

TARGET MARKETING OF TOBACCO AND ALCOHOL-RELATED PRODUCTS TO ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS IN THE UNITED STATES

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This paper examines whether increased consumption of tobacco and alcohol products by minority groups is a function of the target marketing campaigns directed at these groups by marketers, and whether such contributes to the perpetuation of racism. First, a description of the tobacco and alcohol consumption rates of blacks and Hispanics compared to whites is presented, including a comparative analysis of the health effects and mortality rates resulting from the consumption of tobacco and alcohol. Second, the paper examines specific marketing strategies of targeting tobacco and alcohol products to ethnic minority consumers. This is followed by a discussion of whether these practices are a deliberate strategy driven by racism or just the pursuit of profit. A framework for answering the question is provided. Finally, the paper assesses the prospects for change in the future, and analyzes specific needs for future research. (*Ethnicity Dis.* 1996;6:83-98)

KEY WORDS Target Marketing, Ethnic Minority Marketing, Alcohol Marketing, Tobacco Marketing

In 1990 alone, cigarette manufacturers in the United States spent approximately \$4 billion on cigarette advertising and promotion, a figure that is well over \$100 per second.¹ A lifelong smoker who smokes 30 cigarettes per day for 50 years consumes over half a million cigarettes and ends up spending over \$50,000. Thirty-six percent of all lifelong smokers are predicted to die from smoking, resulting in a loss of two decades of productive life.² The alcohol beverage industry's expenditure on advertising and promotion exceeds that of the tobacco industry and results in consumer expenditures of \$44 billion annually.³ However, tobacco and alcohol together as legal drugs account for significantly more health and economic problems than all illicit drugs

combined⁴, given that regular illicit drug use (see Table 1) represents a fairly small percentage of the white (5.5%), black (6.6%), and Hispanic (5.3%) populations. For example, alcohol-related problems are linked to over 200,000 deaths each year, costing society in excess of \$135 billion annually.⁵ By contrast, the annual tobacco-related mortality toll now exceeds 400,000 per year. Because the health and social problems caused by tobacco and alcohol consumption tend to be disproportionately represented among blacks and Hispanics, the tobacco and alcohol industry has been severely criticized for allegedly targeting these more at-risk ethnic groups.^{5,6,7}

Minority health patterns and tobacco and alcohol consumption

In this paper the focus will be on two ethnic minority groups, blacks (12.1% of the population) and Hispanics (9% of the population), providing fairly comprehensive coverage of the issues. According to the *1993 Statistical Abstract of the U.S.*, these two groups represent 85% of all ethnic minorities in the United States, with

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TABLE 1.—Alcohol, Tobacco, and Illicit Drug Regular Users by Race and Age Group¹: 1992

	All Age Groups		
	Alcohol	Tobacco	Illicit Drugs
White	49.7%	26.9%	5.5%
Black	39.8%	26.7%	6.6%
Hispanic	45.0%	21.5%	5.3%
12–17 Age Group			
	Alcohol	Tobacco	Illicit Drugs
White	16.7%	11.6%	6.1%
Black	13.2%	3.2%	6.1%
Hispanic	16.2%	7.4%	7.1%
18–25 Age Group			
	Alcohol	Tobacco	Illicit Drugs
White	62.9%	35.5%	13.7%
Black	50.9%	20.2%	12.1%
Hispanic	52.8%	24.1%	10.2%
26–34 Age Group			
	Alcohol	Tobacco	Illicit Drugs
White	63.7%	35.3%	10.6%
Black	55.6%	33.5%	10.3%
Hispanic	56.1%	24.4%	7.8%
35+ Age Group			
	Alcohol	Tobacco	Illicit Drugs
White	47.8%	24.8%	2.2%
Black	37.2%	32.5%	3.5%
Hispanic	44.9%	23.5%	1.3%

¹ Regular user defined as "used in the past month."

Source: *National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Population Estimates 1992*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Asians and Pacific Islanders (2.9%), and Native Americans, Eskimos, Aleutian Islanders, and others (.8%) constituting the remaining part of the U.S. minority population. Also, when assessing the impact of tobacco and alcohol consumption on minorities, most health, government, and advertising industry sources provide data only for these two groups. However, the target marketing issues addressed in the paper are also important to other ethnic minority groups, as they too are often at greater health risk and the target of promotional campaigns.

Tobacco consumption patterns

Black Americans.—Both sexes tend to suffer the highest rates of mortality and morbidity from smoking-related health problems, such as coronary heart disease and lung cancer.^{8,9} In addition, smoking among blacks plays a significant role in compounding other serious health risks and increasing the incidence of infant mortality, low birthweight, hypertension, and diabetes.^{8,10}

Although black Americans represent only 12 percent of the U.S. population, this minority group traditionally has had the highest usage rate of tobacco products. One study found that 39.7 percent of all male African Americans smoked, compared to 31.6 percent of whites and 28.5 percent of Mexican American male adults.⁸ Among females, the rates were lower, but a similar pattern persisted: 31.1 percent of all black females smoked, compared to 28.1 percent of whites and 17 percent of Mexican Americans.⁸

More recent data (see Table 1) indicate parity in the overall regular usage rates of tobacco products between whites (26.9%) and blacks (26.7%). However, these data on lower usage among blacks should not be construed to mean that there should now be less concern about tobacco promotion and its adverse effects. It is important to note that these surveys are based on broad random samples of the population and do not take into account the effects of targeted promotion on specific segments that are at greater risk, e.g., inner-city youth exposed to a preponderance of outdoor billboard advertising (to be addressed later). Therefore, the adverse effects of target marketing on specific segments of the black community may be somewhat disguised by survey results reporting on general consumption patterns at a national level.

