

SEEDING A SOCIAL EPIDEMIC OF RESPONSIBLE DRINKING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth binge drinking is a problem in New Zealand. This discussion paper has applied the *Social Epidemic Model* to the issue of influencing teenagers to drink in moderation.

The first step is to consider an appropriate message. This is led by *initiators* such as the Alcohol Liquor Advisory Council. The current moderation message is ambiguous and competes with more effective messages to drink heavily. An effective social message will have the following characteristics:

- The message will **stick** well in the minds of the target audience, in this case youth between ages 13 and 20. So the message needs to have some marketing zing.
- The message will **offer advantage** such as improved social standing with peers and attractiveness to the opposite sex;
- The message will be **compatible with their existing values, attitudes and behaviours**. This can be based on the reasons given by some young people who choose to not overindulge, or by creating events, experiences or opportunities that create behavioural change that can subsequently lead to an abiding attitude change;
- Such behavioural changes are best if they **can be tried** with minimal effort or cost. An example would be a sophisticated party pack that had a six pack of small wines, grape juices and food.
- The message has more impact if it is **easily observed**. An example would be teenagers seeing peers or role models adopting the new behaviours.
- **Simple messages** repeated often work.

The second step is to garner support from **key people**. These key people have three different roles in presenting the message and influencing adoption:

- **Influencing**: so they need to have high status in the minds of teenagers and be persuasive. Examples include sporting and music heroes, student leaders, university hostel tutors, parents, church leaders (especially in the Polynesian community), kuia and kaumatua;
- **Information broking**: so they need to be independent, knowledgeable and committed. However for young people they also need to be seen as cool or neutral. Examples include sports coaches, youth magazines and university student association newspapers.
- **Connecting**: Peers deliver messages that have the most impact on behaviour. Effective connectors are likely to be students with a wide circle of friends and engaged in multiple activities.

The third step is to identify the right **early adopters** who will influence those they are in contact with and lead to a snowballing action that feeds through to the majority of teenagers. Early adopters tend to be **willing to try new ideas, have a perceived need for the idea, are action oriented, confident, and comfortable to be different either as a leader or loner**. If they have **high status** and are **cosmopolite** then the idea is likely to spread quickly. The tools to influence this group are through the **key people** mentioned above, **information, resources, networks, media, offering new experiences and observing role models**.

The fourth step is to consider the **context** that affect teenage drinking in our society. For the snowballing effect to occur with the majority of teenagers, then effort needs to be directed as societal influences. These include:

- The **current social norms** including drinking practices by adults;
- **Tolerance of difference.** In general New Zealand society is tolerant but teenagers have a very high need to fit in.
- **Strengths of the networks.** This is influenced by the availability and engagement of teenagers in clubs, education and activities;
- **Economy**, especially income earning by teenagers;
- **Infrastructure** such as the availability of alcohol;
- **Knowledge base** such as on the effects of alcohol;
- **Education** levels can have an influence, although the premise that higher education reduces abuse of alcohol is weak;
- **Resources** to commit to combating alcohol abuse in teenagers;
- **Events** such as the America's Cup and New Year, and how these are handled to support the moderation drinking message;
- **Policies and laws** such as the drinking age and price of alcohol.

Efforts to reduce or control consumption behaviours by regulation or by campaigns that focus on fear of physical harm are likely to be less effective than a social marketing campaign aimed at fear of social exclusion.

YOUTH DRINKING IN NEW ZEALAND

Problems associated with alcohol consumption amongst New Zealand youth is well recognised. An ALAC Youth Drinking Report (2002: p6) states that risky drinking is prevalent in the 14-17 year age group, with “33% of all 14 to 17 year olds defined as ‘heavier’ drinkers”. The public are aware of youth drinking through personal observation and the media. Recent television news items and documentaries have provided graphic evidence of intoxicated youth in public places. Youth aid sections of the police have identified a problem of growing proportions. Government and youth aid agencies are motivated to understand the problem and implement strategies that lead to “more moderation and less harm” (ALAC Strategic Plan 2002-2007). A “targeted” effort to contain youth drinking problems by control was recently seen in the Government’s April 2003 increased taxation on beverages 14-23 percent alcohol by volume range, believed to be a popular lower cost choice amongst youth (New Zealand Herald: 7/5/03).

