

**THE EFFECT OF ADVERTISEMENTS ON ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION AMONG
THE YOUTH IN GHANA**

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Mr Speaker, the future of this nation depends on what we do to our youth today. They are filled with tremendous and towering ambitions. It will be a great waste if they are not moulded and adequately armed to face the tasks ahead of them. It is said that good habits formed at youth make all the difference hence, every policy a nation seeks to implement should aim at protecting our youth from any kind of harm. That is not to suggest that adults do not matter, they do. However, it is said that it is better to build the youth than to mend the men of old.

Mr Speaker, among the many ~~crisis~~ that confront our youth and their future is the use and abuse of alcoholic beverages. The high publicity and prestige our societies give to alcohol have gradually downplayed the damaging effects of alcohol use. Ghana has been listed among countries where alcohol consumption is high; this is certainly not an achievement to be proud of, bearing in mind the repercussions of alcohol abuse.

Mr Speaker, to a very large extent, the various means through which our youth are initiated into alcohol use such as parental influence, peer pressure, societal construct can be controlled by our schools, religious organisations and the society as a whole. As legislators, it is imperative that we do something about the most common and biggest medium; **Advertisements**. Hundreds of advertisements on alcoholic beverages are aired on radio and television daily. As if that is not enough, they are displayed on huge billboards as well as small ones. The alcohol industry is conscious of the power of advertisements so they waste no time in investing heavily in what the Medical News Today describes as illicit alcohol due to the fact that it is brewed locally and not properly examined by the Food and Drugs Authority.

Mr Speaker, various research works have revealed that advertisements associated with alcoholic beverages serve as a catalyst for alcohol consumption and subsequently the abuse of it. A study done by James D. Sargent , MD, as reported by 'Psychology Today' stated emphatically that, "familiarity with and response to images of television alcohol marketing was linked to the subsequent onset of drinking alcohol across a range of outcomes of varying severity among adolescents and young adults, adding to studies suggesting that alcohol advertisements is one cause of youth drinking."



Mr speaker, according to Grube & Waiters, (2005) alcohol adverts affects decisions to consume alcohol while Ellickson et al (2005) established that exposure of the youth to alcohol adverts influences them to begin drinking. Austin and Knaus(2000) also state alcohol adverts induce liking of the advert in the youth and eventually influence them to consume more alcohol.

Mr. Speaker, the concluding remarks of another research done by Frank Amoateng, (University of Cape Coast - Center for Continuing Education) and Kwame Poku, (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology - School of Business) on the **Impact of Alcoholic Consumption: a Case Study of Consumers in Bantama Sub-Metro** says, “on the basis on the findings, the researchers have drawn the following conclusions: advertising is a powerful tool in marketing of alcoholic beverages to a large number of consumers at various destinations especially the use of television and radio. It was also revealed that advertisements influence consumers’ preferences to a large extent, especially consumers who associate a celebrity with a brand as well as having actual knowledge about a product performance or functions, labelling and product ingredients. The use of local language in composing background music in the advertisement has a major influence on consumer purchase behaviour and must be encouraged.”

“Again it was also revealed that consumers take alcoholic beverage for many reasons which included socialization, relaxation, and peer pressure among others. However, the more mature consumers take alcoholic beverage due to other reasons more than being enticed by advertisements. Indeed the younger age groups were more influenced by advertisements which eventually have a positive impact on their level of alcohol consumption. It can be concluded that advertisement has the power to influence consumer consumption patterns. However, the nature of the impact suggests advertisers need additional considerations in making decisions on alcoholic beverage advertisements.”

Mr Speaker, clearly, to a very large extent advertisements influence especially the youth to consume alcohol. Their recommendations are that, marketers should choose celebrities that will appeal to the youth in their advertising campaigns and to make radio and television their number one advertising media since all categories of consumers can be brought to their basket within the long run and would likely influence their purchasing behaviour.

