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# **PROMOTING VICES**

## **An introduction to research on the advertising of coercive products**

*With examples from research on alcohol, tobacco, sugary foods,  
and gambling*

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Publications of the Faculty of Social Sciences 67 (2017)

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Cover Picture: Elias Wulff, 2017

ISBN 978-951-51-3289-5 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-951-51-3290-1 (PDF)

Unigrafia

Helsinki 2017

# ABSTRACT

This book provides an introduction to the study of advertising products that jurisdictions typically regulate due to their potential harmfulness to health and well-being. Examples come from studies on the advertising of alcohol, tobacco, sugary foods, and gambling.

It maps the most usual dilemma formulations and approaches employed by researchers. It addresses the subject also from the perspectives of new mediatized life, merged genres, synchronized communication technologies, and fuzzy borders between producers and consumers of commercial messages.

The book suggests four problematization foci that the research has typically concerned: content, effect, vulnerable groups, and, policy.

It portrays a research field that is underpinned by notions of the harmful effects caused by marketing and of the relevance of pointing out this circumstance in order to achieve a political change.

After each chapter the book summarizes some take-home messages. It concludes by providing recommendations to researchers who want to take on tasks in this area of research.

**Key words:** advertising, marketing, alcohol, sugary foods, advertisement targeted at children, tobacco advertising, gambling advertising, gamblication

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research of this book is funded by *The Finnish Foundation for Alcohol Studies*. I want to thank Pirkko Hautamäki, Karl Johan Hellman, Janne Seppänen, and Thomas Babor for encouragement and quality control.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

During the television morning shows, loud advertisements for cereals and candy pass by, bursting with colorful images. On the bus to work, small pop-up notices on the smart phone screen urge users to hurry up and buy a lottery row on the gambling App. And the App takes the users directly to an online casino asking whether they want to bet on an ongoing football game. “*Betting on your team has never been so easy and risk-free!*”

In our daily lives we come across a myriad of short film clips, images with invitations, suggestions, and convincing argumentation to buy different products. Some of these products are of the kind that most jurisdictions consider warranting some sort of notification or warning of their unhealthy or risky aspects. Alcohol beverages, tobacco products, gambling, and sugary foods are all viewed as commodities with potentially health-related, addictive, or socially harmful consequences. Consequently, their producers should not too aggressively invite people or certain groups of consumers to buy them.

This book discusses research on the commercial promotion of such dubious or controversial products. It provides an introduction to the study of advertising products that jurisdictions typically regulate due to their potential harmfulness to health and well-being. Examples come from studies on the advertising of alcohol, tobacco, sugary foods, and gambling. The book maps the most usual dilemma formulations and approaches employed by researchers thus far.

The research in this area is not a homogeneous set of studies, but rather involves various scopes and draws on many different disciplinary traditions. It can, for example, highlight advertising and its impact; such research trials, evaluates, and provides evidence and proof of distinct aspects of the phenomenon of advertising. Often, the research aims at making decision-makers more aware of the actual and potential increased harmful behavior that the marketing may induce. A great concern has been to enlighten the public of the ways in which they are targeted by commercial interests in different promotion strategies. The researcher is often the one to point out and analyze the roles and function of advertising in society (cf. Divita 2011).

This book provides a crash course, or a series of snapshots, of ways in which research has provided insights into the advertising of dubious products. In order to illustrate how this research is designed, what it contributes, and how it works, I will use examples from the fields of alcohol, tobacco, sugary foods, and gambling advertising research. By no means is this book comprehensive, but is to be viewed as a mapping with comments and examples—a gateway into a field of research.

The materialization and the logics of the strategies and platforms in targeting consumers with commercial messages are undergoing great change. Another objective of this book is therefore to present and discuss research that

is trying to integrate these new trends; I will describe them and explain what they mean and imply. The main focus is thus discussed from the perspectives of new mediatized life: merged genres, synchronized communication technologies, and fuzzing borders between producers and consumers of commercial messages. After each chapter the book summarizes some take-home messages, providing recommendations to researchers who want to take on tasks in this area of research.

The intended audience of this book are scholars, students, or anyone interested in questions related, for example, to consumer protection, public health, or public policy. Research shows that consumers' general attitudes toward advertising have become increasingly negative (e.g., Zanut 1984), so there might be an audience of consumers with a general interest in research available in this area.

My point of departure reflects my background in social sciences; in sociology and in media and communication. I am not a specialist in behaviorist or medical research, but I approach these as epistemologies among many others, discussing what their contribution has been to the field as a whole.