For example, the percentage of blacks who smoke tends to be lower than the percentage for whites in the younger age

TABLE 2.—Alcohol and Tobacco Heavy Users by Race¹: 1991

	Alcohol Heavy Users by Race and Age Group					Tobacco Heavy Users by Race (Tobacco data not available by race and age group)
	12-17	18-25	26-34	35+	Total	Total
White	2.7%	13.2%	6.7%	3.6%	5.4%	16.6%
Black	1.5%	6.1%	8.8%	4.8%	5.4%	10.0%
Hispanic	1.9%	7.6%	7.7%	5.7%	6.0%	7.1%

¹ Heavy user defined as “drinking 5 or more drinks per occasion on 5 or more days in the past 30 days” for alcohol and “a pack a day or more” for tobacco.

Source: *National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Main Findings 1991*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

groups (3.2% to 11.6% in the 12-17 age group in Table 1). Some have attributed this difference to variations in background and lifestyle, e.g., black parents being far less permissive of smoking than white parents.¹¹ However, one study found that when black and white teens were given a chemical “litmus” (to test for traces of cotinine, a by-product of smoking that can be measured in saliva), the results suggested that black teens smoked at nearly twice the rate previously estimated.¹²

For older blacks the percentage escalates dramatically and eventually overtakes the smoking rate for whites in the 35+ age group (32.5% to 24.8% in Table 1). This possibly could be the result of sustained promotion targeted toward younger blacks¹³ resulting in greater use, compared to whites, as they get older. Also, it could relate to differential coping habits between blacks and whites in dealing with day-to-day life circumstances, which for blacks includes coping with greater effects due to racism, discrimination, and prejudice.¹⁴

Table 2 indicates that overall there are fewer blacks than whites (10.0% to 16.6%) who are “heavy users” of tobacco products. Another study similarly found that the mean number of packs of cigarettes smoked per day at all age levels is substantially lower than the consumption rates reported for whites.¹⁵ What is alarming though, is the

fact that smoking-attributed deaths are supposedly higher among blacks (32%) than among whites (25%). Also, black males account for 66% of the total years of productive life lost, black females 25%, and white men and women, 7% and 2%, respectively.^{16,17}

Two principal reasons may be offered to explain this phenomenon: First, recent research confirms that smoking cessation rates among blacks are lower than comparative rates among white smokers.¹⁵ Second, in comparison to white smokers, blacks tend to show a stronger preference for mentholated brands of cigarettes, which are known to contain higher levels of tar and nicotine. For example, Table 3 provides a comparison of black and white indices of usage for a number of brands, including the mentholated brands of Kool (455 to 51), Salem (493 to 51), and Newport (470 to 53). Reports from The Centers for Disease Control (Office on Smoking and Health) indicate that 76 percent of blacks smoke menthol cigarettes, compared with 23 percent of whites, and another study showed that blacks were twice as likely to smoke mentholated cigarettes compared with whites.¹⁸

Hispanic Americans.—Different studies have reported varying usage rates of tobacco products among Hispanics. For example, Table 1 indicates that the overall usage rate is lower among Hispanics (21.5%) com-

TABLE 3.—Indices of Usage of Selected Alcohol and Tobacco Brand Use¹: 1993

	Index: White Use	Index: Black Use ²	Index: Hispanic Use ²
Alcohol Brands			
Bacardi Rum	99	107	124
Beefeater Gin	108	37	69
Chivas Regal Scotch Whiskey	96	95	208
Dewars White Scotch Whiskey	102	83	90
J&B Scotch Whiskey	90	182	94
Jack Daniels Bourbon	105	70	94
Johnnie Walker Black Scotch Whiskey	97	93	155
Johnnie Walker Red Scotch Whiskey	91	151	123
Myers Rum	97	101	163
Seagrams Gin	68	341	97
Silver Tequila	104	58	166
Wild Turkey Bourbon	107	47	124
Beer Brands			
Bud Light	106	52	112
Budweiser Beer	97	112	136
Coors	108	37	121
Heineken	91	167	126
Lownebrau	95	113	166
Michelob	105	74	111
Miller Genuine Draft	104	62	105
Milwaukee's Best	98	133	200
Schlitz	72	309	132
Strohs	97	116	85
Tobacco Brands			
Benson and Hedges Lights	51	462	45
Camel Filter	106	60	134
Camel Lights Kings 100's	111	13	79
Kool Filter Kings	51	455	84
Marlboro 100's	104	45	132
Marlboro Kings	111	25	118
Marlboro Lights 100's	104	64	120
Marlboro Medium	109	31	155
Misty	90	175	109
More 100's Menthol	60	436	175
Newport Kings 100's	53	470	94
Salem 100's	5	493	150
Viceroy Kings 100's	70	344	107
Winston Kings	108	53	42

¹ The index is a measure of the performance of each ethnic group compared to the total population. An index of 100 equals average usage of that brand, and indices higher or lower than 100 indicate above or below average usage.