Mr Speaker, this revelation is worrying. The recommendations, if implemented spell a disaster in the waiting. According to the researchers, mature consumers were not influenced by adverts rather it was the youth. This implies that marketers already have the youth hooked to alcohol

consumption due to the language, music, and choice of celebrities as well as the assumed functions of these alcoholic beverages portrayed in the adverts. It was then recommended that marketers invest heavily in adverts aired on television and radio in order to capture more consumers.

Mr Speaker, let us not forget that children and adolescents also listen to radio and watch television. We are sitting on a time bomb; it is only a matter of time before it explodes.

Mr Speaker, that reminds me of another controversial issue, these adverts always conclude with the line "not to be sold to persons below the age of 18". How do our bar tenders identify persons who are 18 and those who are not? Does it mean our pupils and students in our Junior High Schools; Senior High Schools and even in the universities can use alcohol just because they have turned 18? Taking into account that alcohol dulls the mind and consequently will affect their academic work, as legislators, we should regulate the laws of this nation to discourage the use and abuse of alcohol among the youth. In the USA, the legal drinking age for liquor is 21 years hence we can also do something about the legal drinking age.

Mr Speaker, these adverts are craftily designed to entice the youth to believe that alcohol promotes prestige, attraction, seduction, sex appeal and gives sexual stamina. These youth are barely 20 years; sexual activity at this age comes with a lot of consequences.

Mr Speaker, it is estimated that 90% of alcoholic drinks advertised in Ghana suggest that they give sexual stamina to men and women which contradicts the Liquor Licensing Act 1970 {act 331} which states "advertisement should neither claim nor suggest that any alcoholic drink can contribute towards sexual success or can enhance sexual attractiveness". The reality on the ground is that many of the adverts suggest that the alcoholic beverage is an aphrodisiac – arousing, increasing or intensifying sexual desire. To some extent that is exactly what alcohol does, and the effects are damaging. No wonder 60 years after independence, Ghana is still confronted with issues such as teenage pregnancy, school dropout, street children, violence against women and children and a host of others.

Mr Speaker, our youth are being exploited by the alcohol industry, unfortunately, the advertising regulatory bodies; the National Media Commission and most importantly the Food and Drugs Authority are not doing enough to sanction culprits who have disregarded the law. We need to save our youth. The industry may be making gains and paying taxes to the government but at the peril of our youth and the future of this country.

Mr. Speaker, at this juncture, it is empirical that alcoholic advertisements influence the youth to consume alcohol, this implies that the reverse will significantly control the youth from drinking. Studies done by John Hopkins Bloomberg Schools of Public Health (Center on Alcoholic Marketing and Youth) recommend a complete ban on alcohol advertisement as the most effective way of reducing alcohol abuse among the youth which largely results in premature deaths and other health and social risks.

Mr. Speaker, considering the fact that poor grades, ^{unsafe} risky sex, alcohol addiction, social deviance, social irresponsibility, health risk and mortality are among the negative effects of alcohol use and abuse among the youth, it is important that we pass laws to regulate alcohol advertisements. These laws should aim at banning all distillery companies whose alcohol advertisements flout the code of advertising practice published in our statute books from advertising their products.

In addition to the above, the number of alcohol advertisements should be reduced drastically to pave way for positive campaigns that will neutralise the effects of these disastrous adverts so as to educate the youth on the overwhelming dangers of alcohol use and abuse.

Mr. Speaker, our socio-cultural events such as naming ceremonies, funerals, pouring of libation, engagements, funerals and festivals cannot be fully executed customarily without the use of alcohol. After all, Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding reception. However, it will be wise to start questioning the unnecessary hype the distillery companies give to alcoholic beverages.

Mr Speaker, in conclusion, in **mobilising for Ghana's future**, one thing we can do is to safeguard our youth, they have great unimaginable potentials, the surest way to make them realise their full potentials is to have the courage to change old ideas and practices so that we may direct their path towards good end.

Thank you Mr. Speaker for the opportunity.

