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Jaakko Aspara & Henrikki Tikkanen

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ABSTRACT
Public policy-makers have been noted to sometimes ignore marketing/consumer research, even when the policy issue clearly pertains to consumption markets. We embark to identify factors that may explain policy-makers’ limited attention to marketing/consumer research, especially in cases related to consumer affairs that may have public health implications. Empirically, we focus on policy-making around the advertising of alcohol products. Having been involved in this policy-making process in Finland, we elucidate the case through an introspective narrative. We find that the factors explaining policy-makers’ limited attention to marketing/consumer research range from the decision-making characteristics of policy-makers, through inconsistent definitions for key terminology, to the fear of over-generalizing certain theories of marketing/consumer research. Regarding the latter, a key issue in the present case was that public policy-makers were unconvinced about the generic marketing theory stating that in mature markets, advertising will not increase the total consumption demand of a product category.

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Introduction
It has been noted throughout decades (Dyer and Shimp 1977; Hunt 2002; Wilkie and Gardner 1974; Wilkie and Moore 2012) that marketing and consumer research (hereinafter briefly “marketing research”) does not always receive attention in public policy planning. Although exceptions exist – such as the U.S. Federal Trade Commission’s long-time cooperation with marketing scholars (Hastak and Mazis 2014), as well as authorities’ use of social marketing insights to promote healthier consumer lifestyles (Gurrieri, Previte, and Brace-Govan 2012), Hastak, Mazis, and Morris (2001) observe that generally, “academic [marketing] research has not played a major role in the policymaking process” (181). Further, Hastak et al. note that if policy-makers pay attention to research, they often rather rely on consumer surveys conducted by public health-related government agencies (e.g. National Institutes of Health) (172), than studies of marketing academicians (176). Consequently, marketing scholars are not often able to participate in devising public policies even if they wanted to (Wilkie and Moore 2012, 64; see also Hughes 1981).

When it comes to macro-level issues related to market competition, such as antitrusts (Hunt 2002) or price wars (cf. Guiltinan and Gundlach 1996; Uslay, Malhotra, and Allvive 2006), it is understandable that policy-makers may pay less attention to marketing research than, e.g. to research in macro-economics or political science. However, this does not quite explain why
policy-makers might ignore marketing scholars’ theories and findings regarding micro-level issues related to consumer behavior, as well. Moreover, given that the methodological traditions of marketing research derive to a large extent from psychological and medical fields (i.e. lab and field experiments and intervention studies), it is surprising that policy-makers may lack trust in marketing research(ers) even when it comes to consumer behavior issues that have implications for consumers’ mental wellbeing and public health.

This dilemma – the potential lack of attention to marketing research by public policy-makers – is, in essence, the focus of the present article. To increase our understanding of the reasons how and why public policy-makers may not pay full attention to marketing research, we provide an introspective case study of recent policy-making around restrictions to the advertising of alcohol products in Finland, in 2010–2014. As our overall research question, we ask: What type of specific factors exist, that may explain public policy-makers’ limited attention to marketing research regarding a consumer behavioral issue which has public health implications, such as alcohol product advertising?

To answer this question, we provide a case narrative of our involvement with public policy-making around alcohol product advertising in Finland, following the introspective observation tradition of Wilkie and Gardner (1974), Dyer and Shimp (1977), and Hastak and Mazis (2014) (see also, Holbrook 2007; Gould 1995, 2008). Notably, the purpose of this study is not to provide an ultimate answer to the question of whether, or to what extent, the advertising of alcohol products causes increased alcohol consumption in general, or risks harming specific consumer groups, such as adolescents. Nor is the purpose to provide a comprehensive meta-analysis on studies on alcohol product advertising. Rather, our overall purpose is to make the following two contributions to the general literature on the role of marketing research in public policy planning, in particular (Dyer and Shimp 1977; Hastak and Mazis 2014; Hastak, Mazis, and Morris 2001; Polonsky, Carlson, and Fry 2003; Stead, McDermott, and Hastings 2007; Wilkie and Gardner 1974). First, we unpack, explicate, and elucidate a set of previously discussed factors, as well as identify certain previously unidentified factors, that may cause limited attention to marketing research among policy-makers – especially when it comes to consumer behavior issues with potential health implications. Second, our work contributes by identifying and elucidating certain general theories and findings of marketing research, which appear particularly alien to public policy-makers (e.g. whether alcohol products are a “mature” category for adolescents), as well as by proposing a framework for further research on these issues.

**Conceptual framework for policy-makers’ lack of attention to marketing research**

We are unaware of any explicit or comprehensive frameworks, typologies, or classifications from prior research, regarding the reasons of policy-makers’ potential lack of attention to marketing research in general. Notably, informative for constructing such a conceptual framework are Wilkie and Gardner’s (1974) and Dyer and Shimp’s (1977) seminal reflections on the role of marketing research in public policy-making, as well as a set of more recent studies on the utilization of marketing research in policy-making (Hastak and Mazis 2014; Hastak, Mazis, and Morris 2001; Polonsky, Carlson, and Fry 2003; Stead, McDermott, and Hastings 2007). Yet, since none of these studies, either, provides an explicit framework or typology of reasons for policy-makers’ potential lack of attention to marketing research, we begin by compiling and classifying the factors implicitly noted in these studies into an explicit conceptual framework. Moreover, we complement the factors identified from these previous studies with a set of additional factors – from outside the marketing discipline. These additional factors have been suggested to hinder the incorporation of cultural research perspectives in public policy planning (Geva-May 2002; Klitgaard 1998), which we consider an analogous case to the lack of incorporation of marketing research perspectives.

We structure and classify these factors along five stages of the policy-making process, commonly discussed in public policy research (Hastak, Mazis, and Morris 2001): (1) identifying the problem, (2) building a policy mandate, (3) exploring policy options, (4) executing the policy, and (5) enforcing/
evaluating the policy. We focus on the first four stages, as they pertain to the actual policy planning (while the fifth stage pertains to actions once the policy has been installed).

**Stage 1: Identifying the problem**

The first stage of the policy-making process is problem identification, which is the stage when policy-makers recognize a societal problem and assess its importance (Hastak, Mazis, and Morris 2001).

*Policy-maker body on the driver’s seat lacking coordination with marketing researchers.* Policy-maker bodies typically involved in the policy-making process include, at least, Members of Parliament (MPs), Ministers heading the involved Ministries, and appointed government officials (or civil servants) employed by the Ministries and other government agencies. In the problem identification phase, one or some of these actors often end up taking the driver’s seat of the policy-making process (see Polonsky, Carlson, and Fry 2003). This process-related fact can, at the same time, turn out to be the first reason for why marketing researchers may not get involved in the process. Namely, if the particular policy-maker actor that takes the driver’s seat lacks connections to and coordination with marketing researchers at this stage, the policy-making process may end up ignoring marketing research in later stages, too. Indeed, Polonsky, Carlson, and Fry (2003) note that the challenge is often that the policy-making body driving the process may lack coordination with both other policy-making bodies and with researchers.