² Some of the Black and Hispanic indices are based on small sample sizes and should be interpreted with caution.

Source: *Mediamark Research Inc. Beer, Wine & Liquor Report* (Spring 1993) and *Shopping & Tobacco Products Report* (Spring 1993).

pared to whites (26.9%), and is lower across all age groups. However, other studies have painted a more alarming picture. The 1982-84 Hispanic Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (HHANES) reported that among 20-74 year olds, the age-adjusted smoking rates for Mexican American, Puerto Rican and Cuban American males were relatively high (42.5, 39.8, and 41.6 percent, respectively).²⁰ Among the 20 to 34-year-old men, the smoking rate for Cuban Americans (50.1%) was alarmingly high, the highest among the three Hispanic groups surveyed. The data also showed that among those heavy smokers who consumed more than a pack a day, both Puerto Rican and Cuban American men were likely to be heaviest smokers (52.3 and 64.1 percent, respectively, compared to Mexican Americans whose smoking rate was 33.8 percent). The study concluded that, in comparison to whites, excess rates of smoking related health problems such as heart diseases, lung cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases have not yet been observed among Hispanics. However, if the smoking rates for Hispanics are, indeed, substantially higher than those for whites, as suggested by some of the studies, it is quite likely that smoking related diseases will increase dramatically in the near future. Consequently, appropriate intervention strategies should be implemented to curb this trend.^{19,20}

Alcohol consumption patterns

Black Americans.—The abuse of alcohol in the United States has been linked to several serious problems. These include alcoholism, cirrhosis of the liver, cancer, birth defects, criminal behavior, psychiatric disorders and other long-term health problems.²¹ According to the 1986 report by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), "There is considerable evidence that alcohol problems have a major impact on black Americans. The consequences of alcohol abuse . . . have been extreme for black Americans, especially

black men." In fact, some reports have concluded that black Americans share a disproportionate burden of the alcohol-related diseases and social problems resulting from the abuse of alcohol.²² For example, according to a 1986 NIAAA study that covered 10 U.S. cities, death from cirrhosis of the liver was 10 times more likely to occur among non-whites than among whites.²³ In a similar manner, The National Cancer Institute data showed that between 1979-1981, mortality rates from esophageal cancer were 10 times higher for black males aged 35-44 than for whites males. Among females, the rates were three to seven times higher for blacks than for whites. Earlier reports from the NIAAA indicate that blacks do share a disproportionate burden of other alcohol-related health problems such as alcoholism, hypertension, obstructive pulmonary disease, malnutrition and birth defects.²⁴

In spite of the prevalence of alcohol-related diseases and problems in the black community, African-American youth have consistently reported significantly lower rates of alcohol use than both their white and Hispanic counterparts. For the 12-17 age group, Table 1 shows the rates to be about 16% for whites and Hispanics compared to only 13% for blacks. Some researchers have suggested that alcohol usage for whites and Hispanics tends to peak between the ages of 18-25, while the drinking rates for blacks continue to increase and peak somewhat later between the ages of 26 and 34 years.²⁵ Although the data in Table 1 fail to show evidence of this pattern, Table 2 does indicate that this pattern might be more applicable to "heavy drinkers" where whites do peak in the 18-25 age group (13.2%) while blacks peak in the 26-34 age group (8.8%). Other researchers have speculated that the lower drinking rates recorded among black youth, combined with the fact that this segment is expected to experience more rapid growth than the white population in the future, may

be the reason why the alcohol industry has been targeting minority youth. In other words, the lower drinking rates offer greater marketing opportunities.¹³

Hispanic Americans.—Table 1 indicates that the overall alcohol usage rate of Hispanics (45%) is lower than that of whites (49.7%) and lower for all age groups. However, other studies have concluded that alcohol abuse and the consequent devastating health problems have been so pervasive in the Hispanic community, that the situation has been labeled no less than an epidemic.²² For example, one leading researcher on Hispanic drinking behavior concluded that in comparison to other ethnic groups in the United States, "Hispanic men are among the groups with higher rates of heavy drinking and alcohol problems."²⁰ Another study that compared Hispanic subgroups, classified 18% of Mexican-American men as frequent heavy drinkers, followed by 16% for Cubans and 5% for Puerto Ricans. A similar study comparing a sample of 183 black American and 132 Puerto Rican alcoholics showed that a greater percentage of male (90%) and female (89%) Puerto Ricans engaged in daily drinking than their black American male (78%) and female (64%) counterparts.²⁶

