

Who is marketing alcohol in the slums of Kampala? A closer look at marketing types, content and brands

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Abstract

Objective: To understand alcohol marketing strategies used in an urban slum, photographs of street-level (defined as being seen while walking along the streets) alcohol advertisements were assessed to determine the marketing types, content, and brands in Kampala, Uganda. The content of these photographs was categorized and analyzed to understand the strategies implemented in marketing alcoholic beverages at the street-level in the community.

Methods: We collected pilot data in May 2019 of the content and placements of alcohol advertisements in urban slums using smart phones. Three teams of researchers walked a set route of four stretches of 100 meters surrounding the *boda boda* (motorcycle) taxi stand in the urban retail center in three selected areas in Makindye in Kampala, Uganda. After the data collection, the photographs were reviewed, categorized, and simple, descriptive statistics were computed.

Results: Across three locations, 181 photos of alcohol advertisements were taken with 129 of the photos meeting the criterion for analysis. The most common marketing message was focused on the product itself with quality, taste, and national pride being the top three sub-categories. Overall, 80% of the advertisements were posters found outside bars, restaurants, or supermarkets. Of the products advertised, 75% of the products were produced by one of two companies: Diageo or AB InBev.

Conclusions: The approach for capturing and coding alcohol marketing in urban slums can be refined and used in future research. Also, the approach can be instrumental for characterizing the alcohol environment at a specific time or for continuous monitoring of marketing to inform and evaluate intervention strategies aimed at reducing alcohol advertisement exposure.

Introduction

With emerging research demonstrating that the alcohol burden disproportionately affects regions in Africa, it is also a target for influence and expansion by global alcohol producers (Babor et al., 2015; Jernigan & Babor, 2015; Morojele et al., 2021). Addressing alcohol marketing has been identified as a key strategy for mitigating alcohol-related harm and is a priority for the WHO global alcohol strategy (World Health Organization [WHO], 2010; Jernigan & Trangenstein, 2020). This recommendation follows the growing body of evidence showing the causal relationship between alcohol marketing and alcohol consumption, particularly among youth (Sargent & Babor, 2020). However, in low-resource settings like Uganda, there

are few studies assessing marketing exposure and perceptions (Swahn, Culbreth et al., 2022), or the features and content of alcohol marketing, (Swahn, Palmier, et al., 2022).

A key reason for the limited research to date regarding alcohol marketing content and exposure across regions of Africa is the need for high-level specialized expertise, complex tools, and limited resources to examine alcohol marketing density using the strategies employed elsewhere where resources are more abundant (Swahn, Palmier et al., 2022). Hence, to date, we only find a few studies across Africa examining alcohol marketing density using the commonly used container-based approach which is based on assessing the number of alcohol advertisements within a geographically restricted region, typically a circle (Centers

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for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2017), in a handful of studies in Tanzania (Ibitoye et al., 2019), South Africa (Letsela et al., 2019), Nigeria (Odeigah et al., 2023), and Uganda (Swahn et al., 2022). Given the increase in alcohol use and harm in the region, it is imperative to develop and apply new approaches to streamline and simplify the methodology for low-resource settings to allow for monitoring and assessment that can inform interventions and practical solutions. Moreover, information about alcohol marketing strategies, the types, content, and brands are important to develop counter marketing strategies to protect youth from such marketing exposure, in particular those under the legal drinking age. This is an urgent public health priority as research demonstrates aggressive marketing and increased efforts from the alcohol industry in this region (Ferreria-Borges, Parry, Babor, 2017; Jernigan & Babor, 2015).

Our approach was developed to be easily replicated to also assist in the design, implementation, and evaluation of structural interventions, such as counter-messaging targeting adolescents and other vulnerable populations, and to reduce harmful alcohol consumption in vulnerable populations and communities. Research in the selected setting for this study, Kampala slums, has demonstrated high levels of alcohol harm and poor health outcomes as a result of alcohol use in community settings (Swahn et al., 2020; Swahn, Culbreth et al., 2022; Swahn et al., 2018; Swahn et al., 2013). However, in these settings strategies are typically limited for preventing alcohol-related harm (Swahn, Robow et al., 2022) underscoring the need for simpler strategies and approaches for collecting data systematically for comparison and evaluation.

