / More than a year ago / I don't remember]

Q6 - IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS, how many times HAVE YOU SEEN OR HEARD... (see items in Figure 3). [Never / Few times a year / Once or twice a month / At least once a week / Almost every day]

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## tendances

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