As early as 1976, a study conducted by the University of Southern California reviewing the autopsies of Mexican-American men showed that between 1918 and 1970, 52% of these men aged 30 to 60 years died from alcoholism, compared to 24% for white men.²⁰ More recent studies show that 41% of Mexican Americans who died from alcohol-related illnesses, died before age 50, compared to 30% of whites who died at that early age. Mexican-American men are more likely to suffer from alcohol-related problems than their white or black counterparts. For example, one study from the San Francisco area¹⁹ reported that 12% of Mexican American men suffered from three or more alcohol problems com-

pared to 7% for both whites and blacks, respectively.²⁷

Minority target marketing of tobacco and alcohol

As in the previous section, this section will focus only on the two largest ethnic minority groups, namely blacks and Hispanics, as most minority target marketing efforts are directed towards these two groups. However, it should be noted that critics have accused the tobacco and alcohol industry of targeting other ethnic minority groups (e.g., Native Americans with Crazy Horse²⁸), in addition to what some refer to as other "vulnerable" segments, such as women (e.g., fruit-flavored "wine coolers" and Virginia Slims cigarettes) and youth (flavored cigarette targeted at 15–25 year old males²⁹).

Target marketing of tobacco products

Black Americans.—One of the primary strategies used by tobacco marketers to reach blacks in urban areas is outdoor advertising. Recent research suggests that cigarette billboard advertising appears with greater intensity in predominantly black inner-city locations. One study analyzed 901 billboards in San Francisco and found that black neighborhoods had more tobacco and alcohol billboards than white neighborhoods, while similar conclusions were drawn from another study of 2,015 billboards.^{30,31}

A more recent innovation in outdoor advertising strategy is the increasing use of smaller billboards in black communities. These ads, most of which feature high tar and nicotine menthol brands, now account for approximately 37 percent of all billboards.¹ Compared to the large highway billboards, the major advantage of these smaller billboards is that they can be placed low and close to the street, thus facilitating greater visibility to passers-by of all ages. The American Public Health Association has called on outdoor advertisers to refrain

from targeting minority communities with alcohol and tobacco billboards and to remove existing tobacco and alcohol advertising billboards including mini-billboards in minority neighborhoods.³²

Another frequently used strategy is the concentration of ads in the print media (both magazines and newspaper) read by blacks. One study that analyzed advertisements appearing in selected magazines directed at white versus black audiences, reported that magazines targeting blacks contained more cigarette advertising and more ads for menthol brands.¹⁸ A more compelling body of evidence has been provided by a recent study, which systematically analyzed 540 cigarette ads from 1950-1965 *Ebony* magazines and compared them to a matched sample from *Life*.³³ Statistical analysis revealed that the advertising strategy practiced toward black consumers even 40 years ago was segmented and segregated. The researchers concluded that racial segmentation was apparently practiced because the ads in *Ebony* featured black models (primarily professional athletes) almost exclusively, despite the fact that the black models were also popular among white audiences but were never used in *Life* magazines. Though fewer ads for cigarettes appeared in *Ebony* in the early 1950s, by 1960 and thereafter, *Ebony* carried more cigarette ads per issue than *Life*. By 1962, this ratio had doubled, thereby suggesting a systematic strategy of maintaining a disproportionate intensity of cigarette advertising in the black media. Also, blacks were not offered the safer filtered cigarette brands until years after whites. The researchers concluded: "The cigarette industry treated the black and white markets separately, but not equally. They appealed to black pride, but did so with some prejudice."³³

Hispanic Americans.—Critics have charged that tobacco companies also have flooded Hispanic neighborhoods with a disproportionately higher number of billboards than the number that would normally be

placed in white middle-class suburban neighborhoods,²⁰ and research studies tend to back up this charge.³⁰ Public health professionals have expressed concern that the continuous increase in the intensity of targeted advertising is responsible for a corresponding increase in smoking rates among Hispanic youth and women. It has been alleged that these billboards are strategically placed within convenient access to young people and children in communities that are poor and devastated. Many billboards are located near school yards and playgrounds—areas where children can easily be exposed to the advertising messages.²⁰

A more alarming recent trend is the shift to other, more cost effective methods of reaching black and Hispanic consumers. This involves a significant increase in the use of corporate sponsorship of athletic events, product placement in movies, placement of brand names on clothing or other products, contests, and cultural, civic, fashion, and entertainment events.^{17,18} These marketing approaches are often referred to in advertising terms as "unmeasured media." While marketers in general are increasingly turning to such non-traditional media—traditional media now account for less than half of all advertising expenditures with the remainder allocated to "unmeasured media"³⁴—researchers have recognized that this trend is of particular concern in terms of its impact on minorities.³⁵ Although very little is currently known about the effects of such media, it is generally accepted that such media is less expensive, can influence both consumption and brand decisions, and tends to be focused on specific target audiences. Hence, these marketing tactics have the potential of allowing tobacco marketers to more effectively target ethnic minority communities with their promotions.