*Lack of personal contacts and communication channels to policy-makers.* Further regarding early process aspects, Dyer and Shimp (1977) emphasize that personal contacts between policy-maker “clients” and researchers are important: in the lack of such contacts between the policy-makers and the country’s marketing scholars, marketing research is likely to be ignored in the process. Relatedly, there may be inadequate communication channels from marketing researchers to policy-makers otherwise, too. Dyer and Shimp (1977) suggest that the wide dissemination of marketing research results through a variety of channels is needed (e.g. sending copies to officials; submitting press releases; writing to trade journals; contacting relevant parties) while without such “priming the pump” (65), policy-makers’ attention to marketing research findings may not ever be achieved.

*Political climate complicating marketing issues.* Another generic factor mentioned by Hastak, Mazis, and Morris (2001) to affect the utilization of scientific research at this stage, is political climate, which has large influence on whether the governing politicians and government agencies are likely to perceive a certain issue as an important societal problem. Further, Hastak, Mazis, and Morris (2001) note that academic marketing studies, in particular, are unlikely to be utilized to identify problems per se – whereas certain public survey studies by governmental agencies are more likely to be used. Moreover, in the context of health-related consumer behaviors, the framing of issues on political agendas may be particularly complicated. This is because policy-makers and governments (e.g. conservative vs. social democratic) vary in terms of their ideological stances with respect to problematizing marketing- and consumer lifestyle-related issues, as well as attention paid to the interests of the majority of consumers vs. those of particular niches or minorities (Gurrieri, Previte, and Brace-Govan 2012, 2014; also Gould and Semaan 2014).

**Stage 2: Building a policy mandate**

The second stage in the policy-making process is the building of a broader policy mandate, i.e. support for the policy change among key interest groups and public opinion (Hastak, Mazis, and Morris 2001).

*Belated timing of marketing research.* Dyer and Shimp (1977) discuss the fact that marketing research that has started after the public policy program has been set in motion is considered much less probative, and therefore much less likely to catch policy-makers’ attention, than research that was conducted earlier. Thus, in case marketing scholars’ studies related to the policy matter have not been conducted, at latest, by the start of this second stage of the policy-making process, they may escape policy-makers’ attention altogether.
“Pro-business” assumptions about marketing research. Another factor related to the building of policy mandate is the “negative halo effect” of marketing research, due to being research conducted by business school professors (Wilkie and Gardner 1974). Policy-makers are often apt to assume that all research in business school disciplines, such as marketing, is conducted to support corporate interests, industry associations, or lobby groups (see Stead, McDermott, and Hastings 2007). This “suspicion by policy makers” (Wilkie and Gardner 1974, 43) may greatly hinder the utilization of marketing research at the mandate-building stage.

Differences in the conceptualization of terms between policy-makers and marketing researchers. In their review of why cross-cultural perspectives may be ignored in policy-making, Klitgaard (1998) and Geva-May (2002) note the challenge of different conceptualizations of “culture” between academia and public policy-makers. By analogy, policy-makers may have quite a different conceptualization of what constitutes “marketing” (or, e.g. “advertising”) than academic researchers in the discipline. French and Russell-Bennett (2015) echo the same point about the concept of “social marketing:” “government agencies … do not fully understand how social marketing relates to, contributes to and challenges other approaches to social policy delivery” (143). This, in turn, may lead policy-makers to direct their attention to different aspects of any given phenomenon than academic marketing researchers (Stead, McDermott, and Hastings 2007).

Stage 3: Exploring policy options

The third stage of the policy-making process focuses on identifying and evaluating alternative policy options, including their costs and benefits.

“Systematic” policy planning and lack of systematic reviews in marketing research. Klitgaard (1998) and Geva-May (2002) further point out that policy-makers often want to hold on to a notion, or self-concept, that their policy planning and policy evaluation is highly “systematic.” Thus, they are likely to be predisposed to pay much attention to “systematic” reviews of research on the issue at stake when exploring policy options. In contrast, the conduct of systematic research reviews is rare in academic marketing research, compared with, e.g. public health research (Stead, McDermott, and Hastings 2007). This may, hence, be one reason for policy-makers’ lack of attention to marketing research, especially at the stage when policy options are assessed.

Specificity-seeking of policy-makers and non-specific marketing research. Policy-makers also typically call for as specific evidence as possible related to the issue at stake. Yet, marketing research rarely frames its theories and findings in the language of “specificity and absolute proof” (Wilkie and Gardner 1974, 42). Moreover, as academic marketing research is typically interested in non-industry-specific, generalizable theories and findings, marketing research findings may not be phenomenon-specific or industry-specific enough for policy-makers: they “want the evidence to be directly relevant to the specific topic, not some ‘similar’ topic” (46).

Non-behavioral science education of policy-makers. Wilkie and Gardner (1974) further remark that policy-makers, who are often political scientists by training, may have generally limited understanding of, and interest in, the research of behavioral scientists. As marketing research is to a large extent a behavioral science (i.e. based on theories and assumptions of consumers’ economic behaviors), this may be another factor leading to limited attention to marketing research by policymakers, when evaluating policy options.

Stage 4: Executing the policy

After assessing alternative policy options, the decision about the policy to be adopted is made. Usually, details about the execution of the chosen policy are specified here, and comments from the public (from, e.g. interest groups) are requested (Hastak, Mazis, and Morris 2001).

Scientific difficulty of specifying appropriate methods. At this stage, the sheer scientific or methodological difficulty of studying the real effects of the policy option (Geva-May 2002; Klitgaard 1998)
may, de facto, lead to a result where a certain policy option is adopted without much scientific evidence on its effects. Especially, as Stead, McDermott, and Hastings (2007, 383) note, while experiments would be the “gold standard” in scientific research designs (including marketing research), measuring the effects of complex public health-related policy interventions in real-world settings is a “messier challenge,” and very difficult to implement. Therefore, policy choices are likely to be made based on limited empirical evidence – while non-empirical marketing research and general or analytical theories, in particular, may be ignored altogether.

**Ideology and culture within the policy-making body driving the process.** Hastak, Mazis, and Morris (2001) further note that the ideology and culture within the public policy-maker organization that is on the driver’s seat, often affects the final choice of a policy option. For instance, policy-makers may be predisposed toward interpreting consumer behavior through the hypothetical lenses of rational “economic man” (Wilkie and Gardner 1974, 40) or “equilibrium markets” (Hunt 2002, 309), rather than paying full attention to the idiosyncrasies of actual consumer behavior and psychology. This kind of dominant ideology within the agency may lead to the policy option eventually being chosen and executed on the basis of the theoretical assumptions, rather than on behavioral evidence from marketing research. Also, there are often national ideologies regarding how actively the government is willing to regulate its citizens’ private consumption decisions, or “protect consumers from themselves” (Witkowski 2010, 254).