I will use the terms marketing and advertising partly in a parallel fashion. The former is a broader concept involving all types of commercial strategies of promotion, of which advertising proper is only one part (for definitions, see Baker & Wheeler 1984). Nevertheless, for the purposes of this book, I find that 'advertising' is the most useful and functional concept. It is broad enough to cover a lot of different strategies yet specific enough for the reader to understand that the messages under study are intended messages and that the research under study concerns intended commercial communication targeted at different audiences. Furthermore, the concept also signifies the verb "to advertise," which is the practice and the activity in focus in this book.

The vices or the questionable, wicked, or dubious products that are referred to—alcohol, tobacco, sugary food, and gambling—are not necessarily "dubious" in themselves. They are pronounced as such through the research under study. Young and Markham (2017) refer to such commodities as *coercive commodities*, defining them as goods and services that promote "akratic" consumption: their consumption is in the current knowledge-focus societies recognized by consumers themselves as not always in their own best interests, all things considered. Most people know that it is unhealthy to smoke or to eat candy.

Focusing on the four product categories enables me to point out similarities and differences in certain views and approaches. Also, it demonstrates the cultural position of the products and how it has come to color the inquiries into their advertising. Alcohol and tobacco are widely established as harmful commodities, whereas food marketing is often connected to children as a target group or to epidemiological prevalence trends such as that of obesity and diabetes. Gambling marketing is an underresearched area, but which is receiving increased attention, especially due to the new ways in which new technology enables mergers of gambling and other activities.



Young and Markham point out how the economic project of the production and dissemination of these vices involves an exploitation of extraction of surplus that “*profits from the savings and assets of the working classes, thus impeding the accumulation of a workers’ hoard that may act as a potential blockage to value realisation in consumption.*” (Ibid.)

What has driven me in this book project has been the need for a short presentation and discussion regarding the kind of efforts made in the scholarly community to describe, investigate, and deal with the marketing of coercive products. By writing this book I am myself construing a research area, namely the one of “research on the advertising of controversial coercive products”. To my knowledge, there is no explicit academic tradition specialized in this study subject. Rather, research on the advertising of coercive commodities is found in different disciplines and appears in different contexts. My hope is that gathering a discussion on this research into an overview book may stimulate to exchange between these different areas, and perhaps also make early stage scholars interested in this field of inquiries.

It is a field which inherently involves some core principles pertaining the regulation of commercial communication. You need both boldness and persistence for take on such a task in an age when commercial communication is more difficult to define and deal with than ever before.

## **1.1 OUTLINE OF BOOK: HOW TO READ**

This book is arranged in three parts, each of which ends with a Summary Box with take-home messages.

The first part of the book sets the scene. It introduces the reader to the book and to its subject (1.1. and 1.2.). I will then move on to account for the most typical views on reality (ontologies) and views on how to approach and study reality (epistemologies) in the study field investigated. (1.3.). I will briefly discuss some communication theoretical framings (1.4.) and address the order in the policy-making process that I see researchers typically seeing themselves as being part of in this area of inquiry (1.5.). Toward the end of the first part, I will introduce the reader to questions related to a changing advertising production and consumption landscape and how I see this pertaining to the questions discussed in this book (1.5.).

In the second part of the book, I will introduce the reader to four typical aspects in the study of marketing of “coercive products.” These four framings—content (2.1.), impact and effect (2.2.), vulnerable groups (2.3.), and policy (2.4.)—are each introduced through examples that I have chosen as descriptive and enlightening for demonstrating how the research approaches the issues under study. Each of these sub-chapters ends with a short discussion of the emerging themes and phenomena in the discussed framing of the questions.

The third part of the book discusses the way ahead in terms of emerging questions (3.1.) and recommendations for researchers (3.2.).

## 1.2 MOST COMMON VIEWS AND APPROACHES

In Harold Lasswell's famous one-way chain of communication (1971), the sentence "Who | says what | in which channel | to whom | with what effect?" can be divided into five analytical scopes. The "Who" pertains to *stakeholder and control analysis*; the "says what" is studied in *content analysis*; "in which channel" is covered by *media analysis*; "to whom" is the scope of *audience analysis*, and "with what effect" is the subject of analysis of *effect*.