Target marketing of alcohol products

Like tobacco, the alcohol industry has been facing mounting criticism from gov-

TABLE 4.—Alcohol Outdoor Advertising in Selected Cities*: 1993

	Percent of Population Black and/or Hispanic	Outdoor Advertising Per Square Mile
Representative Cities with Low Minority Populations		
Sioux Falls, SD	1.3%	\$0
Boise, ID	3.3%	\$0
Cedar Rapids, IA	4.0%	\$0
Eugene, OR	4.0%	\$147
Spokane, WA	4.0%	\$36
Representative Cities with A High Hispanic Population		
Dallas, TX	20.9%	\$3732
Bridgeport, CT	26.5%	\$5319
Houston, TX	27.6%	\$2260
Hartford, CT	31.6%	\$3220
Los Angeles, CA	39.9%	\$7082
Miami, FL	62.5%	\$4888
Representative Cities with A High Black Population		
Rochester, NY	31.5%	\$3458
Chicago, IL	39.1%	\$8117
Cleveland, OH	46.6%	\$7019
Flint, MI	47.9%	\$3732
Baltimore, MD	59.2%	\$8239
Detroit, MI	75.7%	\$5522

* Outdoor advertising only for brands and cities tracked in the Leading National Advertisers database.

Source: Competitive Media Reporting (Leading National Advertisers database for 1993).

ernment agencies, concerned citizens and the media about the type of advertising that is now targeted toward minority groups.^{13,36,37} As with tobacco, billboard advertising is of major concern. Table 4 compares selective cities with low versus high black and Hispanic populations. The data indicate that there is a significantly higher level of spending in terms of billboard dollars per square mile for the cities with higher representations of minorities (e.g., \$147 per square mile in Eugene, Oregon with a minority population of 4% compared to \$8,239 per square mile in Baltimore with a black population of 59%, and \$4,888 per square mile in Miami with a Hispanic population of 63%).

However, it must be acknowledged that there are many other variables that can con-

found the results of such city-to-city comparisons, e.g., size of the cities in square miles, size of the total markets in terms of population, population density, municipal ordinances regulating billboards, etc. It is important, in addition to city comparisons, to look at neighborhood level comparisons within a city, i.e., predominantly black versus white neighborhoods. However, even here, as noted above in regard to tobacco, the evidence suggests a greater concentration of advertising in minority neighborhoods. For example, one study found that the density of alcohol billboards was 16 times greater in black and Latino city neighborhoods in Los Angeles, compared to suburban white neighborhoods.³⁸

Another concern is the level of advertising intensity in media directed at blacks. Table 5 provides an analysis of the primary black print (magazine) media for 1993 and 1992 in terms of the amount of alcohol advertising (200 and 242 pages) compared to food and food products (159 and 155 pages) and confectionery, snacks, and soft drinks (74 and 91 pages). Table 6 indicates the percent of total advertising dollars represented by liquor (4.1%), beer (14.4%), and tobacco (4.3%) spent on the primary black print media. Although these dollar amounts may not seem excessive compared to the percentage of the population represented by these groups, it should be noted that advertisers in general spend only a small fraction of their total media budgets on these target publications, often assuming that such consumers can be reached through the general media, and that there are only a small number of these targeted magazines available compared to the multitude of other magazine outlets for alcohol ad placement. Also, even though the percentage of total alcohol ad dollars spent on targeted media may be small, this percentage represents a significantly greater number of pages compared to non-alcohol product categories, as indicated in Table 5.

Another criticism is that marketers are

TABLE 5.—Alcohol Advertising Pages in Print Media Targeted to Blacks Compared to Other Product Categories*: 1992 and 1993

	Number of Pages	
	1993	1992
General Product Category:		
Food and Food Products	159	155
Confectionery, Snacks & Soft Drinks	74	91
Liquor, Beer, and Wine	200	242
Representative Liquor, Beer, and Wine Brands:		
Absolut Vodka	4	19
Anheuser-Busch Company General Promotion	12	17
Bacardi Rum	3	12
Budweiser Beer	11	13
Canadian Mist Whiskey	13	10
Chivas Regal Scotch Whiskey	12	13
Hennessy Cognac Brandy	30	23
Miller Genuine Draft	5	7
Seagrams Crown Royal Canadian Whiskey	9	8
Seagrams Extra Dry Gin	22	23
Tanqueray London Gin	30	6

* Advertising in print media targeted to blacks defined as all ads for the selected categories and brands tracked in the Leading National Advertisers database and appearing in *Ebony*, *Jet*, *Black Enterprise*, and *Essence*.

Source: Competitive Media Reporting (Leading National Advertisers database for 1992 and 1993).

more aggressive in promoting alcohol products that have greater potential for health-threatening and possibly lethal effects due to alcoholic content than in promoting other types of alcohol products. For example, alcohol companies have long been targeting malt liquors toward urban blacks and Hispanics.^{13,20} Malt liquors contain as much as 50 percent more alcohol (4.9% vs. 5.9%) than traditional beer. Much of the controversy over the marketing of malt liquors has focused on the recent introduction of a 40-ounce bottle with brand names like Colt 45, King Cobra, Crazy Horse and St. Ides. This product is being rapidly adopted into the inner-city youth culture and is now regarded as a substitute for street drugs because

TABLE 6.—Alcohol and Tobacco Print Advertising in Media Targeted to Blacks¹: 1993

	Total Ad Dollars (000)	Total Minority Ad Dollars (000)	Total Ad Pages	Total Minority Ad Pages
Liquor (Not Including Wine)				
	\$170,810	\$4,471 (2.6%)	3,570	148 (4.1%)
Beer				
	\$20,944	\$1,265 (6.0%)	362	52 (14.4%)
Tobacco				
	\$231,921	\$5,182 (2.2%)	3,149	136 (4.3%)

¹ Alcohol and tobacco ads in media targeted to blacks defined as all alcohol and tobacco ads tracked in the Leading National Advertisers database and appearing in *Ebony*, *Jet*, *Black Enterprise*, and *Essence*.