This conceptual paper forms the authors’ beginning work toward presenting a model that could be considered as a basis for initiatives targeted toward problem youth drinking. For the purposes of this paper, “youth” is described as those 13-20 years old. It is acknowledged that this age range is broad and that narrower age segmentation could be beneficial, as issues such as attaining the legal drinking age, or work and financial independence would impact on consumer behaviour and choice. However, this paper aims to introduce a new approach initially at a more generic level for youth.

BEHAVIOUR AND CONSEQUENCE

Binge drinking behaviour may be defined as the consumption of five or more drinks in a row on at least one occasion, in a typical two-week period (Treise, Wolburg and Otnes: 1999). Problem drinking is by no means new to New Zealand. As early as 1886, several branches of The Women’s’ Christian Temperance Movement had been formed, to counter the effects of alcohol abuse in New Zealand society (Page: 1996, p4). However, it is fair to say that the incidence of this type of drinking in significant numbers of “youthful” drinkers is a relatively new phenomenon.

Binge drinking can cause physical and social harm in youth drinkers. These fall into categories of driving associated harm (physical and social consequences), unplanned and unsafe sexual practices and experiences (sexual assault, sexually transmitted disease, unplanned pregnancy), criminal offending or violence and interference with life achievement (poor academic performance, and interpersonal problems) (Francis 1999; Lamb 2001; Ryan 1995; Scott and Grice 1996; Spence 1989; Whyman 2002).

Understanding contributing factors, underlying motives and behavioural rewards inherent in youth binge drinking behaviour is needed before taking action. The underlying motivations and influencers of youth drinking are multifaceted. Lax parental guidance and attitudes are put forward as a factor. The ALAC Youth Drinking Report (2002: p7) confirmed parents as a key channel for the 14-17 year old group acquiring alcohol. The liquor industry is criticised for the production and marketing of products (such as RTD [ready to drink] products and alcopops), designed to be attractive to a younger consumer. The advertising industry has also been accused of communicating persuasive images that are seen by young

audiences, despite New Zealand's strict code on the advertising of alcohol (New Zealand Herald 24/5/03). Some view the lowering of the drinking age from 20 to 18 years as a direct contributor to the problem.

While in the past intoxication may have been a negatively sanctioned state, in many youth peer groups, it now appears to have attained a degree of social status. Motivations for drinking are varied. Included in the list of motivations are getting "wasted" and because "everyone else does it".

Treize et al (1997) define binge drinking among college students as ritualistic consumer behaviour. Trieze et al cite Rook's (1985) seminal work on ritualistic consumption as being applicable to the context of college students' binge drinking. Driver (1991) states that rituals in society provide three "social gifts": order in society, allowance for experiences of community and finally, a chance for the individual to be transformed in some significant way. So not only are there felt physical effects from binge drinking or being "wasted", but also significant perceived psychic rewards. The social gifts of ritual outlined above for this market are likely to be a significant motivator of attitude and behaviour.

FINDING A SOLUTION

It is understandable that youth binge drinking is receiving Government focus. The problem is important at an individual, community and societal level. The reality of a future fiscal drain and impact on healthcare and addiction services in coming years is concerning.

The complex nature of the problem means that finding a solution is not easy. Suggestions such as raising the drinking age back to 20 years have been put forward. The Government hopes the changes in taxation on liquor will be a useful deterrent. These solutions may well be too simplistic. Making the product less accessible may only mean the product is sought more highly. Prediction by some social agencies and youth themselves point to the new taxation laws as being ineffective (TVNZ 5/7/03). Furthermore, solutions delivered as controls are not likely to bring about long-term or permanent behaviour change, but merely be seen as constraints to overcome to allow continuance of the behaviour.

