



Sales promotion strategies and youth drinking in Australia



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ABSTRACT

This study employed an exploratory approach to generate detailed information about how in-store shopping experiences and exposure to sales promotion activities feature in the alcohol choices of Australian 18–21 year old drinkers. The qualitative methods of interviews, focus groups, and emailed narratives were used during 2014 to collect relevant data. The findings suggest that young drinkers' in-store shopping experiences and exposure to sales promotions influence the type, range, and quantity of alcohol purchased. In particular, the role of sales staff can be critical in increasing the amount of alcohol purchased by drawing drinkers' attention to and encouraging their participation in sales promotions. There thus appears to be an important interaction between promotional practices and young drinkers purchasing substantially larger quantities of alcohol than originally intended. Such practices need review in light of the high risk of alcohol-related harm experienced by many members of this age group.

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1. Introduction

Alcohol marketing is an important contributor to alcohol sales (Jernigan, 2009, 2010). This is reflected in the estimated \$2 billion that the US alcohol industry spent on advertising in 2013 (Statistica, 2015). Various statutory and/or voluntary alcohol advertising constraints have been implemented in recognition of the status of alcohol as “no ordinary commodity” because of its ability to intoxicate, the potential for dependence among users, and the high levels of alcohol-related harms experienced in many countries (Babor et al., 2010, p.769). However, most existing marketing regulation relates to aspects of traditional broadcast media (Jones and Gordon, 2013; van den Broeck and de Bruijn, 2010), thereby failing to adequately address the many other forms of promotion used by alcohol companies to market their products.

There is increasing awareness of the need for more attention to be given to newer forms of promotion, especially Internet advertising and sports sponsorship (Anderson, 2012; Nicholls, 2012;

Jernigan, 2010; World Health Organization (WHO), 2010). These marketing approaches circumvent existing statutory regulations, lack coverage in most self-regulatory systems, and successfully reach and influence young people (Gordon et al., 2010; Jernigan, 2011). However, other forms of alcohol marketing that have long been used to stimulate sales are also likely to be highly effective in increasing alcohol consumption, especially among younger drinkers, but these have received little research and policy attention. The present study focuses on personal selling and sales promotion activities that are likely to influence young drinkers' purchase and consumption practices but are poorly understood in terms of their overall impact on alcohol choices.

The marketing promotion mix includes advertising, public relations, sales promotion, and personal selling (Tellis, 1998). Of these, personal selling and sales promotion are the two promotional strategies that feature most prominently within the store environment. Personal selling relates to the sales role undertaken by staff members. The marketing literature recognises the importance of human interaction during the retail shopping experience and the potential for effective sales staff to increase customer loyalty, repeat sales, and company profits (Mani et al., 2015; Too et al., 2001). In the context of alcohol sales, personal selling has received

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some research attention relating to the implementation and effects of minimum purchase age regulations and responsible service requirements (Gosselt et al., 2012; Graham et al., 2014; Toumbourou et al., 2014), but there is a lack of research relating to the implications of personal selling practices for alcohol purchases to legal-age consumers in off-licence outlets. This is despite a growing evidence base indicating that off-licence purchases are associated with injuries, violence (both domestic violence and violence occurring at licenced venues), and alcohol use disorders (Liang and Chikritzhs, 2011; Livingston, 2011; Miller et al., 2015).

The primary function of sales promotion is to stimulate demand through the use of temporary sales tactics that include product displays, contests, vouchers, free samples or gifts of related merchandise, price discounts, and rebates (Tellis, 1998). There is evidence that as well as causing customers to change brands, sales promotion activities increase total category sales (van Heerde et al., 2003, 2004). One mechanism by which this occurs is larger purchase quantities that are only partially ameliorated by stockpiling behaviours (Ailawadi and Neslin, 1998; Bell et al., 1999; Chandon and Wansink, 2002). A small body of work has investigated the role of sales promotion in alcohol retail outlets. This research has typically involved audits of promotion activities at off-licence alcohol outlets and/or surveys of customers patronising these stores to assess their awareness of sales promotions and any effects on their purchases (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2003; Jones et al., 2012, 2014b; Lin and Chen, 2012; Wardle and Chang, 2014). There has also been some work examining the effect on alcohol sales of various sales promotion strategies (Nakamura et al., 2014a,b). In combination, these studies have found that such promotions are ubiquitous, are noticed by consumers, and can increase the total amount purchased and consumed. There are indications that this form of marketing is effective in generating sales in general and to minors in particular (Jones et al., 2014b; Jones and Smith, 2011).