**Fear that generic theories of marketing researchers are misused.** Interestingly, when Klitgaard (1998) and Geva-May (2002) discuss the ignorance of cultural perspectives in public policy-making, they note that policy-makers may be worried that some theories or perspectives may be misused, “i.e. that taking [them] into account will lead to oversimplification, discrimination, or omission, which are more damaging than the sins of [their] omission” (Geva-May 2002, 257). Analogously, policy-makers may be worried about the generic (i.e. non-industry-specific) theories of marketing research, and the potential tendency of marketing scholars to over-generalize theories. This may lead policy-makers think that the sin of omitting such theories in policy option assessment is smaller than their inclusion.

**Research questions for the case of policy-making on alcohol product advertising**

The above discussion provides an initial framework or typology of the reasons that may lead to policy-makers’ potential lack of attention to marketing research in general. The empirical study, to which we move next, is focused on analyzing whether and how these generic factors (as well as potential additional factors to be identified) were manifested in a real-life policy-making case related to consumer behavior with health implications: alcohol product advertising. Thus, the research questions for the empirical study can be stated as follows:

1. How are the following factors manifested as reasons for the lack of attention by policy-makers to marketing research, in the case of the regulation of alcohol product advertising?
   - **Stage 1: Identifying the problem:** (i) Policy-maker body on the driver’s seat lacking coordination with marketing researchers, (ii) lack of personal contacts and communication channels to policy-makers, and (iii) political climate complicating marketing issues;
   - **Stage 2: Building a policy mandate:** (i) Belated timing of marketing research, (ii) “pro-business” assumptions about marketing research, and (iii) differences in the conceptualization of terms between policy-makers and marketing researchers;
   - **Stage 3: Exploring policy options:** (i) “Systematic” policy planning and lack of systematic reviews in marketing research, (ii) specificity-seeking of policy-makers and non-specific marketing research, and (iii) non-behavioral education of policy-makers;
   - **Stage 4: Executing the policy:** (i) Scientific difficulty of specifying appropriate methods, (ii) ideology and culture within the policy-making body driving the process, and (iii) fear that the generic theories of marketing researchers are misused.

2. Are there additional reasons for lack of attention to marketing research by policy-makers?
Research context and method

The policy-making process on alcohol product advertising in Finland was selected as the focal context in the present research for two reasons common in studying single cases (Yin 2009): (1) topicality, as during 2010–2014 Finland was in the process of changing the national laws regarding such advertising and (2) extremity, as Finland is a country where alcohol policies are among the strictest in the world (control index $\approx 15$ on scale 0–20; see Nelson 2010). The topicality of the case, and our own position as close observers of the process, allowed us to access relevant empirical materials about the process in a unique, nuanced manner. The extremity of the case context enabled us to identify a variety of factors that may shape policy-makers’ (in)attention to marketing research, which could go undetectable in less extreme cases.

As to the background of the study, Finland’s Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (MSAH) started, in cooperation with a governmental health research institution – National Institute for Health and Welfare (NIHW) – to drive a reform to the national laws on alcohol product advertising in 2010 (empirical materials 4, 5, 13, 14, in Appendix 1). Their primary justification for the reform was that adolescents should be better isolated from such advertising. Interestingly, what underlines the extremity of the case is that “advertising targeted at minors was [in fact] totally banned” by Finnish national law already before the present legislative initiative (17). Indeed, prior laws on alcohol-related crimes (1) stipulated already before that “targeting minors with advertising, indirect advertising, or other promotion of mild alcoholic beverages” in advertising is a “marketing crime of alcoholic beverage.” However, MSAH’s idea was now to ban not only advertising content (e.g. portraying minors in advertisements) but also advertising media channels, to which adolescents may be exposed (e.g. outdoor advertising).

We combine two methodological paradigms to study the focal case: (i) a micro-historical approach and (ii) an observant approach including introspection. First, hence, our approach follows (i) the logic of micro-historians (Ginzburg 1989) who collect “clues” that create an understanding of processes and outcomes taking place during the public policy-making case. Specifically, we follow “clues” that actors involved in policy-making left in public documents, as well as policy memoranda and communications. We provide references to these pieces of evidence below, amidst the case account itself: the document references and other empirical materials are summarized and numbered in Appendix 1. These document numbers are referred to in parentheses in the case narrative. In addition to written documents, our materials include informal interviews and other personal communications with a set of actor-informants engaged in the policy-making process: five MPs, one representative of NIHW, one representative of MSAH, one representative of alcohol misuse-related NGO, two researchers from other fields than marketing, and four representatives of industry associations.

Second, (ii) in part of the materials and communications, we were ourselves involved as actors, due to our position as marketing professors of two of Finland’s leading business schools. At different stages of the process, especially the later ones, we publicized our views about the issues at stake in national newspapers as well as were asked to comment the issues by certain politicians and officials, even in Parliament hearings. In the case narrative below, we describe our role and involvement (as well as non-involvement) in different stages of the process. In doing this, we follow the introspective paradigm often used in studies on the role of marketing research in public policy-making (Dyer and Shimp 1977; Hastak and Mazis 2014; Holbrook 2007; Wilkie and Gardner 1974). As such, our introspective observant study also follows the tradition of introspective research in consumer research in general (Gould 1995, 2008; for an alternative, more “canonical” approach to introspection, see Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). Specifically, we employ here the narrative approach to introspection, “telling one’s story, usually situated in explicit cultural as well as personal dimensions” (Gould 2008, 408). This narrative approach contains aspects of meta-cognitive introspection as well, because throughout the research process, we engaged in “thinking about thinking,” reflecting and “following one’s own real-time thoughts and feelings” (Gould 2008, 408), as regards to our own involvement.
and non-involvement in the policy-making process. As such, the narrative and meta-cognitive aspects “fuse… when one introspects on the socio-cultural phenomena… and follows one’s own thoughts and feelings about it in real-time to help construct a narrative” (Gould 2008, 409).

In analyzing the empirical materials, we utilize the initial conceptual framework along the four stages of the policy-making process. Regarding the final narrative, we had two MPs involved in the policy-making process check our narrative for any factual errors. Figure 1, later, summarizes all the empirical findings, analyzed below.