Social marketing is the application of conventional marketing principles to a social problem or issue, in order to bring about a desired change in behaviour, for a perceived social good. Since the 1970s, it has been used by governmental agencies, not-for-profit and for-profit firms to promote behavioural change in people. Social marketing campaigns usually use mass communication, through public service announcements (PSAs).

Some of the most common social marketing campaigns are those that target drivers and attempt to persuade them to adopt more favourable attitudes toward safe drinking and driving. Fear appeals are perhaps the most common PSA used in the safe driving context (Reid and King: 1986). Fear appeals can be different in intensity and focus on the consequences of continuing with the "negative" behaviour that is the focus. Both physical and social consequences can be used. There is evidence to support the notion that social fear appeals are most effective in this age group. Schoenbachler and Whittler (1996) studied the processing of social and physical threat communications by youth. Findings suggested that social fear appeals were the most effective in influencing youths' attitudes.

The Land Transport Safety Authority of New Zealand (NZ LTSA) (<http://www.ltsa.govt.nz/>) stands by its use of fear appeals. They believe that these campaigns are an effective way of achieving the end goals of reducing road fatalities. Fear appeals are based on graphic scenes that have “reality”. Many of the advertisements are targeted at the at-risk segments, notably male youth 18-25 years.

However, the mechanism by which fear appeals work is unclear and there continues to be repeated debate as to whether this type of advertising is effective. In any advertising campaign, there is a risk of wear-out. Research into the mechanism by which fear appeals work has lead again to conflict. A recent TV2 Flipside programme (23/04/03) questioned teens on the recent Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) advertising campaign based on fear/ shock appeal and found that some “laughed at them”. Increasingly, physical fear appeal campaigns that are too graphic are being criticised from a “taste” and ethical perspective.

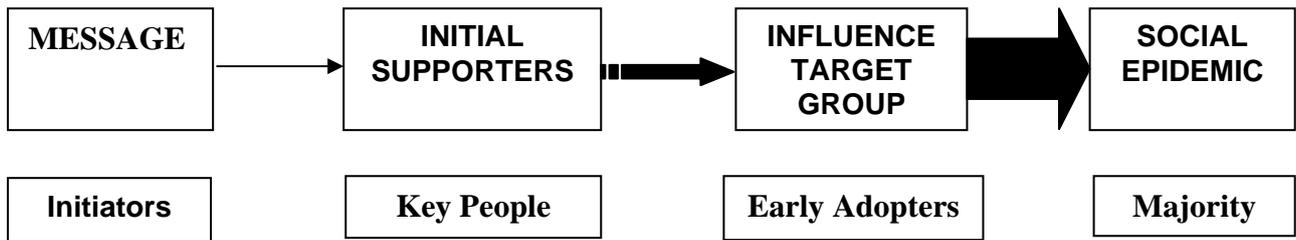
Obviously no social issue should be addressed through one singular approach. Social marketers need to use social marketing strategies that use a combination of effective tools and deliver messages through multiple media channels. Some alternative initiatives have been implemented. The Health Sponsorship Council (HSC), founded by the New Zealand Government with the goal of “promoting health and healthy lifestyles” uses sponsorship as a key promotional tool. Their Smokefree brand targets youth, endeavouring to influence adoption of attitudes and lifestyles that are “smoke free”.

THE SOCIAL EPIDEMIC MODEL

As discussed, while it may be tempting to approach the problems of youth binge drinking with an advertising campaign based on fear, it may not be appropriate for this age group. Fear appeals attempt to persuade the target audience to give up certain behaviour, based on the idea of possible negative consequence. It is important however to understand the significance of felt rewards experienced engaging in the ritualistic consumption experience of binge drinking, such as “community”, “status” or “a good story”. Behaviour cessation and removal of felt benefits can leave a large void for the consumer, if the desired direction is taken.