Retailers use personal selling and sales promotion strategies to trigger impulse purchases that represent additional, unintended purchases or purchases in greater quantities than intended (Kacen et al., 2012). Impulse purchasing is characterised by being spontaneous, involving a positive emotional charge, and diminished regard for negative consequences (Amos et al., 2014). It is therefore often perceived as being less rational than other forms of purchasing that involve more cognitive effort and less emotional response (Hausman, 2000). The marketing literature provides extensive and specific recommendations for retailers to enhance the effectiveness of their promotional activities that aim to maximise impulse purchases. These recommendations include: creating conducive store environments (lighting, music, layout); facilitating tactile stimulation by encouraging the handling of products; ensuring ease of purchase (e.g., by making credit available and salient and providing trolleys); increasing complexity to disorient customers (e.g., by stocking a large number of product ranges); increasing the emotional aspect of purchasing (such as by positioning products as “pick-me-ups” and personal rewards); and timing promotions for when people are more likely to be vulnerable because they are tired and overwhelmed, such as at the end of the day and end of the week (Amos et al., 2014; Beatty and Ferrel, 1998; Chang et al., 2014; Hausman, 2000; Roberts and Manolis, 2012; Xiao and Nicholson, 2013). Alcohol industry publications routinely suggest these kinds of promotional strategies (e.g., Goldring, 2013; Mott, 2014).

Impulse purchasing has been found to be more frequent for hedonic products (Kacen et al., 2012) and products that are high in identity-expression (Dittmar and Bond, 2010). Alcohol fulfils both these criteria (de Visser and McDonnell, 2012; Sayette et al., 2012). Given the high levels of alcohol-related harms in many countries

(WHO, 2010), marketing practices that result in individuals purchasing more alcohol than intended are highly problematic. This is especially the case where purchases are impulsive and thereby dominated by nonconscious decision-making processes that rely on heuristics or emotional responses rather than considered examination of the products on offer (Meier, 2011). Promotion tactics that encourage impulse purchasing should be of particular interest in alcohol control because of the potential for excessive and unplanned consumption, especially among young drinkers who are likely to be highly price sensitive and less able to tolerate large quantities of alcohol. There is thus a need for research to identify the ways in which young drinkers interact with personal selling and sales promotions and the effects of exposure on their alcohol consumption to inform future policy in this area (Jones and Smith, 2011). However, such work is hampered by the complexity of the many and varied marketing strategies employed by the alcohol industry and the resulting difficulty in using quantitative approaches to isolate the effects of specific promotional tactics and explicate the relationships between them (Meier, 2011).

The present study addresses the need for detailed information relating to young drinkers' experiences with personal selling and sales promotion activities. The context of the study was Australia, where the legal alcohol purchase age is 18 years and almost half of those in the 18–24 year age bracket drink at levels associated with high risk of alcohol-related harm at least once per month (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2014). This level of intake is of concern given increasing evidence of the continuing development of the brain into the early twenties and the adverse impacts of alcohol on brain development (Bava and Tapert, 2010; Ewing et al., 2014). This combination of factors makes the early adult years of particular interest in reducing the adverse consequences of pervasive alcohol marketing.

In an attempt to ensure young people do not perceive alcohol advertisements as being targeted at them, the Australian alcohol advertising self-regulatory code prohibits the depiction of children and adolescents (other than as a part of a family scene and clearly not consuming alcohol) or adults under the age of 25 (unless they are not visually prominent or shown in an age-restricted environment and not paid to appear). However, in-store marketing practices can be directed at anyone purchasing alcohol and hence can target those aged 18 years and above. Given the increasing placement of alcohol stores adjacent to supermarkets, these promotions are also often seen by those under the age of 18; for example, in a survey of 1113 adolescents aged 12–17 years, 79% reported having seen in-store alcohol promotion (Jones and Magee, 2011). This extent of exposure among young people, the rates of alcohol-related harm among this age group, and the lack of research and regulatory attention to such practices highlight the need for a specific focus on the nature and effects of marketing activities in terms of young drinkers' purchase and consumption behaviours.