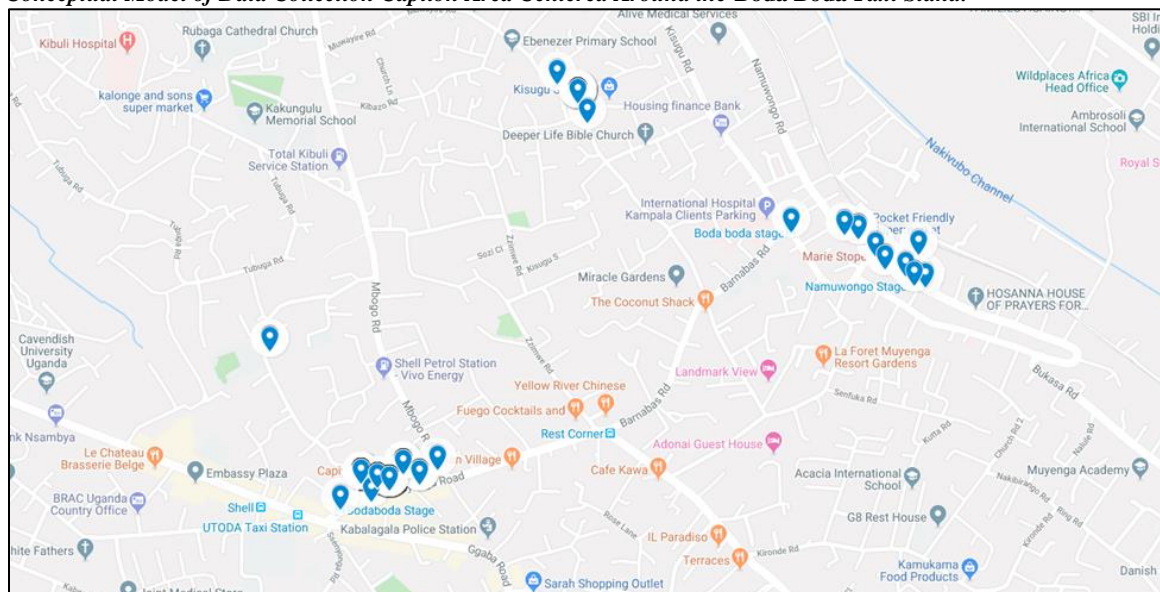
The purpose of this study was to examine the types, content, and brands in a sample of alcohol advertisements seen while walking along the street in an urban slum to understand the marketing strategy implemented by alcohol producers.

Methods

Data for this pilot study was collected by students participating in a study abroad course in Kampala, Uganda in May 2019 (led by Dr. Monica Swahn). The conceptual development began prior to the trip and extended the work of previous alcohol marketing assessment projects. This pilot study captured street-level alcohol advertisements in three sites within the Makindye neighborhood in Kampala, using the smartphone cameras the students brought with them. Three teams of three students walked in 100-meter square sections/blocks with the central point being a *boda boda* (motorcycle taxi) stand serving the retail area of the slum. Each team was tasked with taking a photograph of all alcohol marketing advertisements that were visible from street level and asked to capture neighborhood characteristics and other data points. With each photo taken, the metadata containing GPS coordinates was also captured. The photo and the metadata were then uploaded into a cloud storage space to be accessed, cleaned, and processed by the research team. The GPS data were input into GoogleEarthPro for analysis into the density of marketing objects and visualization of the physical location of these objects within the selected locations. The photos of alcohol advertisements were manually reviewed and categorized to understand who, what, and how companies marketed alcohol. The analyses were conducted by one reviewer who developed the methodology (lead author). Once each photo had been processed, it was input into an Excel document to be analyzed. There was a total of 181 photos processed, and 129 (71%) met the criterion for analysis. The exclusion criteria were as follows; (1) a photo was too blurry or worn down to determine any of the marketing elements; (2) the photo did not capture a street-level alcohol advertisement; and (3) the photo was a duplicate captured by one of the other teams.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of Data Collection Caption Area Centered Around the Boda Boda Taxi Stand.