The Social Epidemic Model pulls together the principles in two bodies of literature: adoption and diffusion, and social marketing. It was originally developed for the process of creating an enterprising culture in New Zealand.

SOCIAL EPIDEMIC MODEL ©DEB GILBERTSON 2003



Characteristics of message	Characteristics of key people	Characteristics of adopters	Context
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stickiness • Offers advantage including status • Compatible with values, attitudes and behaviours • Simple • Can be tried • Observable • Consistent • Repeated 	<p>Influencers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High status • Persuasive <p>Information brokers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledgeable • Independent • Committed <p>Connectors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cosmopolite • Centre of networks • Respected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willing to try ideas • Perceived need for this idea • Action orientation • Confident • High self esteem • Leader, or loner who accepts being different <p>Influencing tools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People • Information • Resources • Networks • Media • Experience • Role models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current social norms • Tolerance of difference • Strength of networks • Connectedness • Identity • Economy • Infrastructure • Knowledge base • Education • Resources • Events • Policies and laws

IDENTIFY THE OUTCOME

The first step is to identify the outcome that is being sought. In this context, the desired goal is to tackle teen binge drinking and to seek to create a new social norm amongst youth, where drunkenness is socially unacceptable. Transformation in social norms can occur. For example, in the 1970s smokers could expect to be able to smoke in another's home without seeking permission from the owner. Over time the social norms have changed such that a smoker would ask before smoking in another's home or expect that they should smoke outdoors. The change is sufficiently pronounced that non-smokers now typically feel confident to ask smokers to not light up near them.

A distinction is made between binge drinking behaviour and total alcohol consumption per person. Lamb (2001) provided statistics that showed that France was the nation with the second highest consumption of absolute alcohol per capita but its teenagers were only 8% as likely to have been drunk ten or more times in a year as teenagers from Denmark. There was little correlation across countries between total consumption per capita and unsafe drinking practices by teenagers.

A successful campaign could be influential in driving the adoption of new social norms. Word pictures can be created such as, "When this social marketing campaign has been successful, most young people will be able to choose to drink in moderation or not at all and feel strong in their choices. Young people will be

confident to create circumstances that support moderate drinking, will be able to ask others to moderate their drinking, and will favour those people who are in full control of their senses. Young people will regard it as normal and acceptable if a party has either no alcohol or limited alcohol." This is just an example of describing what will be different when the social marketing campaign has been successful. The word picture needs to be created in consultation with teenagers.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TARGET AUDIENCE

Youth often want to appear sophisticated as though they are older than their years. So a message directed at young teens may well backfire. It may be seen as encouraging behaviour that is suitable for young teens but not older teens and therefore to be unsophisticated. It may be better to have a trickle down effect that sets a new norm of behaviour for older teens that is then emulated by younger teens.

The contrary argument is that the longer youth abstain from drinking alcohol, the less likely they are to engage in risky drinking behaviour.

Youth believe they are bombproof. Many of the appeals to negative physical consequence, such as proneness to accidents, pregnancy, poor health or death, are often lightly dismissed by youth. However they have a great need to be accepted by their peers, and are easily touched by social fears. The other face of the same coin is that many young people see their social status in terms of whom they associate with. Many also focus on their education and future prospects. Some are committed to achieving excellence in sport, arts, or physical fitness. Many have an emerging vision of who and what they want to be and see their teenage years as formative. So a message directed to this group can be either a fear or success appeal.

Even though teens are the target audience, they are influenced by a number of other target audiences including sporting and music heroes, parents, police, schools, university hostels and so on. Therefore to reach the target audience, the communication strategies should involve the targeting of other key audiences and stakeholders.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MESSAGE

CURRENT MESSAGE

Different people will have a different sense of what the current message is to youth concerning drinking. To the authors, the public message appears to be to encourage moderation and safety, although it is ambiguous, weak, and in competition with many other messages fed to youth. Youth often get ambiguous messages from parents, friends, media, police, community and heroes such as those in sport and music. On the one hand most of these groups decry offensive behaviour resulting from drunkenness, but there is also a pervading sense that alcohol is essential for parties and other social get-togethers.