**Case history stage 1: problem identification**

In Finland, the policy-maker bodies typically initiating health- and social-related policy changes are (a) elected politicians of parties who act as Ministers in the current government and (b) the MSAH. In the latter, civil servants appointed for long-term as Ministry officials are typically proactive policy-makers. This was the situation in the present case, as well. A particularly proactive MSAH official had already been nominated by the media (10) as the person who “challenged the tobacco industry” by leading work on legislation changes with the objective to “end smoking in Finland altogether” (11). This MSAH representative now wanted to do the same with alcohol products, having the opinion that “Finland would be a better place if alcohol was not consumed at all” (12, 18). A close partner of MSAH in the policy-making was also the governmental health research institute NIHW.

**Policy-maker body on the driver’s seat lacking coordination with marketing researchers.** The early preparatory work for the law reform, as led by the MSAH on the driver’s seat, involved no academic marketing researchers. Two clues of this emerged. First, given that the established partner of MSAH in (public health) research-related issues was NIHW, MSAH seemed to perceive no pressing need to involve academic marketing researchers from universities into the process. At NIHW, in turn, no marketing researchers were employed. Second, MSAH did not widely engage other Ministries in the process, either, such as the Ministry of Employment and Economy (MEE). This meant that excluded from the process were also the MEE-led research institutes such as the National Consumer Research Center and Finnish Consumer Authority, which would employ marketing and consumer researchers in their staff.

**Political climate complicating marketing issues.** Next, in the policy-making process, a certain coincidence occurred that favored the legislation aims of the representatives of MSAH. Namely, after the Parliamentary elections in Finland in spring 2011, the winning party – the conservative National Coalition Party – could motivate two other parties, the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats, to join the Government by offering them various small incentives in the Government Program, to their liking. Among these small favors was the following line written to the Government Program (3): “Alcohol advertising will be restricted by prohibiting advertising targeting children and young people… Permitted advertising times for television and radio will be reviewed.” A Member of Parliament later explained this to us:

Already the Government negotiations and the sentence written there determined that some further restrictions to advertising would be made. Coalition Party gave this small favor to Social Democrats, in order to get the favor returned in some bigger issue. So partly independent of whether there was evidence in favor of the restrictions or not, the increased restrictions were pre-determined politically this way.

What is more, the Social Democrats and Christian Democrats were particularly concerned about adolescents and families, with poverty and alcohol problems. This meant that there existed few marketing researchers to involve as experts in the process, as the academic marketing research in Finland rarely focuses on children/adolescents as consumers.

**Lack of early personal contacts and communication channels to policy-makers.** As noted above, and evinced by official documents and memoranda, marketing researchers were not at all involved in the early policy preparation work coordinated by MSAH. According to the MP whom we interviewed and who had been observing the process from early stages, no marketing researchers had had...
Figure 1. Factors explaining policy-makers' lack of attention to marketing research.
personal contacts or other informal communication, either, toward the policy-makers in these early stages. Personal contacts were not built until later on in the process, when the present authors were in contact with MSAH and other policy-making actors.

**Case history stage 2: building a policy mandate**

Soon after the Government Program was written, MSAH started to work for a proposal for legislation change. Less than a year later, in Spring 2012, the Ministry published its initial proposal (6) to change the laws related to alcohol marketing. The main changes in the initial proposal were (a) content-wise, to forbid so-called “image advertising” of alcohol products (allowing only the description of “product information” in ads), and (b) channel-wise, to extend the ban on TV and radio advertising from 7am–9pm to 7am–11pm, and to ban outdoor billboard advertising of alcohol products altogether.

Regarding the main justification of these restrictions, the law proposal evoked the earlier idea to protect children and adolescents. Specifically, the proposal stated as its aim:

… aim to restrict … alcohol beverage advertising in a way that children and young people would be exposed to alcohol advertising as little as possible. Because of a dose–response relationship in advertising, a lesser exposure to alcohol advertising would lead to lesser alcohol consumption by children and youth.

To further justify the aim, the proposal referred to “scientific research results:”

… in the 2000s, certainty has been established regarding research results, according to which alcohol advertising damages children … The most important summary of these research results is in the unanimous report of a Science Group appointed by the European Commission’s alcohol and health forum from 2009.

As is standard practice in the Finnish legislative process, MSAH sent its initial proposal of the new law for review and comments to a number of actors and stakeholders in spring 2012. These stakeholders ranged from other Ministries and Government agencies, through non-governmental organizations (e.g. Mannerheim League for Child Welfare) to industry associations representing alcohol-related industries (e.g. Federation of the Brewing and Soft Drinks Industry; Finnish Hospitality Association) and media industry. However, no university or other research organization – nor any marketing or consumer scholars – were among the 33 parties from which reviews and comments were requested (7).

**Differences in the conceptualization of terms between policy-makers and marketing researchers.** At this point, we, as marketing scholars, came across the law proposal, too – on MSAH’s public website. Two terminology aspects immediately caught our attention. First, the proposal wanted to ban all “image advertising” – but we were not aware of any unanimous academic definitions for such form of advertising. With our understanding of our discipline, all advertising creates brand and product images, making the term “image advertising” redundant. Second, methodologically, we were especially puzzled by the proposal’s claims that (a) “certainty has been established regarding research results, according to which alcohol advertising damages children,” as well as by the claim that (c) a “dose–response relationship” exists between advertising and alcohol consumption. In our view and experience, (a) social scientific research (including business, marketing, and consumer research) rarely establishes anything with absolute certainty; (b) the claim about advertising “damaging” children seemed to represent highly graphic and emotion-laden rhetorics; and (c) we had never encountered academic marketing research that would have found a uniform dose–response relationship between advertising and demand.

The odd terminology made us interested in finding out what the research results which MSAH was referring to, actually were. With a closer look, MSAH’s proposal referred, specifically, to a report of “Science Group” of “European Commission’s alcohol and health forum,” published in the Internet (Science Group 2009). Albeit not specifying what a “scientific opinion” means, this report reviewed dozens of studies more or less related to alcohol marketing. However, at the end, the report made its conclusion based on just “13 longitudinal studies … of alcohol use amongst … young people” (1).
Searching for these studies, we found that all of them had been conducted by public health researchers, with no marketing research studies included. At the same time, when drawing its “unanimous” conclusion, the report overlooked over 30 other studies to which it briefly referred (in its reference list), as well as a number of other studies with contrasting findings. The report did not elaborate at all, either, on how the body of marketing research viewed the effects of advertising on consumption in general, or on the consumption of alcohol products in particular. Moreover, despite claiming a “unanimous” conclusion, the report itself stated that the “body of evidence is not uniform in its findings” (13) and that “only modest effects [by advertising] have been found in some studies, while others have found no effects” by advertising on adolescents’ alcohol consumption.