Source: Competitive Media Reporting (Leading National Advertisers database for 1993).

of its ability to produce a quick, inexpensive "high."³⁹

Drug counselors and health officials express concern that, in spite of the absence of any studies on the effects of malt liquor on youth, there is evidence of a significant increase in underage drinking linked to the availability of the large malt liquor bottles.³⁹ An increasing number of youth are now being treated for twin addictions—drugs and alcohol. Critics have charged that the advertising of malt liquors is unabashedly aimed at inner-city youth by using themes that often make allusions to the potency of the brew, and its association with power, sex, hedonism and even "a drug-like high." For example, some malt liquors like Olde English 800 use drug slang language in the advertising copy.⁴⁰ Also, crude and explicit appeals to sex are often used by malt liquor advertisers to appeal to black adolescents (not young adults over 21 years of age) who are exposed to rappers and rock stars appearing on late night black contemporary music shows.¹³ According to a 1991 report in *The Wall Street Journal*, certain parts of the lyrics to a St. Ides rap in one advertisement were so crude and offensive that the Washington State Liquor Control Board banned it after blacks in Se-

attle complained—the ad copy referred to getting “your girl in the mood quicker” and getting sexually aroused (anatomical reference deleted) with a six-pack of St. Ides malt liquor.⁴⁰

Target marketing: “good business” or racism?

The strategy of segmenting the market by ethnic groupings and targeting each segment is a common practice used in marketing.⁴¹ Usually, such a strategy has a positive connotation and is applauded by minority consumers, especially when used in conjunction with products deemed not to have deleterious health effects, e.g., target marketing of hair care products to blacks or ethnic foods to Hispanics. What becomes challenging is demarcating “good” ethnic target marketing which satisfies consumer wants and “bad” target marketing that may have detrimental consequences on the targeted segment.

Even with tobacco and alcohol, the fact that these products are differentially targeted toward minorities is not sufficient evidence for attributing a racist motivation to the marketers. Part of a marketer’s job is to target specific segments of the population, find out exactly what those segments desire, and fulfill those desires. For example, Table 3 indicates that minority black consumers, compared to whites, are more likely to use Johnnie Walker Red Scotch Whiskey (index=151 vs. 91, respectively) and Schlitz beer (index=309 vs. 72, respectively) while Hispanics as compared to whites are more likely to use Chivas Regal Scotch Whisky (208 vs. 96, respectively) and Milwaukee’s Best (200 vs. 98, respectively). The same is true of product categories. For example, Table 7 on indices for alcohol product categories shows that blacks as compared to whites are more likely to use rum (119 vs. 98, respectively) and gin (135 vs. 95, respectively) while Hispanics compared to whites are more likely to use tequila (158 vs. 104, respectively). It seems reasonable

TABLE 7.—Indices of Alcohol and Tobacco Category Use by Race¹: 1993

	White	Black	Hispanic
Alcohol Categories			
Vermouth	103	92	82
Rum	98	119	121
Bourbon	105	66	100
Canadian Whiskey	102	90	85
Scotch Whiskey	99	101	103
Rye/Blended Whiskey	105	65	97
Vodka	102	85	97
Gin	95	135	94
Tequila	104	57	158

¹ The index is a measure of performance of each ethnic group compared to the total population. An index of 100 equals average usage of that product category, and indices higher or lower than 100 indicate above or below average usage.

Source: *Mediamark Research Inc. Beer, Wine & Liquor Report* (Spring 1993).

to conclude that marketers of those brands and product categories, which have higher consumption rates among minorities, will be more aggressive in marketing to minorities.

As a result of this natural tendency of a marketer to go after the most attractive segments, proponents of target marketing often mention First Amendment rights and the protection of commercial speech, the inappropriateness of paternalistic protection by the government, and freedom of consumer choice to support their arguments. For example, The Association of National Advertisers has attacked proposals to constrain ethnic targeting as “bordering on racism, let alone censorship,”⁴² and some civil rights activists have even suggested that restricting minority directed target marketing is tantamount to saying that minority consumers are incapable of making their own decisions.⁴³

Of course, an important question that neither side has answered conclusively is whether the demand for the product preceded the promotion, or whether the promotion produced the demand. Proponents of target marketing will argue that minorities were

consumers of alcohol and tobacco products for years, long before the advent of aggressive target marketing efforts and even during the time when companies virtually ignored minorities in developing their marketing strategies. For example, the brewing industry insists that malt liquors have always been highest among minority drinkers; therefore, the brewing companies are merely serving a group of consumers who already have a preference for the product.³⁹