Research on the marketing of dubious, wicked, or potentially unhealthy commodities, pierces through all of these questions. What has been common for all research is that it has typically been justified from the perspective of citizen and consumer protection. The idea has been that in describing and providing evidence of effect, scientific endeavors overlap a great deal with the task of public communication on how the advertising negatively impacts citizens and societies. While integrating various theoretical views on communication with at times combined and rather complicated views on the communication process (see examples sub chapter 2.1. and 2.2.) the scope has often been raised and nourished by political discussions. Due to the articulated stakeholders and interest parties involved (e.g. industry, state, and citizens), this area of research tends to be dominated by an evidence thinking concerned proof of relationships. It often draws on behaviorist and rather positivist outlooks.

The main view on reality, *ontology*, that underpins a great deal of research in this area involves the idea – or problem construct – that the commercial messages are detrimental because they normalize, invite, and encourage consumers to buy, ingest, or take part in commodities that may be unhealthy or, for example, addictive in the long run. The harm caused by this promotion is articulated on two levels. There is (a) the direct harm on individuals through the consumption. This is rather easy to argue in cases of alcohol use and smoking. It is well-established that the individual feels bad and their body is harmed through excessive smoking and drinking. There are also well-known negative consequences for people in the nearest environments of the users, interfering with family members and causing ill-being for others (cf. Laslett et al 2010; Hellman et al., 2016). The second, comprehensive perspective on the harm from the marketing of coercive products is enunciated (b) on the level of the population in a society. The consumption of the products has been shown to involve social and health care expenses. Furthermore, these have shown to correlate with unemployment, financial problems, criminality, and family problems (for an example of population-based problem constructs, cf. marketing and childhood obesity Harris et al. 2009). In some countries a meso-level aspect—the communitarian perspective—has been of specific systemic importance: the community suffers from an individual's suffering from substance use, great obesity, or gambling problems (Hellman & Room, 2015). A more or less articulated need to restrict incentives that inspire people

to harm themselves underpins many empirical investigations in this area of inquiries.

The research instruments employed when studying advertising of coercive products depend on the ontologies that the researchers adhere to in formulating their research objectives. And, simultaneously, ontologies depend on perspective choices and research instruments that we identify as needing to approach our research object. Epistemologies, or the views on ways to approach, are thus entangled with ontologies, and concur with certain research instruments. If an impact relationship is hypothesized, then the researcher uses certain measurements to discern and prove this relationship. If a certain type of gratification or meaning function of a message is hypothesized, the researcher uses another set of instrument, etc.

Because the definitions of the problems studied depend on the kind of ontologies and epistemologies that we apply when we are trying to study them, new materialists have come up with the word *onto-epistemologies* (cf. Kaiser and Thiele, 2014). This concept proves especially helpful when inquiring into the research on marketing of vices: all research discussed in this book is embedded in and part of the onto-epistemologies of what the “problem” or “issue” of advertising coercive products is all about.

Behavioral sciences, psychology, and some communication-theoretical endeavors have taken on onto-epistemologies that produce evidence of effect through larger statistical correlations or, for example, more directly through experimental designs. For instance, in chapter 2.2., I will highlight a study investigating whether people in a bar lab would consume more alcohol if they viewed alcohol-related commercials than when they were viewing material that was not related to alcohol drinking. The onto-epistemology can be spelled out as behavioral outcomes (drinking) as a consequence of a stimulus (films with alcohol) in a bar lab setting (representing a common drinking context). It translates into the assumption that this may also be a logic that holds in everyday life, with people coming out from cinema theatres heading to bars.

With the rise of theoretical discussions regarding the actual gains from positivistic endeavors such as measuring the direct impact from alcohol images on drinking, such endeavors have, over time, become epistemically rather isolated from more recent mass media theoretical developments. Technological advances and accessibility to register data have enabled psychologists to take on more complicated endeavors of evidence production, whereas the critical social theoretical discussion has turned to topics that explain larger contextual circumstances such as commercial power, ideological influence, and principles of information ownership. It is thus to some extent a rather polarized field that meets the new challenges of studying marketing online and on different digital platforms. I will next account very briefly for some larger communication theoretical traits that serve as a backdrop to the research perspectives presented in part two of the book.

### 1.3 COMMUNICATION THEORETICAL FRAMINGS

Research into the marketing strategies of coercive products embeds views on the process of marketing, the question of why companies advertise their products, and the ideas that they connect to the products when they choose their strategies and communication and mediation platforms.

The study of marketing tends to embed some elements of hypothesized effect: there is no point advertising things if there is no effect. Yet, there is little agreement among scholars on the nature and extent of these effects. Research in this area has therefore drawn on and been part of effect studies, a genre of communication studies that has gone through many phases of onto-epistemological turns.