Not only is the message ambiguous, it is also competing. Butcher (2002) cited research that indicated most children see around 300 hours of alcohol promotion a year against one hour of moderation education. These messages promote ideas of fun, friendship and sophistication.

The moderation message is difficult to embrace. ALAC promotes the idea that a healthy adult can metabolise one standard drink per hour. While the message is accurate (subject to health, age, sex, size, metabolism, previous food consumption,

race, pregnancy and mood) it is not a call for action. There are other messages promoted by ALAC that have more impact, such as providing food at a party and respecting others' choices not to drink.

The one current message concerning alcohol that is clear is that drinking and driving is wrong.

OFFERS ADVANTAGE

In choosing an effective message the first consideration is what advantage does it offer the audience. For example with moderate alcohol consumption the advantage might be acceptance by peers, better health, or improved self-control. We have not found research on why young people choose to drink in moderation, however Spence (1989) gave the reasons provided by young people in Britain for choosing to not drink as:

- Because it s against the law for young people to drink
- Because the don't want to look silly or out of control
- Because their parents would be upset
- Because their friends would disapprove
- Because they don't want a hangover
- Because they are concerned about health
- Because they don't want the extra calories
- Because they want to concentrate on important things
- Because they don't need it to have a good time.

For the message to offer some advantage it needs to be greater than the reasons why young people choose to binge drink. We do not have research findings on why they choose to binge drink but the following studies show the reasons that young people say they choose to drink.

Spence (1989) found teens say they drink because:

- Because they are curious about it
- Because they're celebrating something
- Because their friends do
- Because their parents do
- Because they want to relax
- Because it feels good
- Because they want to look older or more sophisticated
- Because they want to break the rules
- Because they want to get away from their problems.

In a New Zealand study (Wyllie, 1996) the most common reasons for people drinking less were:

- Concerns for drinking and driving
- Physical fitness
- A perception that it has become more acceptable to drink less
- Amongst young people having less money to spend on alcohol was also a reason to cut down.

COMPATIBLE WITH CURRENT ATTITUDES, VALUES AND BEHAVIOURS

A successful message will pick up on the benefits that the target audience are seeking. The message also sticks better if it is compatible with current attitudes, values and behaviours. However attitudes are strongly influenced by actual behaviour. For example Ryan (1995) undertook a survey of teenagers called 'Monitoring the Future'. The survey found that 76% of teenagers disapproved of

taking one or two drinks daily. However weekend binge drinking, taking five or more drinks in a row once or twice a weekend, was disapproved of by only 71% of teenagers. The contradiction whereby the more risky drinking behaviour is slightly more acceptable matches the actual behaviour that they engaged in with their friends.

Another contradiction between what people say and what they do is found in a 2002 survey commissioned by New Zealand's Alcohol Advisory Council (Fryer et.al., 2002) of youth aged 13 to 20. They found that 86% of youth agreed that *drinking too much alcohol can damage your image or what people think of you* and 75% agreed that *people who get drunk embarrass themselves*. However, in contrast 66% agreed that *most of my friends enjoy getting drunk* and 46% admitted that *getting drunk is fun*. Of concern is the fact that 25% of 14-17 year olds (and particularly the "heavier drinkers" at 49%) claimed that *if I'm going to drink, I usually drink to get drunk*.

Since the social marketing message is seeking to change behaviour, it is difficult to match the message to existing behaviour. Nevertheless, many young people are drinking in moderation. The ALAC study found that amongst 14 to 17 year olds 29% had at least one risky drinking occasion in the last two weeks, and 49% had at least one risky drinking occasion in the last three months. While these figures are very concerning it also means that 71% of 14 to 17 year olds have not been drinking in a risky manner in the previous two weeks, and 51% of had not been drinking in a risky manner in the previous three months. This provides some foundation for providing social kudos to those teenagers who chose to drink in moderation.