However, even if it is granted that tobacco and alcohol marketers may not be consciously targeting minority consumers based on a racist motivation, there still is cause for concern. For one, it is important to determine if ethnic minorities are more vulnerable to the attempted influence of tobacco and alcohol manufacturers than middle-class white males, a group that has shown a greater decline in smoking than any other group.⁴⁴ Based on the limited research in this area, there is little evidence to substantiate the greater vulnerability to the argument on advertising influence, although some studies indicate that minorities have a differential response rate to mass media.⁴⁵

Second, it is important to acknowledge that target marketing efforts may have unintended, spin-off effects and consequences that are exactly the same as if the motivation had been racist. For example, marketers may allocate the "right" amount of their marketing dollars motivated purely by profit maximization and the proportion of their market represented by minority consumers; however, the effect of that "right" amount might still result in significantly greater negative consequences in minority communities than non-minority communities. Therefore, it is important to establish a framework for ascertaining when certain target marketing practices are just "good marketing" and when they stem from a racist motivation, or at least have the same effect as if the motivation had been racist. If the answer is yes to any of the following

five questions, then the target marketing practice is highly likely to be perceived as stemming from a racist motivation:

1. Does a firm's target marketing effort take advantage of consumers who may be more susceptible to the effects of promotion, i.e., less adept at coping with persuasive tactics?
2. Does a firm's target marketing effort take advantage of consumers who may be more vulnerable, based on income, education, knowledge, age, maturity, life's circumstances, etc.?
3. Is there a cause and effect link between a firm's target marketing effort and increased alcohol and tobacco consumption among the targeted segments in the short term (initial start-up consumption) and in the long-term (lower cessation rates and/or greater gravitation to the "heavy user" category)?
4. Does a firm's target marketing effort result in a greater allocation of promotional dollars directed to minority consumers than would be warranted based on the segment's brand and product category rates of consumption?
5. Regardless of the intent, e.g., non-racist motivation, does target marketing result in disproportionate harm to minority consumers in terms of social costs and other societal concerns, e.g. economic, health, employment, crime, violence, family problems, etc.?

Prospects for change in the future

Whether or not target marketing stems from a racist motivation, many already feel that the effects of target marketing have reached a crisis stage and are issuing a challenge to researchers, public health professionals, public policy decision-makers, and the tobacco and alcohol industry itself to chart a meaningful direction for change. Three domains in which potential change could occur are discussed below.

Voluntary methods

Some critics of target marketing have suggested that the media should take a proactive stance by limiting or even refusing advertising submitted by the tobacco and alcohol industry, and by running more editorial material on the dangers of tobacco use and alcohol abuse. However, a recent study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*⁴⁶ reported that those magazines that did not carry cigarette ads were more than 40% likely than others to publish any material about the serious health risks of smoking. This phenomenon was particularly evident with respect to magazines catering to women, a group for which lung cancer is now the leading cause of cancer death.⁴⁷ The study also pointed out that those magazines with the highest degree of dependence on cigarette advertising revenues were the least likely to cover anti-smoking issues. This suggests that the effect of voluntary advertising restrictions and articles critical of the industry, particularly by media dependent on the industry's advertising revenue, is very unlikely to be effective. In addition, because the tobacco and alcohol industries have an impressive record of financial involvement in both the Hispanic and the African-American communities by sponsoring major events and contributing generously to educational foundations, organizations (e.g. NAACP), and civil rights figures, many of the leading organizations representing both Hispanics and blacks have been surprisingly silent.^{20,24}

Federal and state legislative methods

During the 1980s marketers were pretty much insulated from regulation as the federal government took a hands-off attitude. More recently, advertising has come under intense scrutiny because of mounting pressure for anti-advertising legislation in Congress. At one point the American Advertising Federation noted at least 30 proposals in the U.S. Senate and House of Representen-

tatives geared toward greater regulation of advertising.⁴⁸ In particular, alcohol product promotion has received extensive criticism.^{5,6,49} Some of the proposed bills include restricting or possibly banning target marketing, particularly to groups at greater risk, such as heavy drinkers, young people, ethnic minority groups, and women.

Consumer activism

While the legislative process could prove extremely lengthy and time consuming, public outcry, consumer activism, professional health organization recommendations, and well-publicized condemnations from the Surgeon General have provided speedier results. For example, The American Public Health Association recently called for the advertising and media industries and the alcohol beverage and tobacco producing industries to incorporate prohibitions against targeting minority communities into their codes of advertising practices.³² The tobacco industry suffered an embarrassing defeat in 1990 when R. J. Reynolds was forced to withdraw "Uptown," a cigarette with the highest level of nicotine ever marketed in the U.S.⁹⁰ and targeted at blacks. The imposed withdrawal was mainly as a result of a coalition of over 30 grassroots organizations and public condemnation from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary.^{17,50} In a similar manner, consumer protests in 1990 resulted in the withdrawal of *Powermaster*, a highly potent malt liquor targeted at blacks and produced by the Heileman Brewing Company.¹³

