

Alcohol Advertisements Flood New York City Subway System

A Report of the Corporations and Health Watch Project,*

Hunter College, City University of New York

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Introduction

A 2007 Marin Institute report demonstrated that many alcohol advertisements in the San Francisco public transportation system were in clear violation of national standards.¹ The release of the Marin Institute's report led to the removal of all alcohol ads in the MUNI system in San Francisco.

In June of 2007, the Hunter College Corporations and Health Watch Project decided to assess the prevalence of alcohol advertising in the New York City subway system. We selected a convenience sample of subway stations and subway stops in Manhattan, choosing subway stops and trains with high ridership and customer flow. In June and again in July, we observed four Manhattan subway lines (the 4, D, A, and L lines) between 14th Street and 125th Street and recorded each instance and brand of alcohol advertisement. Researchers examined all advertisements posted within the subway stations and also inspected advertisements on selected trains.

Results

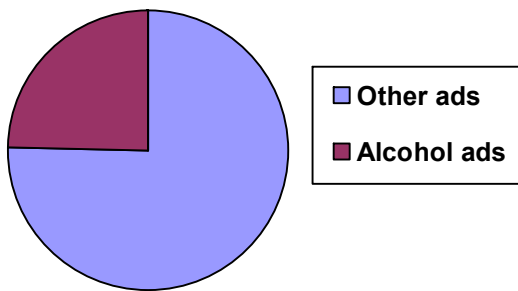
Twelve out of seventeen subway stations surveyed had at least one alcohol advertisement in both June and July. In four of these subway stations, during both June and July, every single advertisement was for alcohol. The observed alcohol advertisements were most commonly for Stolichnaya Vodka, Budweiser and Mike's Hard Lemonade. As shown below, in June, 25% of all subway station advertisements were for alcohol products and in July, 34% were for alcohol. In both months, four or more of the busiest subway stations displayed only alcohol advertisements. Of the total of 1711 advertisements observed within seventeen subway stations in June and July, nearly 30% were for alcohol.

Subway Cars

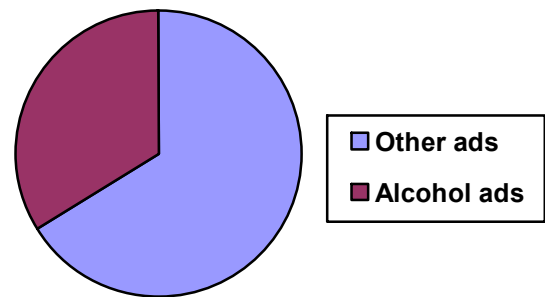
Researchers inspected a small, nonrandom sample of approximately 35 subway cars in June and July and observed 385 alcohol advertisements posted on these trains. Many subway cars contain repeating Bud Light advertisements with the slogan, "It's Always Worth It" while other regular Budweiser advertisements encourage riders to "Open Up a World of Taste." If a car contained any alcohol advertisements, these ads were usually repeated down an entire half of the car with the other half being occupied by advertisements for some other product.

* This report was written by Heidi Knoblauch, Zoe Meleo-Erwin and Nicholas Freudenberg

June 2007 Subway Ads



July 2007 Subway Ads



Conclusion

The Metro Transit Authority (MTA) system serves an average of 7,262,760 passengers daily on 26 lines. Each year more than a billion passengers enter the New York City subway system. New York City schools provide free transit passes to 700,000 children every semester. Thus, it is estimated that each year millions of New York City youngsters are repeatedly exposed to alcohol advertisements. Several research studies demonstrate that young people exposed to more alcohol advertising are more likely to drink.² For example, based on the study of a national sample of young people, a recent article in the *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* (Snyder et al, 2006) concluded that “alcohol advertising contributes to increased drinking among youth.” Another study showed that the largest segments of the U.S. market for alcohol products are under-age drinkers and adult problem drinkers, who together account for almost 40% of the market for alcohol products.³ Thus, by allowing alcohol advertisements in the NYC transit system, the Metropolitan Transit Authority contributes to illegal and problem drinking in New York City.

According to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, in 2005, 1,450 New York City deaths were directly or indirectly attributable to alcohol.⁴ Many more individuals and families had their well-being hurt by excess or improper alcohol use. The Health Department reports that 15% of NYC residents drink excessively—defined as consuming more than 60 drinks a month for men and more than 30 a month for women, or binge drinking, that is consuming 5 or more drinks on anyone occasion.⁵

By banning alcohol advertisements in the New York City bus and subway system, the Metropolitan Transit Authority can take an important step in reducing the burden alcohol imposes on New Yorkers.

About Corporations and Health Watch

The Corporations and Health Watch Project is based at Hunter College, City University of New York. The Project monitors the health impact of the corporate practices of the alcohol, automobile, firearms, food, pharmaceutical and tobacco industries and studies public health strategies designed to encourage these industries to modify activities that harm health. Its website www.corporationsandhealth.org serves as a forum for researchers, advocates and public health professionals who seek to reduce unhealthy corporate practices. Its director is Nicholas Freudenberg, DrPH, Distinguished Professor of Public Health at Hunter College. He can be reached at nfreuden@hunter.cuny.edu.

¹ Michele Simon. "Numerous CBS Outdoor Alcohol Advertisements Endanger San Francisco Children." Available at: http://www.marininstitute.org/public_transit/muni/index.htm.

² Alaniz ML, Wilkes C. Pro-drinking messages and message environments for young adults: the case of alcohol industry advertising in African American, Latino, and Native American communities. *J.Public Health Policy* 1998;19(4):447-472;) Atkin C, Hocking J, Block M. Teenage drinking: does advertising make a difference? *Journal of Communications* 1984;34:157-167; Austin EW, Chen MJ, Grube JW. How does alcohol advertising influence underage drinking? The role of desirability, identification and skepticism. *J.Adolesc.Health* 2006 Apr;38(4):376-384; Austin EW, Knaus CS. Predicting the potential for risky behavior among those 'too young' to drink, as the result of appealing advertising. *J.Health Commun.* 2000;5:13-27; (27) Ellickson PL, Collins RL, Hambarsoomians K, McCaffrey DF. Does alcohol advertising promote adolescent drinking? Results from a longitudinal assessment. *Addiction* 2005 Feb;100(2):235-246; Mastro DE, Atkin C. Exposure to Alcohol Billboards and Beliefs and Attitudes toward Drinking among Mexican American High School Students. *Howard Journal of Communications* 2002 04;13(2):129-151;) Snyder LB, Milici FF, Slater M, Sun H, Strizhakova Y. Effects of alcohol advertising exposure on drinking among youth. *Arch.Pediatr.Adolesc.Med.* 2006 Jan;160(1):18-24; Wyllie A, Zhang JF, Casswell S. Positive responses to televised beer advertisements associated with drinking and problems reported by 18 to 29-year-olds. *Addiction* 1998;93:749-760.

³ Foster SE, Vaughan RD, Foster WH, Califano JA Jr. Estimate of the commercial value of underage drinking and adult abusive and dependent drinking to the alcohol industry. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2006 May;160(5):473-8.

⁴ NYC DOHMH Annual Progress Report Take Care New York, 2007. Available at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/tny/tny-report-2007.pdf>.

⁵ NYC DOHMH. Alcohol Use in NYC, 2005. Available at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/survey/survey-2003alcohol.pdf>.