To analyze the characteristics of the advertisements, four categories were selected, and a value applied for each category applied to the included photographs. (See Tables 1 and 2). These four categories were chosen to answer the basic questions of *who*, *what*, *where*, and *how*. Within the following categories *marketing tactic*, *creative*, and *brand* there was a need for sub-categories to better define the elements seen within each photo. All photographers included these sub-categories to gain a more granular understanding of the advertisement. Simple descriptive analyses were performed to understand the major stakeholders, the most common messaging, where the advertisements were placed, and the type of creative assets or collateral utilized.

For the *marketing tactic* categorizations, the authors used marketing industry-standard designations to name the tactic for each piece of collateral (McCarthy, 1960). All but three photos were categorized as *out-of-home* (OOH) which was the driving factor for the development of the sub-categories. These advertisements were all visible from the street – none of our photographers entered buildings to capture alcohol advertisements. For the *creative* categorizations, the industry-standard “product mix” labels were used to describe the content of the alcohol advertisements photographed, effectively describing the content or messaging of the advertisement. The alcohol advertisements fit into four pillars – *place*, *price*, *product*, and *social* (Borden, 1964). For the *placement* categorizations, the authors established a set of definitions to describe how the collateral was positioned within the neighborhood, and provided context for the photo and where the alcohol advertisement was placed on the street. Finally, for the *brand* categorizations, the authors were limited to using the internet and the Google search engine to determine the company that produced the product being advertised. The goal was to identify all the companies that produced the alcohol being advertised, as well as their ownership structure. If the company listed in the marketing materials was owned by another company, its parent company was also listed. If the product or company yielded no results with a Google search, it was labeled “unknown”. A full set of definitions is included in Tables 1 and 2. This study did not involve human subjects, so Ethical Review Board approval was not required.

Results

The analysis of the characteristics of alcohol marketing in this study is based on 129 alcohol advertisements found across three slums in Kampala and the specific marketing tactics are described in Table 1.

Of the samples collected, 98% (or 126/129) were categorized as out-of-home (OOH) advertisement. This form of advertising tactic is also known as outdoor advertising (Table 2).

Looking more granularly, of the 123 alcohol advertisements categorized as OOH, 103 (80.5%) were categorized as posters. These posters or flyers were made of paper, considered flimsy, and were in various states of disrepair.

Table 1

Description and Definitions of Marketing Terms and Tactics Used for Alcohol Marketing (n = 129)

| Sub Marketing Tactics | Definition | n |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Poster | Paper sign/flyer; flimsy or destructible | 103 |
| Street furniture | Multi-purpose object; tables, chairs | 9 |
| Hanging sign | Non-paper sign; more permanent/sturdier | 8 |
| Billboard | Large outdoor sign | 3 |
| Window cling wrap | Marketing element; sticks to inside of window | 3 |
| Wind-waver | Stand-alone, curved, & non-paper; moveable | 2 |
| POS displays | Point-of-sale display; in store, near cash register | 1 |

The next two marketing tactics used were the hanging sign (6.3%), or street furniture (7.1%), often found together around bars, clubs, and betting parlors. Billboards, one of the more recognizable pieces of OOH advertisements, made up 2.3% of the marketing materials observed. Additionally, wind-wavers (1.6%) and wraps (0.8) were rarely noted.

Table 2

Alcohol Advertisement Content, Categorization and Definition (n = 129)

| Sub-Content | Definition | n |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Friendship | Making friends~/improving the time spent with friends | 14 |
| Taste | Focus on superior taste of the product | 13 |
| Empowerment | Use of the product to improve oneself | 12 |
| Product itself | Name of the product used as the advertisement | 12 |
| Quality | Focus on the high quality of the product | 12 |
| Nationalism | Messaging focuses on being from Uganda/made in Uganda | 11 |
| Low price | Highlighting how low the price is to convince consumers | 10 |
| New product | Product that is new to the market | 10 |
| Party | Product improves/starts a party/social gathering | 10 |
| Damaged | Cannot determine message from picture due to age or the elements | 7 |
| High value | Product has a high value to the consumer | 7 |
| Bar/restaurant | Product is marketed at a bar/restaurant where it can be purchased | 6 |
| BoGo | Purchase a quantity and get free alcohol | 2 |
| Flavor | Focus on the flavor of the product | 2 |
| Poor photo | Cannot determine message due to poor photo quality | 1 |