Further, when reviewing the 13 original studies in detail, as well as three more discussed by MSAH officials (in total 16), we identified several methodological weaknesses in them. A summary of these methodological weaknesses is in Appendix 2. (the full review of the studies was made available by the authors in open-source article repository: Aspara and Tikkanen 2013). As one of the main weaknesses, we found another definitional issue: none of the 16 focal studies did not specifically focus on such advertising (i.e. traditional TV advertising, billboard advertising, etc.) which MSAH’s law proposal suggested to ban. Most of the studies focused on alcohol portrayals in general media content – i.e. portrayals of alcohol use in the story lines of movies, TV programs, or music videos – and not ordinary alcohol product advertisements that were to be banned. In our view, any study findings regarding adolescents’ general media content use could and should not be used to justify bans on traditional billboard, print, or TV advertising. What is more, we were even specifically aware of experimental studies in which alcohol portrayals in movies had increased immediate alcohol consumption of young adults, whereas commercials seen during movies had not done so (Engels and Koordeman 2011; Koordeman, Anschutz, and Engels 2011, 2012). Thus, if anything, the weak evidence presented by the studies which MSAH referred to could, in our view, be used to justify restrictions to “product placements” in general media content (e.g. movies) – but not to justify bans on ordinary advertising.

Belated timing of marketing research. Concerned about the conceptual definitions and methodological weaknesses of the studies that MSAH used to legitimize its law proposal, we attempted to become more actively involved in the policy-making process. First, we submitted an op-ed column to the largest newspaper in Finland (Helsingin Sanomat) in June 2012, describing our concerns about a lack of evidence behind MSAH’s claims. The column raised interest among actors involved in the legislation process: due to its critical tone, especially those political parties and industry associations that were critical of the proposed law were interested. As a result, we were asked, by some MPs, to present our views at a discussion event at Parliament regarding the proposed law, in fall 2012. We also published another op-ed on our concerns in the leading weekly news magazine Suomen Kuvalehti in Finland, in March 2013.

Second, we contacted directly (by mail) the Minister responsible for the law, as well as a number of other Ministers and MPs who had been involved in the process. In our letter, we described the definitional and methodological weaknesses of the studies MSAH used in justifying the law proposal (as in Appendix 2, and Aspara and Tikkanen 2013). We also explained that the established general theory and findings in marketing research held that advertising does not affect the total consumption demand or volume in established product categories and mature markets (Borden 1942), such as alcohol products (Ornstein and Hanssens 1985; Wilcox, Kim, and Schulz 2012) – but rather only different brands’ market shares. Finally, we warned that banning advertising would likely lead to increased use of price promotions and other, creative guerrilla marketing promotions, which could in fact increase – instead of decrease – young people’s alcohol consumption.

However, the letter we sent to the Minister, as well as the op-ed columns discussing our concerns, did not have any effect on the process. Informally, in an interview with a group of MPs, we obtained the feedback that our efforts simply came too late. We had not conducted our review of the studies, which MSAH was referring to, until after the initial law proposal had been written, and we had not conducted any empirical studies of our, either. One MP commented:
Your meta-analysis of the weaknesses of the studies used by the Ministry to justify to restrictions was very insightful. But I think it just came in too late. And it would have been more effective, if you had done some empirical research of your own at that point, in the Finnish context.

“Pro-business” assumptions about marketing research. While our communications did not have effect on the process, officials of MSAH and NIHW still replied to us in the same media we published the op-ed columns in. A notable aspect of both replies was that they assumed and insinuated that we, as marketing researchers, would be consultants or lobbyists to the alcohol products industry. For instance, a key official of MSAH insinuated that we would be “consultants working for American brewery industry” (19) – without any factual basis whatsoever. Likewise, in their reply in the main news magazine, the NIHW officials also expressed a concern that the present authors’ arguments were just “standard claims of the alcohol industry,” (20) as did the aforementioned NGO it cooperated with, Ehyt (21). Even further, a MP told us, after a Parliamentary meeting where the same MSAH and NIHW officials had been present:

In our Parliament meeting, we had those [MSAH and NIHW officials] visiting us. They also talked about you and your research reviews [referring to the present authors], and were saying to us that you would be just industry lobbyists, and we shouldn’t be listening to you.

Case history stage 3: exploring policy options

Some months later, in April 2013, MSAH published a revised law proposal (9). In the revised law proposal, MSAH had reacted to some of the criticism it received. For instance, “image advertising” would not be banned after all. Yet, to our surprise, additional restrictions were now proposed to advertising channels. Specifically, certain promotions through the social media would be forbidden, such as “advertising based on content generated or shared by consumers … and lotteries or contests.” The restrictions to TV and radio advertising, as well as the full outdoor billboard advertising ban, remained in the proposal (with the exception of sports events).

Once again, MSAH sent the revised law proposal for review and comments to a number of actors and stakeholders, mostly the same ones as before. Again, however, there were no marketing researchers among the parties from whom official comments were requested.

“Systematic” policy planning and lack of systematic reviews in marketing research. MSAH continued to appeal, in their final law proposal, to the same public health researchers’ “systematic reviews” on the effects of advertising on adolescents’ alcohol consumption as before (Science Group 2009; see also Anderson et al. 2009a; Meier 2008; Smith and Foxcroft 2009). In contrast, we were unaware of any “systematic” study reviews of marketing researchers on the matter, nor did MSAH commission any such review. The lack of such systematic reviews in marketing research may, hence, partially explain policy-makers’ lack of attention to marketing academicians here.

Specificity-seeking of policy-makers and non-specific marketing research. A notable, further aspect of the public health researchers’ reviews, which the MSAH officials were referring to, is that they presented very bold and specific conclusions (“unanimous conclusion” that “advertising increases adolescents’ alcohol consumption”). In contrast, the marketing studies in the area (Goldfarb and Tucker 2011; Ornstein and Hanssens 1985; Wilcox, Kim, and Schulz 2012), as well as marketing research in general, did not make this bold statements or absolute claims about the effects of advertising. Also, when we explained (in our letter to the Ministers, and op-ed columns) that general marketing theory held that advertising does not increase category demand in mature product categories, the NIHW officials simply countered us by stating that this general theory would not hold in the special market of alcohol products. We will return to this below.

Non-behavioral education of policy-makers. In the stage of evaluating the final policy options, there were also indications about the non-behavioral education of the policy-makers playing a role in the choice and justification of the final policies chosen. Especially, they were not convinced by our trying to explain the nuanced methodological weaknesses of the studies, such as that the studies did not in fact study at all such advertising that MSAH was suggesting to ban, or that
small statistically significant effects found in some studies (and no effects in other studies) did not mean that there would be any substantial effect taking place in real markets.