2. Method

As part of a larger Australian study examining alcohol-related beliefs and behaviours among 18–21 year old drinkers, this analysis focused on young adult drinkers' alcohol purchase experiences and the impact of various personal selling and sales promotion strategies on their purchase decisions. Accessing this age group provided insight into their current alcohol purchase and consumption behaviours, while also allowing them to discuss their alcohol-related behaviours prior to becoming of legal purchase age (i.e., 18 years). Over a six month period and multiple data collection sessions, the 60 study participants raised issues relating to alcohol that they considered personally relevant. This allowed the topic of

relevant promotional activities to arise spontaneously in accordance with the perceived salience of these forms of alcohol marketing.

2.1. Recruitment

The study received ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee. Recruitment was conducted in late 2013, with data collection occurring over the first half of 2014. A social research agency recruited young adult drinkers by sending invitations to their database members who met the eligibility criteria of age (18–21 years), alcohol consumption status (minimum of two drinking episodes per month), and place of residence (Perth, Western Australia). Gender and age quotas were applied to achieve equal numbers of males and females and those aged 18/19 versus 20/21 years. The invitation offered potential participants the opportunity to be involved in a “study about alcohol consumption”. To supplement the emailed invitations, advertisements were placed on various websites and social media platforms.

In total, 380 individuals responded to the invitations/advertisements. Of these, 106 were excluded due to ineligibility or full gender/age quotas and 197 were unable to commit to the study for the full six months. Of the remaining 77 potential participants, 17 withdrew when contacted by the researchers, resulting in a final sample of 60 drinkers. One-third of the sample members reported typical alcohol intake levels classified by the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (2009) as low risk for long-term alcohol-related harm (i.e. they reported an average of no more than two standard drinks per day). The other two-thirds were classified as being at high risk because they reported average alcohol consumption in excess of two standard drinks per day.

2.2. Protocol

The sensitisation method (Pettigrew and Pescud, 2013; Pettigrew et al., 2015) was used to generate detailed data relating to young adults' alcohol-related beliefs and behaviours. This approach involved asking participants to provide 15 data inputs over six months. These inputs comprised two individual interviews, one focus group, and 12 emailed narratives. Participants could receive up to \$AUD600 over the six month data collection period if all tasks were completed (an average of \$AUD40 per data collection episode). The interviews were conducted at the commencement and middle of the study, and the focus groups were conducted at the end. The topics raised in the interviews and focus groups included general attitudes to alcohol and alcohol consumption, perceived social norms relating to alcohol, participants' personal experiences with alcohol, and observations of alcohol use among their peers. Broad, open-ended questions were posed to facilitate spontaneous mentions of relevant issues (as per Manning and Cullum-Swan, 1994).

Participants' fortnightly narratives could include discussion of any alcohol-related topics of their choice. This allowed them to document their alcohol-related views, observations, and experiences in their own time and their own words, potentially producing more considered and detailed reports of relevant factors than could be generated via other forms of data collection (Gould, 1995). To cater to young people's preference for digital forms of interaction (Flanagan et al., 2015), the submission of their narratives was via email and timing was flexible; participants could submit at any time over each two-week period.

2.3. Analysis

The data generated from the interviews, focus groups, and

emailed narratives (a total of 813,666 words) were imported into NVivo10 for coding and analysis. The coding process was undertaken by the first and second authors. In the first instance, a ‘parent node’ relating to alcohol retailing was established, along with various ‘child nodes’ that contained data pertaining to specific aspects of the retail environment. As per Strauss and Corbin (1990), these child nodes were a combination of theoretical nodes that related to relevant concepts from the literature (e.g., upselling, product trial) and *in vivo* nodes that reflected the topics raised by participants (e.g., friendly staff, cheap alcohol). In addition, all data were coded to demographic nodes to enable identification of trends according to participant characteristics. The coded data were distributed among the author team for consideration and discussion. NVivo's text and matrix search functions were then used to refine the themes identified in the data, with further discussion among the researchers until a final interpretation was reached.