CAN BE TRIED

Behavioural change almost always precedes attitudinal change. For example, with drinking and driving, the risks of being caught encouraged people to have a 'lifesaver' driver if they went to a pub or party. The attitudes that now support one member of the group remaining sober reflect their actual behaviour.

This means the message may need to offer new ways of behaving. For example, what if the wine industry offered a party pack with a sophisticated and upbeat image that contained three small wines, three small non-alcoholic wines and some food? Could youth be encouraged to purchase these packs to take to parties rather than alcopops or beer? If this became the 'in' thing to do, would it then lead to a change in attitudes?

Certainly there is a need to get the alcohol industry to find better ways of profiting from the youth market than their current practices. In a head to head advertising battle between the government and the alcohol industry, the industry will win unless there are legislative changes affecting advertising. It is far better to apply the alcohol industry's marketing budget to work in alignment with that of the government than in conflict.

OBSERVABLE

In the wine example given above, the new behaviour is observable by others. A social marketing campaign needs to find ways that the target audience sees the message being adopted by peers and role models. It is one of the reasons that youth drinking is an issue because they observe others, like parents, drinking freely.

Many clubs take pride in their code of behaviour. Some parents interviewed for this paper talked about their choice to take their teenagers to these clubs because they can demonstrate a responsible drinking environment with food and dancing. Youth, like all age groups, are adept at fitting into the surrounding social norms. They will

modify their behaviour so in a moderate drinking mixed age group such as a well-managed club they will behave differently than at a youth party. Some parents who we spoke to lamented the poor role model standards set in sporting clubrooms, especially rugby.

In summary new ideas need to be observed in action, and then to cement in new behaviours the ideas need to be observed being adopted by peers and role models.

SIMPLE

An effective message is simple and repeated often. This is why politicians resort to sound bites and slogans to convey complex social messages. The language and ideas need to match the interests of the target audience. For example the campaign against drinking and driving used slogans like, "If you drink and drive you're a bloody idiot". Coca cola used the famous line 'Coke is it'. Nobody has any idea what 'it' is but it evoked images for the target audience and it certainly sold a lot of coke.

Any message needs to brainstorm many minds and be market tested, however we playfully had a go at constructing a simple message. Our efforts to find language that is uniquely used by current teenagers came up with a blank so we juxtaposed the two words they use often which are 'cool' and 'smashed'. These words could be used to tackle a range of issues affecting youth binge drinking, such as:

Cool	Choices	Smashed
Cool	Friendship	Smashed
Cool	Party	Smashed
Cool	Lifestyle	Smashed
Cool	Families	Smashed
Cool	Brains	Smashed
Cool	Health	Smashed
Cool	Cars	Smashed
Cool	Fun	Smashed

We also played with ideas around the theme "True to You" evoking values of the real person compared with the alcohol affected person.

CHARACTERISTICS OF KEY PEOPLE

Attitudes and behaviours are socially influenced. Therefore a campaign to change attitudes and behaviours needs to be lead by those people with the most influence. These people can be characterised as influencers, information brokers and connectors (Gladwell, 2000). Some people can fulfil more than one of these roles.

These key people are standard bearers of the message.

INFLUENCERS

Influencers have high status and are persuasive. For many young people they are high profile people like sporting heroes, music bands, and TV and radio personalities. However they are also role models like student leaders, university hostel tutors and parents. For Polynesian youth, influencers may include church leaders and for Maori youth it may include kaumatua and kuia. The alcohol industry also acts as an influencer; they are persuasive and imbue themselves with high status.

These people and groups influence young people through their daily attitudes, behaviours and messages. In general they exert a subtle influence that supports

alcohol consumption. Some are more blatant such as rugby that even has alcohol sponsorship of its leading teams, and has done nothing to dispel the sport's 'hard playing, hard drinking' image.

