



REGULATING ALCOHOL ADVERTISING IN SOCIAL MEDIA – THE FINNISH CASE

Anu Katainen

anu.h.katainen@helsinki.fi

Dr.Soc.Sc, Adjunct professor in sociology
University lecturer in social policy

PI: Online Marketing of Alcohol in Finland (Academy of Finland 2016-2018)



OUTLINE

- In 2015, Finland became the first country in the world to incorporate special regulation of social media into the Alcohol Act.
 - Why were the social media restrictions implemented?
 - How does the Finnish Alcohol Act regulate alcohol marketing in social media?
 - What are the outcomes?



TERMINOLOGY

- **Social media platforms:** social networking sites, here Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube
- **Social media posts:** contents that are published on social media platforms
- **User engagement:** consumers' response to posts. Can be measured as how many times the posts have been *liked, commented or shared*.
- **Organic reach:** visibility that is achieved without paying for it



Original Long Drink

5 November at 12:19 · ⚙️



17.11. juhlietaan vuoden harmainta päivää. #vuodenharmainpäivä

17.11. Vuoden harmain päivä



harmaalle taivaalle.



-0:04



👍 😄 ❤️ 5.6K

415 Comments 751 shares 643K views

HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI



AIMS OF THE NEW LAW

- 1. To protect children and adolescent from the exposure to alcohol advertising.**
 - Especially relevant in new media environments, such as social media platforms.
- 2. To restrict the use of consumers as distributors and producers of alcohol advertising.**



SOCIAL MEDIA REGULATION IN THE FINNISH ALCOHOL ACT

- According to the social media amendment, the marketing of mild alcoholic beverages is prohibited if
 - the advertising commercial operator in an information network service administered by itself uses any textual or visual content produced by consumers, or places into the service textual or visual content, produced by itself or by consumers, which is intended to be shared by consumers. (translation from Montonen & Tuominen 2017, 203)
- Alcohol brands are not allowed
 - to use user-generated content in social media alcohol advertising
 - to publish content that are *intended to be shared by consumers*
 - to use games, lotteries and competitions



ENFORCEMENT

- The National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health (Valvira) is responsible of the enforcement of marketing regulations.
- Valvira gives guidelines for how the law should be applied (for the purpose of monitoring and informing alcohol marketers).
- Valvira has no resources for actual monitoring, it only assesses cases that have been notified for them (by companies, associations, private citizens etc).
- In case of violations, Valvira notifies marketers and gives guidance on acceptable marketing practice, but may also forbid certain contents and expressions.



THE STUDY

- Comparison of Finnish and Swedish alcohol marketing posts on Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and Twitter before and after the implementation of social media regulation in Finland.
- 38 alcohol brands from Finland, 52 from Sweden, all major Swedish and Finnish brands included.
- Posts from brands' accounts at three time points, January 2014, January 2016 and January 2017.
- N=2740, Finland N=1536 and Sweden N=1204



OUTCOMES OF THE LAW

- The law has had no impact on the volume of alcohol advertising in social media.
- The use of user-generated content declined in Finland from 2016 to 2017 (the increase continued in Sweden)

However,

- The law has had no impact on advertisers' possibilities to engage users.



DISCUSSION

- The law change has had an impact on the marketing techniques used by Finnish alcohol brands in social media, no impact on user-engagement.
- The consumer reach dependent on marketers' skills to take advantage of the platforms, very difficult to regulate by law.
- The main difficulties in the regulation:
 - the law aims at limiting the spread of alcohol advertising content in environments that are based on content sharing.
 - Social media service providers operate globally, constant development of algorithms and platforms to customize consumer reach.
- Total ban in social media? Outsourcing marketing to social media influencers.



CONCLUSIONS

- Further research is needed on
 - the long-term impact of legislation
 - the new forms of influencer marketing
 - how company PR messages, political interest promotion and advertising mix in social media marketing



Thank you!