3. Results

Although relevant issues were raised across all three forms of data collection (interviews, focus groups, and narratives), the large majority of references to the effects of personal selling and sales promotion activities arose in the narrative data. Many participants elected to detail their recent alcohol-related experiences in their fortnightly emails, which included their visits to alcohol retail outlets, their interactions with sales staff, and their engagement with various promotional offers. Their descriptions of their experiences reflected the Western Australian context in which alcohol is primarily sold via specialist retail stores and cannot, for example, be sold in supermarkets or petrol stations.

While price discounts and volume deals were frequently mentioned and were reported to impact on the types and quantities of alcohol purchased, interactions with store staff appeared to be especially influential because of the ability of these employees to make sales promotions salient and to endorse the products that were the subject of these promotions. There were therefore interactions between the different forms of in-store promotional activities that served to enhance the overall effect. The extent of these interactions is exemplified in the following extended extract that demonstrates the effectiveness of personal selling when combined with other sales promotion tactics such as volume deals and price discounts:

Okay, so I go to the liquor shop and I plan on buying one bottle of Jim Beam. Sort of had that in my mind, I was gonna get a 700ml bottle. Anyway, so I go in there and the price tag was only a little bit different for the 1 litre, so I thought, “Alright, I’ll get the 1 litre, alright”. And then there was like a buy two special, so I thought, “Alright, I’ll buy two”. So I went in there wanting to get a 700ml bottle, and I ended up making the decision to get a 1 litre, which turned into 2 litres of Jim Beam, which is almost three times as much as I wanted. I go to the counter to pay for it, and because I spent over \$30 I could get a free six pack of beer for \$10. So I thought, “That’s half price! Alright, I’ll do it”. And the girl behind the counter was very convincing – she upsold me brilliantly. And then I said, “No, actually I’m going change the beer to the cider”. And she said this one key sentence, “Why not have both?” And she got me. I thought, “Alright, why not have both?” True! So I got both. So I got cider, beer, two bottles of Jim Beam, all in the one occasion when I walked into the shop just to get a 700ml bottle, because the supermarket sold it perfectly and then the person providing the customer service sold it even better and engaged me to buy more. So I think many people may experience this of going in with a set mind and walking out with a bucket load more cause it’s kind of just a cheap, you know

what I mean? And if you've got more in your hands, then you're going to drink more (Participant (P) 24, Male (M), 21 (years), Low-risk drinker, Interview).

Table 1 provides a summary of the major findings relating to participants' reports of relevant promotional activities of which they were aware and any resulting impacts on their alcohol purchase behaviours. The activities are listed in order of their apparent ability to influence young drinkers' behavioural outcomes.

3.1. Store staff

For many participants, the social aspects of alcohol consumption blended into the shopping experience, which was often described as a social event in itself. Appreciation was expressed for store employees who were friendly and engaging, with participants preferring those who remembered them from previous visits and made them feel like valued customers. Participants noted that they would consistently return to stores where they felt welcome and recognised. For some, the depth of the perceived relationship with sales staff went further than being casual acquaintances, such that they spoke of them as being friends.

The reason that I was attracted to them is because of their customer service. Mainly we were 'locals' and became very friendly with the employees. So friendly that we actually started receiving regular discounts off our alcohol each time we bought something ... cheap alcohol is the best! (P58, F, 20, Risky drinker, Narrative).

I think that everyone that serves at a bottle-o is really fun or happy. They've always got a story or wanna chat. Like, I've made really good friends with people that serve alcohol in my area all the time, know me by first name, know my story, and always send me in the right direction and things like that. So yeah, it's always a happy atmosphere ... I love that type of service, it's always a fun event going to buy drink (P8, F, 21, Risky drinker, Interview).