**Case history stage 4: executing the policy**

Following the last round of comments to MSAH’s final law proposal, MSAH did not substantially revise its proposal any more. Instead, it submitted the proposal to be processed by Parliament. Before the final acceptance of the law in Parliament, the Social Affairs and Health Committee of the Parliament contacted us. The Committee reviews laws, with invited experts, before their acceptance by the full chamber of Parliament. We submitted a commentary repeating our earlier concerns to the Committee. But as is common in Finnish Parliamentary practice, the Committee review had no influence on the proposed law, or its acceptance by Parliament. Thus, the Parliament eventually accepted and ratified the law in December 2013.

**Scientific difficulty of specifying appropriate methods.** When asked to testify at the Parliamentary Committee, we tried to once more elucidate the methodological weaknesses of the handful of studies, which MSAH was using to justify the law (Appendix 2, and Aspara and Tikkanen 2013). We also explained that the while the effects of advertising on consumption demand or product sales (i.e. sales-response) has been one of the most prominent research streams in marketing research, no definitive solution has emerged regarding how to study the complex interaction effects involved, and how to isolate or identify the effects of advertising from those of other marketing mix variables and contextual factors (see, e.g. Bass et al. 2007; Hanssens, Parsons, and Schultz 2003; Vakratsas and Ambler 1999). For instance, what exactly is the marginal effect of advertising, over and beyond simultaneous price decreases and new product introductions? However, the Parliamentary Committee, no more than the MSAH officials, did not seem to truly understand this complexity.

**Ideology and culture within the policy-making body driving the process.** It seemed that MSAH’s final law proposal, as well as the Parliament Committee’s final acceptance of this proposal, were thus eventually decided at least partly on an ideological basis. Both the Social Democratic Party and the Christian Democratic Party, for instance, had an ideological heritage advocating abstinence and social welfare reform-oriented politics, dating back to the era of Prohibition Law in the early 1900s. Furthermore, another party, the Center Party, shared a similar reformist and abstinence agenda. Finally, as indicated above, the key officials at MSAH were, at personal level, eager proponents of restrictions to the use and marketing of alcohol products. An MP also commented this to us:

> These MSAH officials were, indeed, chief ideologues behind this whole legislative process. And they were more or less blindly followed by some key politicians among Social Democrats and Center Party.

**Fear that the generic theories of marketing researchers are misused.** At the final stage, the policymakers also seemed particularly concerned, or even fearful, about marketing researchers’ generic theories of how markets function. In the case of alcohol advertising, such a theory was, first and foremost, the theory on the effect of advertising on the total consumption demand of product categories. The crux of the issue here was that the officials objected to the notion that alcohol products would constitute a mature category even for adolescent consumers. We will analyze this issue further, in the Discussion section, when proposing avenues for future research.

**Additional factors underlying lack of attention to marketing research**

Addressing research question R2, we further identified and found evidence of a number of additional factors explaining potential lack of attention to marketing research by policy-makers.

*“Just in case” approach vs. further evidence-seeking approach.* Our case observations point to yet another process-related aspect creating a divide between policy-makers and marketing researchers: a different conception of whether and how the policy-making process should proceed in conditions of uncertainty about research evidence of the possibly harmful effects of advertising. In brief, the policy-
makers seemed to be prepared to ban advertising through a “just in case” approach – even taking the risk (of “type I error”) that the aforementioned public health researchers’ studies (Appendix 2) had “found” a harmful effect of advertising (on adolescents) that did not really exist. In contrast, since marketing scholars are often methodologically conservative, a more natural process for marketing scholars would have been to seek new empirical research evidence ruling out this risk, before making policy choices.

Rhetorical skills of lawyers and expert witnesses. Another key factor was the rhetorics applied by the key officials at the policy-making bodies in justifying the policy options. Firstly, it seemed to us that the graphic rhetorics applied in the initial law proposals written by the officials of MSAH (“advertising damages children”) emotionally anchored the mindsets of the stakeholders of the policy-making process in favor of further restrictions. Thus, even if the language of the justifications for the law proposal turned milder later on, the need for further restrictions had likely been established, in stakeholders’ minds, already by the earlier rhetorics. Secondly, in insinuating about our – the marketing researchers’ – pro-business or pro-industry agenda, the officials of MSAH as well as NIHW also utilized rhetorics effectively. Even without factual basis, the insinuations they presented in media (op-ed columns) as well as privately to MPs, effectively undermined the trustworthiness of our views as marketing scholars.

Defensive instead of proactive stance of marketing research. As a consequence, we as marketing scholars found ourselves throughout the process in a highly defensive position. At the same time, the need to defend our positions, even from non-factual insinuations, hindered us from taking a more proactive, constructive approach in studying the phenomenon at stake and contributing to the policy-making process. In practical terms, this meant that our time and effort was directed to defending and reviewing the extant research, instead of conducting new empirical studies proactively. Thus, no new empirical evidence of the issue at stake was obtained. The often defensive, instead of proactive role of marketing scholars regarding research on consumer behavior with health implications has also been noted by Stead, McDermott, and Hastings (2007).

Discussion and conclusions

Theoretical contributions

The present study observed that public policy-makers exhibited selective attention in justifying advertising regulations in Finland, focusing on a set of survey studies by public health researchers and ignoring certain econometric and experimental studies by marketing research – and even more so, ignoring generic theories, findings, and body of knowledge of decades of marketing research. Figure 1 summarizes the key findings of our study.

By identifying these factors, the main contribution of the present research, theoretically, is for the literature addressing the role of marketing research in public policy-making. For this literature, the contributions are three-fold. First, we explicate and compile together factors that previous research has identified, piecemeal and implicitly, to hinder the incorporation of marketing research into public policy-making (Dyer and Shimp 1977; Hastak and Mazis 2014; Hastak, Mazis, and Morris 2001; Polonsky, Carlson, and Fry 2003; Stead, McDermott, and Hastings 2007; Wilkie and Gardner 1974) – and elucidate each of the factors in our case of the regulation of alcohol product advertising. Second, we usher in a new set of complementary factors affecting the role of marketing research in policy-making from literature on public policy analysis: factors that have been previously identified to hamper the incorporation of cultural research perspectives in public policy planning (Geva-May 2002; Klitgaard 1998). By analogy, we proposed and demonstrated how similar factors are likely to have hindered the incorporation of marketing research perspectives into public policy planning in our case. Third, we identified a set of additional factors that pertain to the policy-making process as a whole (e.g. “just in case” approach by policy-makers; the rhetorical skills of lawyers and expert witnesses used by policy-makers; the defensive stance of marketing scholars).
On a more detailed level, a particularly important finding of the present research was to identify the suspicion, or even fear, of public policy-makers toward certain general theories and findings of marketing research. Most notably, this suspicion related to the general theory or finding of marketing research that when a market or product category (in this case alcohol products) is *mature*, advertising is unlikely to increase the product category’s consumption demand. Because this appeared to be one of the key issues preventing public policy-makers from fully attending to marketing research and theory in the present case, we next provide an additional framework regarding this issue, as an avenue for further research and validation.