The message from influencers on binge drinking appears to be absent or vague. For example, ALAC's study confirmed that parents were the main source of alcohol for youth under 18, and that youth did not discuss alcohol matters with their parents (Fryer et.al., 2002).

A campaign that aims to change attitudes and behaviours amongst youth needs to address the messages presented by influencers. Before any campaign is begun directly with youth, some groundwork needs to be laid. For example, efforts directed at setting standards, and providing training and support for university hostel managers will raise the likelihood that the message aimed at university students will be consistently backed up.

Efforts aimed at sporting bodies can help to create clearer boundaries for alcohol consumption for teenagers engaged in sports.

Parents must be a key target audience. There is some advice on the ALAC website for parenting teenagers through the challenges posed by alcohol. However parents receive considerably more information on helping their child to stay safe on the Internet than on staying safe at parties.

Role models such as celebrities, sporting and music heroes can be persuasive endorsers of responsible alcohol messages. Care needs to be taken that these icons are not prone to embarrassing the campaign through subsequently misusing alcohol.

INFORMATION BROKERS

Information brokers channel information to the target audience. They are knowledgeable, independent and committed. Examples include ALAC, the Police and schools. However here lies the problem. These information sources are also perceived as bastions of orthodoxy and authority. As such teenagers may accept and understand the message, but see themselves as expressing their independence through rebellious behaviour. It may be necessary to create some information brokers who have an image that is either neutral or cool.

For example sports coaches could be a good source of information on how much alcohol is too much for health, fitness and mana. Cosmetic sales reps may discuss the effect of alcohol on skin quality. Other possibilities include magazines that are read by youth, and student loan information on ways to minimise student debt.

CONNECTORS

Peers deliver messages that have the most impact on behaviour. Remarkably people put more trust in information they receive from a peer who they know has limited knowledge over an expert (O'Donnell, 1980). So creating a social epidemic means fitting the message into active social systems. The key is to use connectors who are cosmopolite, at the centre of networks and respected.

In teenage circles, connectors are likely to be 'in group' leaders at school, and 'high flow' teenagers engaged in many activities that span several groups. 'Flow' is a term developed by Csizenhaly to describe the experience of full absorption in an activity when the challenge matches the person's abilities. He described 'high flow' people as those who more often experienced a state of 'flow'. In his research he compared 250 'high flow' and 250 'low flow' teenagers. The 'low flow' teenagers tended to hang

out at the mall and watched a lot of television, whereas the 'high flow' teenagers did more hobbies, sports and homework.

Across every measure of psychological well being, including happiness, self-esteem and engagement, 'high flow' teenagers did better except they say they would rather be at the mall and watching TV - 'having fun' like the 'low flow' kids. 'High flow' teenagers are happier, do better at schooling and university, have deeper social ties and are more successful in later life (Seligman, 2002).

'High flow' teenagers are useful for social marketing campaigns. Their busy lives cross many social circles, they tend to be well liked, they are early adopters of ideas, and their happiness creates positive energy. These individuals can be targeted through their sporting and cultural activities, and the positions of responsibility that they hold.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ADOPTERS

Influencing relatively few people can create a social epidemic. If one person influences five people, then a message can rapidly snowball. The key is to trigger the message with the right early adopters.

Early adopters tend to be willing to try new ideas, have a perceived need for the idea, are action oriented, confident, and comfortable to be different either as a leader or loner. If they have high status and are cosmopolite then the idea is likely to spread quickly. However if the early adopters are low status then it can slow the rate of adoption. For example in the health industry, acupuncture was slow to be adopted as high status mainstream doctors perceived it as being an alternative medicine practiced by low status alternative medics. To adopt acupuncture would be to reduce their status.

This issue is an important one for choosing the target audience for a responsible drinking message. The younger the audience the lower the status, so the message needs to be projected at early adopters who are a step older than the target audience. For example, in schools it may be directed at prefects. Or for senior high school students the message may be initially aimed at student leaders in tertiary education. The difficulty with this latter targeting is that it may be difficult to create the powerful effects of personal contact passing ideas through word of mouth.