The establishment of rapport with store staff was described as being most likely when the staff members were in the same age group as the drinkers.

The staff is always friendly and around my age, so there is always a conversation exchanged, with genuine customer service (P55, M, 18, Risky drinker, Narrative).

Sales personnel were also appreciated for their product knowledge in terms of the product ranges available and the relative value for money represented by the different product assortments, as well as their willingness to take the time to share this information. Reflecting their status as novice drinkers, participants were interested in learning about different kinds of alcoholic beverages and the occasions for which they would be most appropriate. In this way, staff members were able to encourage purchase of products that may not otherwise have been considered by the young drinker.

I enjoy staff who make an effort to say hello and ask what you're doing for the night to give suggestions on what to drink (P27, F, 21, Risky drinker, Narrative).

Store employees were often described as being helpful in their spontaneous suggestions of ways to maximise the value of their alcohol purchases. By being aware of all the different sales promotion offers available and explaining them at the point of sale, store staff could anticipate customers' desires and stimulate additional purchases that had not been anticipated when the young person entered the shop.

The customer service was excellent. I went in there to get, what was it, it was a bottle of scotch. And then there was a two-for-one sorta deal. So I thought "Alright, I'll do the two". So then I bring that to the counter, and then the customer service lady said, "Cos you've spent this, you can get this one for half price". So I said, "Well alright then", and she recommended it, you know what I mean? So by the end of the time, leaving there, the sales and marketing was so good that I didn't get one, I got one for two for the thing, and then I got another one on top of that for 50 percent discount (P24, M, 21, Low-risk drinker, Focus Group).

While some viewed such promotional activities as aspects of good service, not all participants were enamoured with the attempts of sales staff to influence their purchases. Illustrating the pervasiveness of staff members' efforts to increase sales, the following participant expressed frustration at persistent upselling:

What I dislike about going to liquor shops is when the shop assistant tries to upsell me other items or asks whether I want join Flybuys (*loyalty reward program*) after I told him I don't have it. I understand that the management tells the cashiers that they have to ask those questions, but I think this is a very annoying

Table 1
Sales promotion strategies identified by young Australian drinkers aged 18–21 years.

| Promotion tactics | Behavioural outcome |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personable staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Friendly manner - Personal greetings - Offering specials - Product knowledge - Turning a blind eye to underage customers • Price discounts and volume deals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased purchase volume • Increased consumption • Outlet choice • Product choice • Product trial • Underage purchase |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give-aways <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alcohol, paraphernalia, competitions • Store environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Layout - Signage - Lighting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased purchase volume • Increased consumption • Product choice • Outlet choice • Product choice • Product trial • Outlet choice |

tactic. If I wanted more alcohol, I would have probably bought it, and asking at the last minute isn't going to change my mind. Also, all the up-sale specials are always posted around the store, so I'm definitely well aware of them (P50, M, 21, Risky drinker, Narrative).

For some, the development of relationships with store staff was an intentional strategy to increase the likelihood of future discounts.

I also have a habit of getting friendly with the staff at my local bottle shop so the guys there sometimes give me discounts (P7, F, 18, Low-risk drinker, Narrative)

Similarly, some appeared to have cultivated relationships with sales staff over several years, including when they were below the legal alcohol purchase age. They discussed how establishing relationships with employees had helped them evade being asked for proof of age and subsequently fostered a strong sense of loyalty that influenced their outlet choices in later years. In these instances, turning a blind eye appeared to be an effective strategy for grooming these individuals as long-term customers.

I usually head to my local bottle shop, not only because it's just around the corner, but the staff there have been so friendly it has formed somewhat of a bond. Being a teenager who has been a regular customer (it was this bottle shop I would go to prior to being 18, as they would never ask for my ID), they have learnt to recognise me and greet me whenever I walk in (P55, M, 18, Risky drinker, Narrative).

3.2. Price discounts and volume deals

As indicated above, many of the study participants were highly attuned to in-store sales promotions that provided them with the opportunity to maximise their alcohol purchases within their budgets.