**Future research: clarifying theory on advertising, demand, and mature markets**

The main suspicion of policy-makers toward the aforementioned theory seems to stem from their presumption that alcohol products are not a mature market *for adolescents*, even if they were a mature market in general (see the case history above and, e.g. 20 in Appendix 1). Underlying this were two further assumptions: (i) since consuming alcohol products is illegal for under-aged adolescents, the market will not be mature for them and (ii) since adolescents are merely getting familiar with this market/category, it will not be mature for them. Thus, policy-makers seemed to accept the general conclusion of marketing research that advertising does not increase the total consumption in mature product categories and even the notion that alcohol products are indeed a mature product category in general – but their concern was that alcohol products may not be a mature product category for adolescents in particular.

To unpack and elucidate related marketing theory, the above two assumptions need to be further scrutinized. On the one hand, it must be noted that the first sub-assumption, (i) above, has no basis in theory, empirical evidence, or logical reasoning. That is, there is no theory, evidence, or logic suggesting that whether the market is legal (or not) would determine its maturity (e.g. the market for moonlighting home maintenance services is rather mature, even if illegal); or that the market participants’ legal age, per se, would determine its maturity.

On the other hand, the second (ii) assumption – that since adolescents are merely getting familiar with the product category – is more ambivalent, and would therefore need more empirical evidence from alcohol markets to be disconfirmed or confirmed. Specifically, this question would ultimately necessitate the assessment of the following issues:

1. **Is there a stable number of adolescents consuming the product category in the first place?** – because the most traditional definition of market maturity pertains to the stability vs. growth of the category’s overall demand (Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven 1990; Levitt 1965).

2. **Are adolescents generally aware of the product category?** – because whether “customers are familiar with the products” (Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven 1990, 507), even without advertising, is another key feature of mature markets.

3. **Do adolescents perceive the product category as a socially accepted, legitimate category?** – because the market’s maturity also relates to it being or having become a socially legitimate category (cf. Levitt 1965).

**Figure 2** contains a chart that summarizes these questions, identifying the key issues that should be verified in future research, in order to determine whether the market can be characterized as non-mature (mature) for adolescents and whether advertising is thereby likely to increase (not increase) their demand for alcohol products. In principle, the general marketing research and theory would suggest a “null hypothesis,” that the answer to at least one of these questions is “yes,” meaning that the alcohol product category is, indeed, likely to be mature for adolescents, too. Regarding the first question, the overall consumption volume of alcohol by adolescents has in fact been declining rather than growing in recent years, in many Western countries (the USA: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 2012; Finland: Karlsson et al. 2013). Regarding the second
question, in turn, indirect evidence indicates that adolescents in most countries (at least Western ones) would be very likely to be aware of alcohol products as a category even without advertising. This is because alcohol products are pervasively present and available at homes, in family lives (cf. Fisher et al. 2007), and related peer contexts (Ary et al. 1993; Curran, Stice, and Chassin 1997). Thus, most adolescents will likely be aware of alcohol products as a category, even without advertising.

Finally, the third sub-question is whether adolescents would perceive the product category as a socially accepted, legitimate category without advertising. Yet, again, the null hypothesis based on prior research is that they probably would. As Measham (2006) analyzes in the case of the UK, the social acceptability/legitimacy and even desirability of alcohol products among adolescents mainly stems from, and is reproduced by, the overall youth culture (rather than advertising), which, unfortunately, cherishes intoxication. Moreover, a body of advertising research related to consumers’ skepticism toward advertising, recognized also by some public health researchers (Engels and Koordeman 2011), indicates that consumers are generally quite aware that advertising tries to persuade them to buy things (Friestad and Wright 1994). This awareness – or advertising literacy – elicits skepticism toward advertising, which, in turn, mitigates its effects on consumer’s buying decisions (Mangleburg and Bristol 1998). Regarding adolescents, then, children and teenagers have been found to be even more advertising literate than older generations (Livingstone and Helsper 2006), with younger teenagers being especially skeptical of traditional advertising in today’s Internet world (Moscardelli and Liston-Heyes 2005). This evidence would further justify the null hypothesis that adolescents’ perception of alcohol products as a socially desirable or legitimate category is likely to arise mostly from other sources than commercial advertising; mostly likely the family, peers, and cultural environment.

At any rate, a key task for further research would indeed be to examine and verify the answers to the sub-questions in the framework of Figure 2, and in this way determine whether the alcohol product market is likely to be a mature market for adolescents in a given country. While the null hypotheses, based on general marketing theory above, would suggest that the answer would be “yes” to at least some of the questions, further empirical verification is needed.

Regarding suitable methods for seeking this empirical verification, we propose to complement the survey-based studies (cited in Appendix 2) with econometric sales data as well as with field experiments (cf. Goldfarb and Tucker 2011; Saffer 1995). A combination of methods would likely yield more robust
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<th>Implications for</th>
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findings regarding the maturity of the alcohol products market for adolescents, and the role of advertising in influencing adolescents’ alcohol consumption. In addition, these methods could be further complemented with ethnographic methods – due to the prominent role of contemporary consumption culture in influencing both the media habits and the day-to-day consumption patterns of adolescents.

**Implications to stakeholders**

Table 1 provides a summary of recommendations to (a) appointed government officials, (b) elected MPs and Ministers, and (c) marketing/consumer researchers, based on the findings of the present research. The implications are structured according to the stages of the policy-making process, and directly pertain to the findings summarized in Figure 1. In addition to these implications, public policy-makers could also benefit from increased understanding of marketing theories in their own (social marketing) campaigns aimed at increasing public awareness and prevention of misuse of alcohol and other products with health implications (Wettstein, Suggs, and Lellig 2012). At any rate, more cooperation and joint research projects commissioned and conducted by government officials and marketing/consumer researchers are needed.

**Conclusion**

The present study has elucidated reasons for why public policy-makers may not fully attend to marketing and consumer researchers’ theories and findings, even in cases where the policy issue at stake clearly pertains to consumption markets and practices. According to our findings, researchers of consumption markets need to be aware, inter alia, that even if they pursue objective, scientific, and generalizable knowledge about marketing and consumer behaviors in their research, policy-makers may doubt the validity of their theories and findings, assume they support business interests, and consider them too non-specific or generic to be used in policy-making. To fight these prejudices and become involved in policy-making processes, researchers may need to proactively and early conduct research on policy-relevant issues and build personal contacts and more intensive communication channels toward policy-makers.