The content or messaging of the alcohol advertisements was also categorized. There were a wide variety of slogans or content used to market the alcohol products around the Makindye neighborhood, so we categorized them into four

categories as an adaptation of the four "Ps" of marketing – place, price, product, and social. Overall, we categorized the advertisements as follows: place $n = 6$ (4.8%); price $n = 19$ (15.1%); product $n = 67$ (53.2%); social $n = 27$ (21.4%); and unable to determine: $n = 7$ (5.6%).

Diving deeper, 53% of the content used by advertisers ($n = 67$) revolved around the products and what differentiated them. Common themes revolved around taste, quality, and the idea of it being the pride of the country (nationalism-focused). The idea of alcohol being used in social scenarios made up 21% of the advertisements ($n = 27$). The advertisers drew heavily on the idea that alcohol is used to make a situation or gathering better (Party), or even the idea that making new friends or spending time with existing friends would be made better with the inclusion of alcohol (Friendship). Moreover, *price* was observed to constitute 15% ($n = 19$), with a heavy focus on the affordability (in terms of cost) of the product itself (Low Price). Lastly, advertisements that indicate a product is exclusively available at a particular location was seen in 5% ($n = 6$) of the analyzed advertisements.

The analyses of the advertisements indicate that there were approximately 35 different companies installing these marketing advertisements. However, not all these companies are independent from each other and in certain instances owned by the same parent company. The most frequently noted companies, by number of advertisements, were owned by major stakeholders: Diageo (51), AB InBev (40), local Ugandan companies (11), Ugandan Distillery (7), Namaqua Wines (6), and Emerador/Diageo (3). There were 6 other brands with 1 or 2 advertisements (7), and instances where advertisements in which the brand could not be determined (4). The company name most frequently noted was Uganda Waragi ($n = 17$), owned by Diageo. Waragi is the name of both commercially produced and local distilled liquor (referred to as War Gin). Furthermore, in reviewing the other companies and their owners, about 75% of all advertisements found in this study came from two multinational companies, Diageo ($n = 51$) and AB InBev ($n = 40$). Only 14% of the advertisements observed were from local, Ugandan-owned businesses ($n = 18$).

Placement of the alcohol advertisements was also analyzed. All the photos were taken of advertisements as seen from the street. However, 57% of the advertisements did not include the type of placement ($n = 74$). Bars or restaurants ($n = 30$) accounted for 23% of the observations. A convenience store or supermarket ($n = 16$) was observed in the background of the photo 12% of the time, and a dedicated alcohol outlet ($n = 5$) appeared in 4% of the alcohol advertisements analyzed.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to characterize the marketing, type, content, and brands in this low-resource setting reflecting an urban slum using a novel, but simple, data collection methodology. Assessing the features and content of alcohol advertisements is important and can inform the development and focus of community action, policies, or guidelines to protect vulnerable populations, particularly

underage youth who are below the legal drinking age of 18 years in Uganda. (World Health Organization, 2018) For example, the frequent reliance on non-permanent paper posters by advertisers may represent an intervention target for community leaders or policymakers, as this type of advertisement is more easily modifiable or removed if so desired.

In addition to describing the type and content of marketing used, it is important to understand where the advertisements are being placed in the community. Alcohol marketing policies seen across the globe, in both high- and low-income countries, traditionally place policies or restrictions based on the location of the advertisement. Unfortunately, the characteristics of urban slums make it difficult to keep or enforce building codes or zoning restrictions to match or enforce these policies. Broad sweeping restrictions on the placement, like the need to be indoor-only, only within certain districts, or not within a certain distance from schools or youth centers, could allow for more effective management of advertisements at the street level. Empowering the community to help enforce codes or policies on these restrictions could be an avenue for increasing compliance. Unfortunately, the data were particularly limited with respect to location and the strategy we used would need to improve to better capture the type of placement. The instructions and guidelines of the pilot study were not conducive to capturing information about where the advertisements were placed, so the findings about this pillar of marketing are limited. However, the data that was collected shows that less than half of advertisements were placed at locations where alcohol can be purchased (a combination of bars, restaurants, alcohol outlets, convenience stores or supermarkets). A focus for policymakers could be on developing limitations on where alcohol advertisements can be placed, as well as increasing resources for enforcing these codes (e.g., hotlines for reporting infractions in areas with limited police presence).