The power of mass media started to become increasingly acknowledged during the twentieth century. This influence notion was based on the observation of the media's great reach and apparent impact on people, at first of the newspapers, but during the first and second world wars of radio and film in particular. Social scientists became aware of these "great transformations," and individual crime, declining morality, rootlessness, impersonality, and lack of attachment to community were among the first negative social aspects pointed out (McQuail, 2008, p. 51).

McQuail (2008) refers to the "natural history" of media effect research, as its focus and problem formulations have been shaped by time and place (McQuail, 2008, p. 457). Government and law-makers' interests, changing technology, and historical events have come to color the perspective employed and the aspects emphasized. McQuail divides the effect research into four historical phases that signify their ontologies regarding impact on people, and connote their emphasis and acceptance of effect: the all-powerful media; theory of powerful media put to rest; powerful media rediscovered; and negotiated media influence.

According to a review by Potter and Riddle (2007), the most widely used theory is cultivation, where ideas and norms in populations and cultures are manifested over time. Other prominent theories are third-person effects, agenda setting, uses, and gratification. The effects have typically been conceptualized as cognitive, affective, and behavioral (cf. Perse & Lambe, 2016).

Big onto-epistemological shifts occurred during the critical and linguistic turns when communication processes and effects became increasingly problematized (cf. Hall, 2003 [1997]). Typical questions that were now being posed included: *How does advertising construct meanings?* and *Where and when is meaning produced?* Signification negotiation and gratification was problematized throughout social sciences. Meanings were not just to be produced, spread, and ingested. They were more subtly encoded and decoded. Still, the psychological endeavors in impact studies were a train that continued to run incorporating new longitudinal studies and designs that attempted to develop more complicated ways of proving impact.

After more than ten years of involvement in research on the marketing of coercive products, my own guess is that the next chapter is likely to concern the brain. The brain is presented as the Rosetta stone for understanding how humans react to stimulus. Significant advances in neuroscience in the last couple of decades are portrayed as bringing us closer to a place we have never been before inside the human mind. Research is able to measure brain movement and emotions to see how the brain works. Consumer neuroscience is studying brain responses to marketing stimuli by using electroencephalogram (EEG) and eye tracking (e.g., Khushaba et al., 2013). The techniques are already used, for example, to inquire into brain responses to food logos in obese and healthy-weight children. (Brice et al., 2013). Furthermore, neuroeconomics helps us see how decision-making happens in the brain (Glimcher & Fehr, 2013). There is uncertainty about what this information is to be used for. Conventional marketing tools have frequently been criticized for their inability to assess consumers' motivations. Hammou and Melloul (2013) still warn that although neuromarketing is gaining popularity among professionals and academics, there are still reservations when it comes to the function of neuromarketing and its level of information accuracy.

## 1.4 POLICY-BASED EVIDENCE?

If the first prominent characteristic of this research area concerns an element of some sort of hypothesized effect, the second prominent element is its articulated political and societal value.

In the area of public health the use of research is emphasized throughout knowledge production. A basic point of departure in this rather new discipline is its political demand and purpose, seen as important for developing healthy and well-functioning societies (cf. Lupton, 1995). The studies that are most easily conceptualized as relevant and useful for a specific action are seen as the most "policy-relevant." "*It is proven that drinking among young people increases with exposure to alcohol advertising*" is a statement that can be translated into action: to protect young people from the concerned messages and to prohibit marketing exposed to and targeted at minors.

Many studies on evidence-based policy are still clinging to linear ontologies that are rather similar to Lasswell's one-way model of communication. Evidence is to be sought and produced and then integrated. Strassheim and Kettunen (2014) propose instead that we view expertise and evidence as "socially embedded" in authority relations and cultural contexts. The marketing of coercive products is indeed a political question which is being negotiated and debated at different levels of society all over the world. Policy-relevant facts are the result of an intensive and complex struggle for political and epistemic authority. Strassheim and Kettunen (2014) claim that this is

especially the case when science and policy are difficult to distinguish and the guidelines for validating knowledge are highly contested.

My hope is that this book will expose some problems involved in a lack of a pronounced or hypothesized ontology regarding the actual impact mechanisms involved in marketing. In fact, the kind of research that looks at aspects that are less directly practice-translatable may be as important for, or turn out even more important from a long-term societal perspective. For example, exploring cultural beliefs in small-scale ethnography may revolutionize our understanding of how marketing is made meaningful through everyday habits.