Some research needs to be conducted on which youth have a perceived need for responsible drinking norms and why. It may be a reluctance to be embarrassed while drunk, a desire for fitness, or simply a realisation that they enjoy themselves more when sober.

In planning this article, the authors asked teenagers for some of their stories of managing their alcohol choices. Two stories relate directly to the drivers for early adopters.

In one Lower Hutt school a girl had died from an overdose of alcohol and drugs. Her friends were shocked and decided to run parties that had four rules:

- No drugs
- No alcohol
- Respect for all, and
- Inclusive of anybody who would abide by the party rules.

Initially there were just six students who had been friends of the dead girl. However they were well liked and the parties grew in number, so very soon almost all of the senior school and some of the younger students were attending these parties. The parties were fun and adventurous with dancing, midnight swims in the sea, and zany activities.

In the second story, the head boy wanted a big party for his birthday. He discussed it with his mother who agreed he could invite the senior school with some clear rules:

- Each person pays \$10 that will be used to provide alcohol, food and a band.
- No alcohol or drugs to be brought to the party
- Adult supervision would be evident at the party
- Parents of party goers would know when the party was finishing, how they were getting home and what the rules were
- Friends of the head boy were to help design the party and debrief it.

The invitation went out in a school assembly with the permission of the principal. The first party worked so well that there were several more in the barn, and no one ever got drunk. It became a matter of pride to the friends that the parties be fun and unspoilt by abuse of alcohol.

CONTEXT

Social epidemics are influenced by the context. For example with alcohol consumption, New Zealand has a long record of alcohol abuse. Efforts to foster temperance led to a law that pubs close at six o'clock. While well intentioned, this law led to binge drinking behaviour after work that was colloquially called the 'six o'clock swill'. The law was finally scrapped in the 1970s but echoes of the attitudes that led to the 'swill' are still embedded in the culture.

Successive efforts to use laws to restrict drinking have often backfired. For example, when the pubs were closing at 6pm a law was passed that beer could only be served in glasses, not jugs. So enterprising publicans sold large trays of 13oz glasses pre-filled.

Similar questions are raised about the reduction in the minimum age for buying alcohol from 20 to 18 years. Does the reduction lead to more alcohol purchased at younger ages, or does the withdrawal of prohibitions lead to better choices being made?

This article has focussed on the demand aspects of alcohol consumption not the supply side. However choices made on how the alcohol is supplied affects how demand can be influenced.

The alcohol industry is a large and powerful body. Thought is needed on how the industry can sustain profitability by behaving in a manner that is consistent with a responsible drinking society.

Resources for the drink driving campaign has been substantial, but for responsible drinking messages has been very thin. In the view of the authors, a social epidemic is not possible without solid funding for a sustained campaign. This in no ways implies that a campaign is solely based on expensive advertising. To be successful, an integrated marketing communications approach must be undertaken.

Events such as the millennium celebrations and the America's Cup lead to increased alcohol consumption. Events can also be used to foster responsible drinking. New Years Eve celebrations in many hot spots around New Zealand have become alcohol free. Television interviews on New Year's Day had many attendees celebrating the reclaiming of the night for families. However much of the drinking dispersed to other locations, away from sight and control by the Police.

The Hokitika Wild Food Festival is an example of an event that is trying to find a solution for fostering responsible drinking. Behaviour at the event where consumption is managed is good, but drunken youth are congregating along the main street of Hokitika and proving to be a worry to visitors to the town. If the organisers can find a way to ensure responsible drinking in the town, then the mana of the event is with the quirky food and West Coast character. The solution is a combination of legal restrictions and influencing visitor expectations. Firm alcohol policies on events such as the Hokitika Wild Food Festival can build a culture of fun without alcohol abuse. Events of all sorts can be planned and managed to carry forward a social epidemic of responsible alcohol use.

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