My routine when visiting a bottle shop is to usually just have a quick glance around for any awesome specials that make an easy decision for me (P30, M, 20, Risky drinker, Narrative).

This sensitivity to promotions made them highly receptive to marketing tactics such as discount vouchers and loyalty reward programs that encourage purchase of specific products and/or patronage of particular outlets. The females and those who were heavier drinkers appeared to be more willing to go out of their way to redeem vouchers.

I go there for FlyBuys points sometimes (P11, F, 19, Risky drinker, Narrative).

I got a Woolworths docket for a two-for-one wine deal which encouraged me to drive out of my way for the purchase (P45, F, 21, Risky drinker, Narrative).

Some participants explained that the availability of such specials has evolved into a component of their social planning. **Cheap alcohol was described as facilitating social get-togethers that would not have occurred without access to large quantities of alcohol at a lower price than they would normally expect to pay.**

So you buy like maybe a carton or something. But then if there's two cartons or the second one is half price, you wouldn't

probably then save it for another night, you'd just yeah kinda get more people in. It changes the way you kinda approach the night (P38, M, 18, Risky drinker, Focus Group).

There were indications that **sales promotions could increase the amount the participants consumed.** As well as facilitating unplanned and additional drinking events as described above, some participants noted that purchasing large quantities of alcohol encouraged them to drink more on that particular occasion. Rather than just causing them to switch products or retailers, such promotions appeared to increase their total alcohol consumption.

I definitely noticed that I was likely to drink more of the carton, because I knew that I had a larger supply and didn't have to worry about 'rationing' my drinks. If I just buy a six-pack, I typically leave two or three in the fridge for the next time I drink so that I don't waste it all on one night. So I definitely will drink more on the odd occasion that I do buy in bulk, compared to if I just buy a six-pack or a bottle of wine (P11, F, 10, Risky drinker, Narrative).

3.3. Give-aways

Although friendly staff and price/volume specials dominated the participants' discussions of their in-store experiences, there was also some mention of other sales promotion tactics such as give-aways and competitions. The most frequently mentioned free item was alcohol in the form of complimentary tastings that enabled novice drinkers to experience different types of alcohol without having to invest in an entire product unit.

Normally the staff in bottle shops are really helpful, they know their alcohol. And sometimes in like a big Dan Murphys, like the one in Cannington, you can actually have wine tastings of the wines they sell, which is good cause then you can taste before you buy, instead of just buying and not liking what you bought (P21, M, 21, Low-risk drinker, Narrative).

Specific give-aways mentioned by participants were those that attracted them because of their novelty or 'cool' factor.

Guinness at the moment - they're doing this thing where if you buy 10 pints they give you like a free party glass with your name on it (P33, M, 18, Risky drinker, Interview 2).

3.4. Store environment

The general sense from participants was that store ambience is relevant to the extent that it does not make them feel uncomfortable or prevent them from either enjoying the shopping experience or focussing on the best specials available. This aspect of the purchasing experience therefore appeared to constitute a 'hygiene factor' that is mainly relevant if it does not meet basic expectations.

I would generally say that, apart from a dirty store, bad service, or lots of crime near the store, there is not really much else that young people can 'dislike' about a particular alcohol retailer. We really do not care how nice the store looks, we generally just want the best alcohol at the cheapest price (P26, M, 19, Risky drinker, Narrative).

I like the spacious alcohol outlets which give you some room to move and get to your drinks ... I like stores with specials and

signs that are clear so I don't have to seek help to look for the drink I want (P49, M, 19, Risky drinker, Narrative).

Where specific positive store attributes were mentioned, they were typically in relation to lighting, space, and signage. Of note was that there were no mentions of music or other sound-related stimuli.

Visually most bottle shops are appealing, with the bright lights, and the bright colours from the packaging (P44, M, 19, Risky drinker, Narrative).

It is always good to walk into a store that has plenty of room for its stock rather than an untidy, overly full store where you have trouble finding what you're looking for. Big stores also tend to have signage which is high up and easily visible as soon as you enter the store (P40, M, 19, Risky drinker, Narrative).