Critical remarks on public health initiatives to prove relationships between advertising and people's potentially harmful behavior have been raised by commercial enterprises in particular (Roderick, 2017). The critique has, for example, concerned critical aspects that are left out from research in order to make politically valuable points. While it is obvious that producers and marketers have their own interests in the knowledge produced about their activities and, as such, the critique of the research seldom hold the standard of proper peer review, it may sometimes be healthy for researchers to hear alternative interpretations of their interest position within their own ontological comfort zones. From the cases described in this book, the reader will note that researchers often see themselves as producers of valuable information and knowledge for proceeding in a political matter. The pun of "policy-based evidence" (Strassheim & Kettunen, 2014), which can be derived from the "evidence-based-policy" concept constitutes a healthy reminder of the demand for certain research and why researchers tend to take as their object of study certain aspects of the communication process in their inquiries into marketing and advertising.

## **1.5 CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE**

In 1995, Sterne talked about how companies needed to incorporate the World Wide Web in their marketing strategies as an element to be taken into account. Today, whether the marketing concerns advertising during a televised game show or putting a game tag on a lemonade can, the most ordinary and natural point of departure is emphasis on online communication. All marketing tools are somehow connected with the online.

Throughout this book I will try to address some changes that have occurred in marketing content, strategies, modes, and techniques during the past 20 years or so. The greatest change concerns of course the implementation of digital online technologies that have provided new revenue and value-producing opportunities. The digital format has enabled dissemination to masses, but with possibilities to customize and target messages according to consumer preferences. Some companies supervise and vacuum information regarding people's movements on the Internet and use this valuable

information for commercial objectives. Masses of Big Data concerning what people appreciate, what they buy, what their interests are, are owned by global enterprises of search engines, streaming services portal platforms, and social media operators. Marketers create their ads in a few days and revise them instantly based on the data about consumers' clicks. (Einstein, 2017, p. 107)

An interesting connection between the marketing developments and the kind of products in the focus of this book concerns the ways in which people internalize understandings of what to fill up their lives with in order to satisfy their needs of enjoyment and well-being. Castells famously argued in 1996 that new technologies would become such an integral part of human activity that *"all processes of our individual and collective existence would be directly shaped by new technological media"* (Castells, 1996, p. 70). Now that this is a reality, researchers have pointed out a great need to inquire into the implications that this has for meaning-making and governance of addictions and lifestyles. If *"all experiences from the micro level of identity formation to the macro level of politics and society are purportedly increasingly mediated and mediatized,"* (Strömbeck, 2008, p. 229) lifestyles and addictive habits can also be seen as mediatized, increasingly ICT-permeated in their foundations. According to Hjarvard (2004, p. 48) mediatization *"implies a process through which core elements of a social or cultural activity (like work, leisure, play etc.) assume media form."* In other words, social and cultural processes are transformed into formats that lend themselves to modes of media, in the word's broadest signification. The increasing focus on media use as a health or addiction problem of its own can be seen as an articulation of this grand trend (cf Hellman et al. 2013)

Merging and synergizing platforms, techniques, and products is a huge contemporary trend (Einstein, 2017). Marketing spans through commodity categories in a similar manner as large conglomerates gather bulk productions of similar products: lemonade, juice, jam, cereals, alcopops. New technology media and communication companies are merged into global multibrand enterprises that control different segments of commodities, production, and consumption. It strives for merged genres and synchronized communication technologies and fuzzifying borders between producers and consumers. This cause difficulties for policies to focus on consumer and citizen protection from advertising practices and strategies. How best to talk to consumers "becomes more complex when there are multiple players in the mix" (Einstein, 2017, p. 84), but at the same time, the understanding of who the consumer is enables advertisers to craft their sometimes hidden and subtle messages so that it is likely to receive the attention and effect sought for. (Ibid.)

Business synergies underpin and uphold the trend of interests melting together. For example, application technology for gambling companies is loaded onto smart phones through consumer accounts in application stores. The same company that owns social media platforms and streaming services can own e-commerce sites that, in turn, own the license for a gaming product that is being promoted together with the streaming service. Company mergers

bear witness to new synchronized interests. Computer technology and media companies are often to be found on long lists of company mergers and procurements. In 2006 Google bought the trademark YouTube and the mobile operating system Android; in 2007 it acquired the DoubleClick, which expanded Google's reach in online advertising into display ads. Amazon bought the Whole Foods grocery business in 2017, which is also when Apple incorporated Beddit Sleep Monitor hardware and SensoMotoric Instruments eye tracking hardware and software. These are just a few examples that provide insights into opportunities for companies to keep track of people through a myriad of devices and platforms.