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**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

**References**


## Appendices

### Appendix 1.

Empirical materials of the present research

<table>
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<th>Policy-maker stakeholder</th>
<th>Materials without authors’ involvement</th>
<th>Materials with authors’ involvement</th>
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<td>Parliament and Government</td>
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<td>1. Law on alcohol-related crimes (EV 95/2009 vp – HE 84/2008 vp)</td>
<td><em>Five MPs</em> (four personal interviews, one digital communication)</td>
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<td>National Institute of Health and Welfare (NIHW)</td>
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Appendix 2.

Summary of the methodological weaknesses of the studies which the ministry’s law proposal claimed to show with “certainty” that advertising of alcoholic beverages damages children

The studies referred to in the Ministry’s law proposal. The law proposal of the MSAH stated:

in the 2000s, certainty has been established regarding research results, according to which alcohol advertising damages children: advertising makes children initiate alcohol usage earlier and increases alcohol usage and binge drinking during youth. … The most important summary of these research results is in the unanimous report of a Science Group appointed by the European Commission’s alcohol and health forum from 2009.

The above reference to a “Science Group” is to a report named “Scientific Opinion of the Science Group of the European Alcohol and Health Forum,” which emerges on the Internet. Albeit not specifying what a “scientific opinion” means, the report reviewed dozens of studies more or less related to alcohol marketing. Yet, at the end, the report draws its conclusion based on “13 longitudinal studies that investigated the impact of marketing communications on initiation and continuation of alcohol use amongst … young people” (1). The conclusion is that:

[d]espite the above methodological concerns and despite the fact that not all studies found an impact for all the individual marketing exposures studied, nevertheless, the overall description of the studies found consistent evidence to demonstrate an impact of alcohol advertising on the uptake of drinking among non-drinking young people, and increased consumption among their drinking peers. (17)

Elsewhere, the Ministry also referred to other, similar study reviews such as those by Anderson et al. (2009a) and Snyder et al. (2006), which identify the same 13 studies plus 3 more (see policy-makers’ focal study references), totaling 16 studies. These studies are the following:

Policy-makers’ focal study references


**Methodological weaknesses of the focal studies described in our Letter to the Minister.** The methodological weaknesses of the focal studies, assessed vis-à-vis the methodological standards of marketing and consumer research,¹ include the following (see Aspara and Tikkanen 2013 for details):

- **Exclusive reliance on the survey approach in both the independent variables (advertising exposure) and dependent variables (alcohol consumption).** This likely creates common-method bias and demand effects in results (spurious correlations between advertising and consumption variables) or N.B. Even the longitudinal “prospective cohort” nature of the focal studies does not remove these biases because the outcome variable (alcohol consumption) is not objectively measured or diagnosed as variables usually are in the prospective cohort studies of biomedical research (e.g. cancer occurrence). Rather, even the outcome variables are measured with self-report survey measures (of one’s consumption of, liking for, or intent to use alcohol²).

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¹While the methodological weaknesses are, here, assessed against the common standards of marketing/consumer research and journal publications, it must be noted that within their own discipline and journals (i.e. the public health discipline), not all the weaknesses identified may be considered weaknesses. This is because of the different scientific paradigms applied, as well as possibly different standards adopted by the journals.

²However, it could also be considered that these self-reported intention variables are the best ones available – as obtaining data on the actual alcohol consumption or purchases of adolescents could be difficult because adolescents cannot legally buy alcohol anywhere (leading to unobserved/unregistered data on their purchases).
• **Sample selection biases, attrition bias, and outliers**
  o **Lack of study focus on advertising and adolescents**: Only 4 out of the 16 focal studies actually examined the effect of (i) advertising on the alcohol consumption of (ii) under-aged adolescents. Eleven out of 16 studies do not study advertising, but (a) alcohol appearance in general media such as TV programs or movies; (b) participants’ liking of alcohol brands; or (c) ownership of brand merchandise; not all studies focus on under-aged minors, either.
  o **Attrition bias**: The behavior of study participants dropping out of the study, and thereby the correlations for them, may be drastically different from those reported by the study for the final participants. On average, over one-third of participants dropped out from the studies.
  o **Outliers**: 14 of the 16 focal studies do not conduct analyses on whether their found correlations are caused by extreme observations.

• **Lack of attention to the problems of the specific self-report measures used**: The focal studies ignore the facts that respondents
  o are likely to have inaccurate knowledge or memory regarding the focal variables (e.g. recalling how many ads they saw in past month when asked “how many ads did you see?”);
  o tend to have biased responses to questions on the frequency of their own behavior especially when closed-end response categories are used (e.g. “1–2 times a month” or “3–5 times a month”) instead of open-ended questions (“how many times?”);
  o may use ad hoc patterns in answering questionnaires (e.g. a tendency to “agree” with questions [i.e. acquiescence]); and
  o tend to give socially desirable answers regarding the variables (e.g. claiming to remember more ads than they remembered).

• **Negligence of key control variables**: The results are likely to be significantly biased due to the ignorance of key control variables related to
  o alcohol consumption by peer consumers and family (ignored in 6 out of 16 studies);
  o exposure to alcohol portrayals in general media (ignored in 8 out of 16 studies);
  o the general regulatory and cultural environment (ignored in 15 out of 16 studies); and
  o marketing variables other than advertising, such as pricing, distribution, and (new) product designs (ignored in 15 out of 16 studies)

Especially the ignorance of (a) price levels as well as (b) price-promotion activities is a significant shortcoming, as lower prices have been shown to have a significant positive effect on total alcohol consumption (Ornstein and Hanssens 1985).

• **Multicollinearity issues (i.e. high correlation between predictor variables)**: The focal studies ignore potential multicollinearity in data, which can produce severely biased correlations
  o Only 1 of the 16 studies reports the full correlation matrix between variables, which would help detecting possible multicollinearity.
  o For instance, if general TV viewing and advertising exposures are highly correlated, regression results with a multicollinearity problem might indicate that both these variables predict alcohol consumption even if neither one did so in reality.

• **Effect sizes**: Even if some correlations may appear statistically significant, their true ability to predict or explain the outcome (alcohol consumption) is unclear
  o Even if they have large sample sizes, many of the focal studies accept the looser 0.05 statistical significance level, instead of the more stringent 0.01 level.
  o None of the studies reports incremental \( \Delta R^2 \) (or incremental model fit \( \Delta LL \)) when the advertising or marketing variable is included in the model.

\[\text{It can also be argued that the omission of price controls (as well as distribution coverage controls) is not a substantial weakness in the studies, because under-age adolescents cannot legally buy alcohol at stores in any case, and need to get access to alcohol by some alternative routes and means. Still, we maintain that there is likely to be a substantial indirect effect by pricing – for instance, even if a teenager asks an adult from the street to buy alcohol products on his/her behalf, the teenager likely needs to pay the money for the products indirectly. Therefore, it would eliminate a potential methodological weakness to include the price control variables.}\]