4. Discussion

While the marketing literature reports many studies that demonstrate the power of sales promotion to increase demand for a wide range of consumer goods (Chang et al., 2014; Mohan et al., 2013; Xiao and Nicholson, 2013), evidence relating to the specific context of alcohol retailing is sparse (Purshouse et al., 2014). The findings of the present study indicate that specific in-store promotional activities can influence the types and quantities of alcohol purchased by young adults. In addition, it appears that the impulse purchases triggered by these activities may result in higher levels of consumption, thereby potentially contributing to the risk of harm within a group that already has the highest risk of single occasion drinking harm of any age group in Australia (AIHW, 2014).

Whether the promotional activities identified by the study participants are deliberately used by alcohol retailers to target this age group is unclear. Regardless of intention, the potential of these marketing efforts to increase alcohol-related harms among an already vulnerable group means they should be the focus of increased research and policy attention. However, it seems likely that alcohol retailers would be aware of the apparent effects of their in-store promotional activities on their young customers. The loyalty programs mentioned by the study participants are large, comprehensive programs that involve the collection of demographic data as well as detailed purchase information. A primary objective of such programs is to collect data that can be used to more effectively target specific consumer segments (Corrigan et al., 2014). Alcohol retailers can be expected to know who they are reaching and whether their efforts to increase sales are successful. The extent to which the participants reported encountering young staff who actively engaged in conversations with them and commented on the attractiveness of the promoted specials suggests that alcohol retailers are highly strategic in their selection and training of staff and their choice of sales promotions to target this market segment. In other words, while alcohol is no ordinary commodity (Babor et al., 2010), it is sold like one through the extensive use of strategies such as price discounts, volume deals, and focused personal selling (see Table 1). The sales promotion tactics recommended in the marketing literature for general products are thus being well-utilised by the alcohol industry, with little if any regard for the 'special' nature of alcohol and the potential for harm from excessive consumption. To date, these activities have received little attention and the focus has been on other forms of alcohol promotion, primarily television advertising.

This situation suggests that restrictions on point-of-sale

promotions may be warranted (Independent Review Committee, 2013; Nakamura et al., 2014a). Such an approach has been effective in the context of tobacco, where a ban on point-of-sale displays was found to reduce impulse purchasing of cigarettes by 30% (Carter et al., 2013). Implementation of a similar requirement for alcohol retailers would need to be mandatory to be effective, as evidenced by the failure of voluntary regulations relating to the advertising of alcohol and junk food to prevent children's exposure to these advertisements (Pettigrew et al., 2012; Roberts et al., 2012). Other potentially effective strategies could include pricing policies that tax alcohol by alcohol volume coupled with a minimum floor price (Chalmers et al., 2013) and risk-based licensing fees that take into account outlets that contribute to greater consumption and related harmful alcohol use (Trifonoff et al., 2014). A further more restrictive option would be to introduce legislation to regulate the amount that can be sold to individual customers, as has been proposed for tobacco (Chapman and Freeman, 2009). However, approaches such as the latter would be seen as adversely affecting all drinkers, and hence unlikely to attract community or political support.

Given growing concerns about alcohol use in the late teens/early twenties due to adverse effects on the developing brain (Bava and Tapert, 2010; Ewing et al., 2014), the findings also lend support to arguments for an increase in the legal purchase age to reduce alcohol-related harms among young adults (Cobiac et al., 2009; Jiang et al., 2014). The extent to which the study participants reported being influenced by the personal selling and sales promotion activities to which they were exposed indicates that reducing this exposure is an important aspect of harm reduction for this age group. The difficulties associated with introducing and enforcing requirements to modify the store environment to minimise effects on young adult drinkers, while permitting the use of the full range of promotional strategies for older drinkers, are likely to make an increase in purchase age a more practical, albeit politically fraught, solution.