Future target marketing research needs

Unfortunately, although various research approaches (including econometrics/modeling, experimentation, quasi-experimentation, surveys, content analysis, and qualitative studies) have been used to investigate the question of whether or not advertising increases total consumption for tobacco and alcohol, this remains an undecided and con-

controversial issue. The inconclusive findings of these studies do not mean we should throw up our hands in vain in attempting to assess the relationship between tobacco and alcohol advertising and consumption. It is highly likely that many of these studies displayed certain methodological flaws or were not appropriate for examining the link between alcohol advertising and aggregate consumption.⁵¹

The inappropriateness of certain research approaches is particularly relevant in assessing the effect of target advertising toward ethnic minorities. For example, econometric modeling approaches tend to focus on aggregate consumption of alcohol, often aggregating beer, wine, and spirits together without making any distinction. This approach then typically examines the correlation between advertising expenditure as the independent variable and overall alcohol consumption as the dependent variable. However, it is generally recognized that for different segments of the population, positive advertising elasticities may be found for beer and distilled spirits consumption, but not for wine consumption. These differential elasticities are particularly important in understanding the effects of target marketing, e.g. the high rate of malt liquor consumption among blacks. Therefore, from a target marketing perspective, aggregate consumption analysis fails to address these issues and therefore limits our understanding of the effect of advertising on specific segments of consumers. Also, particular marketing efforts may have differential effects on consumers in different stages of involvement with alcohol. These differential effects may be masked when all consumers are analyzed as a single group.^{13,52}

Analysis at the disaggregate level

Future research on target marketing will benefit greatly by focusing analysis at the disaggregate level rather than on aggregate consumption, as has traditionally been done. One approach might involve exam-

ining the purchase behavior of minority consumers in ethnic minority neighborhoods compared to non-minority neighborhoods. This approach could be adopted using scanner data from stores in different ethnic neighborhoods as has been done to assess retail target marketing strategies.⁵³

Another approach is to focus on brand level consumption, given that it is generally recognized that advertising has its primary effect on brand preferences, rather than general consumption. Also, to truly understand the effects of target marketing, it is necessary to understand strategic advertising planning and what advertisers refer to as "aperture," i.e., reaching the right audience, at the right time, at the right place, with the right message.^{14,54} This is most appropriately studied at the brand level as almost every alcohol ad is designed to use aperture to appeal to and influence a specific target segment, rather than to promote alcohol consumption in general across all segments.

Unfortunately, most alcohol advertising research cited in the target marketing debate has ignored this level of analysis. Because each ad has a strategy based on aperture, it will have a varying effect across segments. Measuring the effects of ads across a broad sample of the population may mask the effect of the ad on the specific target segment that it was designed to reach. Researchers can minimize this problem by choosing a random sample of subjects only from among the targeted segment based on strategic advertising planning and aperture, e.g. measuring the effects of a Billy Dee Williams ad only on targeted black consumers. Generally, though, researchers opt for generating generic ads to appeal across segments so that a broad range of subjects can be exposed to the same ad and comparisons can be made across groups. Unfortunately, such ads created in the absence of a specific strategic focus typically are so bland that they are totally ineffective in producing the desired effects the researcher is trying to

measure. Other suggestions for future research on target marketing that take into consideration disaggregate level analysis based on aperture include designing studies to examine effects such as: (1) the medium selected, such as ethnic, minority-oriented newspapers, magazines, radio stations, and television programs; (2) the neighborhood in which there is a proliferation of billboards, such as malt liquor billboards in urban inner city areas; (3) the people selected as human models and spokespersons, such as using Billy Dee Williams for Colt 45 Malt Liquor; and (4) the type of appeal used, such as rap music to reach urban youth.

Directions for future research

Future research should take into consideration the multiple causes (e.g., price, availability, peer pressure, social influence, habits of parents and friends, curiosity, scholastic abilities, where and with whom adolescents spend spare time, etc.) of alcohol and tobacco consumption and the interaction of alcohol and tobacco advertising with these other variables. Also, researchers need to conduct more longitudinal studies, given that drinking and smoking behavior is likely the result of thousands of advertisements over decades rather than of viewing one or two advertisements, as is typically done in research experiments.

In addition, researchers need to be more open to investigating alternative explanations and theories. For example, one theory that has been largely ignored is commodity theory.⁵⁵ This theoretical approach suggests that as more restrictions are placed on alcohol and tobacco advertising, this would have the opposite of the intended effect (i.e., consumption would increase). For example, among adolescents it has been observed that putting restrictions on alcohol advertising and consumption has made it more desirable among the underage, transforming it into a rite of passage, a "forbidden fruit is sweeter" mechanism.⁵⁶ Finally,

as suggested above, more emphasis on strategic planning and aperture is needed.

Obviously more and better research is needed before we can have a full and proper understanding of questions related to the relationship between alcohol and tobacco target marketing, and ethnic minority consumption. Given the above-mentioned limitations of past research and recommendations for future research, it is hoped that better designs and procedures will be developed that can provide better answers to these questions.

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