Understanding who is advertising in communities is also important as it can help to highlight the brand owner and whether they represent national or international actors. In this sample of advertisements, there were examples of advertisements that inferred a sense of nationalism or national pride if consuming the product, yet local ownership was not the norm. One can assume then that the benefits or profits of these advertisements may benefit those outside of Uganda compared to the local economy, an argument that may assist community leaders or policy makers in their decision making about the alcohol marketing in their communities. This study and approach may help local leaders or policymakers derive policies that help reduce outside influence or allow for the development of advertising counter-campaigns focused on this outside influence. As more data are collected, expanding the footprint being studied, it becomes crucial to develop strong coalitions of stakeholders. These coalitions, such as alcohol policy alliances, can operate within a community or internationally. They can assist and facilitate a better understanding of where multinational corporations are operating and how their tactics might vary from country to country. Addressing this topic in future research is important.

While the conclusions drawn for each of the four marketing categories in this pilot study can help improve the public health interventions, a key pitfall would be to think of them in a silo. Developing messaging refuting the nationalist or “Made in Uganda” style marketing content is made easier by understanding that a substantial number of advertisers are foreign-based companies. So, the context clearly matters. Despite recent research and scholarship underscoring the investment of the global alcohol industry and penetration in Africa (Jernigan & Babor, 2015), it was still surprising to see that such a high percentage of the advertisements represented foreign companies, especially given the focus of the content on national pride.

Finally, understanding who the major stakeholders engage in advertising their product in a certain community given its specific profile or characteristics, is just as important as the type of marketing used, or the content of the messaging deployed. In the data collected, there were approximately 35 different companies represented. The company name most frequently noted was Uganda Waragi, which is owned by Diageo, one of the largest alcohol companies in the world. Furthermore, in reviewing the other companies and their owners, about 75% of all advertisements found in this study come from two companies, Diageo, and AB InBev. In fact, only 14% of the advertisements observed were from local, Ugandan-owned businesses. This is a key finding that underscores the significant influence of major multinational corporations in local markets, highlighting the need for targeted policies and interventions to address the disproportionate impact of their advertising strategies in low-resource settings.

There are limitations that should be considered when interpreting these findings. The application of this study is limited due to the small scope of the project. Therefore, generalizing the following conclusions are not recommended as few-to-no baselines have been established and the data collected could be unique to the Makindye neighborhood in Kampala where the study was conducted. During the implementation of the pilot project, there were issues in that metadata was not collected, thus inhibiting the ability to accurately map the GPS datapoints. Smartphones are not always dependable in or capturing GPS data, so accuracy of the GPS datapoints can be inaccurate from the outside environment (i.e., trees, buildings, or cloud cover can lower accuracy). The data was collected during the day and that should continue with future iterations, though, there should be additional considerations for weather and the environment to improve data quality. Moreover, user error, unclear instructions, and limited training on photography may have negatively influenced the quality of the photos being taken by the team, which added constraints to the data analyzed, particularly with respect to placement. Future iterations should include a better field manual that helps improve the collection of data while also considering and advising on safety of the researchers – especially on the use of smartphones if the area studied has high levels of crime.

Conclusion

To conclude, the data collected and analyzed in this study raise a series of valid questions for future research. The approach we have developed can also be used to strengthen capacity of local organizations to implement effective alcohol marketing monitoring and public health interventions to protect vulnerable populations within their communities. Further research is needed to refine and test the data collection methods and their utility across settings and for alcohol policy development. These efforts may produce new and better community level data to inform stakeholders and facilitate the evaluations of interventions including alcohol counter-messaging campaigns. Finally, understanding the dominant presence of companies like Diageo and AB InBev in the communities we studied, as well as the minimal representation of local businesses, may shift public perception of marketing practices and promote more informed and equitable policy decisions.

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