These findings also highlight the potential adverse outcomes of the increasing co-location of alcohol stores with supermarkets and the cross-promotion of alcohol with groceries (i.e., the 'shopper docket' or discount coupons referred to by a number of participants). The high exposure of children and adolescents to these promotions (Jones and Magee, 2011), combined with evidence that exposure to point-of-sale alcohol marketing and ownership of alcohol-branded merchandise is associated with earlier drinking initiation and more harmful drinking (Ellickson et al., 2005; Jones et al., 2014a; McClure et al., 2013), suggests that regulators need to address both the co-location issue and the burgeoning use of cross-promotions which bring grocery shoppers into alcohol retail outlets with their children. At the very least, the alcohol industry could be strongly encouraged to develop codes of practice to outline limits for such promotional activities, stipulate the need for appropriate staff training (such as occurs in the alcohol service industry), and provide guidelines for compliance monitoring.

In terms of future research, there have been calls to extend the limited body of work focussing on (i) the effects of different kinds of alcohol sales promotion (Nakamura et al., 2014b) and (ii) how sales promotion and availability/location interact to influence alcohol purchase and consumption (Holmes et al., 2014). The results of the present study indicate that such issues are especially important in the context of younger drinkers, and that the combination of the personal selling and sales promotion components of the promotion mix should receive particular attention. The qualitative approach adopted here has limitations in terms of generalisability, indicating the potential value of larger-scale, quantitative studies to determine the prevalence of the intensive selling efforts combined with substantial price and volume discounts that have been identified. It

would be of interest to include a broader age range in future studies to determine whether young drinkers are a particular focus of such promotional activities. The results would assist in the development of appropriate policies and regulations to address any intentional targeting.

A further limitation of the present study is the reliance on self-reporting and therefore on marketing activities of which participants were consciously aware. Much consumer decision making occurs below the level of consciousness (Chartrand and Fitzsimons, 2011), suggesting that the influence of various promotional strategies is likely to be substantially underestimated (Cohen et al., 2014; Meier, 2011). This is especially the case for impulse purchasing, which is acknowledged to be characterised by the use of heuristics and the prioritisation of emotional responses over deliberate contemplation (Verplanken and Sato, 2011). Marketing tactics that seek to increase sales by manipulating customers' subconscious processes to trigger impulse purchases are dubious at the best of times, but they are especially problematic when applied to a product that has such demonstrated potential to cause harm. Future research could employ data collection methods capable of investigating both conscious and subconscious effects of promotion to produce a more comprehensive account of the effects of these tactics on young people's in-store choices. For example, online simulations could be used to replicate the store environment and assess the extent to which different promotional messages influence perceptions and behavioural intentions. Alternatively, if alcohol retailers were willing to facilitate experimental research designs, matched stores could employ different personal selling and sales promotion strategies to assess differential effects.

Given that alcohol availability and regulatory requirements differ markedly across locations, it is important for future work to investigate the role of alcohol retailing environments in influencing youth alcohol purchasing in different geographical regions. In countries with somewhat similar alcohol retail contexts to Australia (e.g., the US, the UK, Canada, and New Zealand), it is likely that at least some of the findings of the present study would apply. Indeed, some of the identified issues may be especially relevant in places where alcohol is more readily available than in Australia. For example, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has expressed concern about the lack of guidelines for point-of-purchase alcohol marketing practices in retail outlets such as convenience stores and supermarkets because of the potential for these practices to increase sales among young drinkers (CDC, 2003). Research in multiple geographical locations would assist in developing a robust evidence base to identify the characteristics of retail environments that are most problematic and therefore most in need of policy attention.

To conclude, our findings suggest that personal selling and sales promotion strategies are used to promote alcohol as an ordinary commodity without consideration of its demonstrated ability to cause harm. The detailed accounts provided by the study participants indicate that alcohol suppliers are going 'by the book' when it comes to in-store promotion, using tried and tested tactics to effectively stimulate impulse purchasing, thereby increasing the total quantity of alcohol sold to young drinkers. There is currently a lack of regulation to curtail these marketing activities, and suggestions have been made here for a range of public health strategies that could be implemented to achieve this end, recognising that they will have varying levels of applicability and acceptability in different national contexts. Along with efforts to address more modern and innovative forms of alcohol promotion (e.g., online advertising and social media), more traditional marketing strategies such as personal selling and sales promotion are worthy of greater research and policy attention in an attempt to reduce alcohol-related harm among young people.

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