Researchers are paying increasing attention to the ways in which this has affected marketing display, layout, effect, and appeal: The ongoing phase of online advertising is especially characterized by native advertising, a format that matches the form and function of the online platform upon which it appears (see, e.g., Carlson, 2015). A streaming or social media device can market a product in ways that appeal to or melt together with the kind of service that the customer usually employs.

Consumers are not always aware of the many ways in which they are targeted and addressed. For example, it has been well established that consumers' ability to identify sponsored news articles as advertising is low. The native advertising makes use of such a "genre identification deficiency," whether it is temporary or more sustainable, and this is also why a more subtle and hidden native advertising has been raised as a great new concern for consumer protection. (Wojdyski et al., 2017). Product placements in streaming series are the result of great business deals that are categorized as business secrets and which may never be revealed to the public.

It is possible to study native, multimodal, and merged marketing techniques from the perspective of the consumer, for example the creation and utilization of profiles in online ethnography enables the researcher to move around in online milieus, copying the movements of potential customers (cf. sub-paragraph 2.3.).

Impact has been studied with the same devices and methods that the industry employs, such as surveys, experiments, focus groups, and tracking of eye movements. However, resourceful commercial enterprises tend to be a step ahead. I will return to the discussion of how to meet new research design challenges in the new marketing landscape in all sub-chapters of the book.

### *TAKE-HOME MESSAGES SUMMARY BOX*

- Research in the area of advertising of coercive products is inherently underpinned and permeated by a view on the problematic aspects involved in promotion and advertising.
- A hypothesized effect and the usefulness of research for societies are two ingredients and characteristics of this field's inquiries.



- In a long view, effects research developments have been strongly shaped by circumstances of time and place.
- There is a new ubiquity of commercial messages created by online platforms and adherent smart phone applications. Synergies and mergers between products and companies makes it harder for consumers to assess the messages and discern their sender and its intentions.

## 2 FOUR FRAMINGS

The ways in which researchers have empirically approached the phenomenon of advertising and marketing of products such as alcohol, unhealthy foods, tobacco, and gambling can be summarized into four main dimensions of problematization.

The first concerns how commercial actors choose to communicate about their products so that people start consuming them. The main dilemma pertaining to this question concerns dishonesty of information upon which the consumers act in ways that harm themselves, others, and society at large. This dimension typically hypothesizes an effect of a deceitful, “wrongful,” and incorrect message. It also involves the moral wrongfulness of telling lies *per se* (see marketing ethics book). The attention given to the different problematic aspects may vary between cultures and the products being marketed (de Mooij, 2010; Robert & Arnab, 2013). Traditionally, marketing ethics has pointed out a fuzzy truth value that the genre of advertisement inherently involves and that most people are aware of (Spence & Van Heekeren, 2005).

The second problematic aspect that is typically emphasized in the literature concerns the impact *per se*. Here, the impact is not only hypothesized but in some way or another explored, proven, or measured. The measurements can concern the likelihood of smoking initiation due to exposure to tobacco commercials or the correlation between youth obesity and regulation of the marketing of soft drinks in schools.

The third problematic aspect that has been addressed in the literature can be seen as overlapping a great deal with other perspectives, but it nevertheless forms a clear focus and research theme of its own. This aspect concerns the view of citizens, consumers, and encoders of messages as not equally “modifiable” and affected by the messages. It involves a belief that some groups are less capable of resilience and critical interpretation due to certain constitutional or circumstantial factors. For example, a person can be too young to have knowledge of the industries’ interests in them as a consumer. Heavy gamblers, smokers, or alcoholics have shown to be more likely to notice and to act on messages concerning the product to which they are sensitized (e.g., Binde, 2009). These groups are seen as more likely to become manipulated to act in a way that may be harmful for them. They are therefore thought to be in need of special protection from commercial messages.

The fourth problematic aspect that materializes in existing research on marketing and advertising of potentially harmful products is the one of how regulation and policies are to embed and implement necessary issues in order to protect citizens and the interests of jurisdictions, states, and communities. These inquiries concern different instruments available for regulating advertising discussing the options in view of their effectiveness.

Table 1 displays the four problematic aspects, the main dilemmas materialized in the empirical literature, and their ontological premises for being justified.

**Table 1.** Four problematizations in research on advertising of coercive products: problematic aspects, dilemmas involved and ontological premises for each aspect.

<b>PROBLEMATIC ASPECT</b>	<b>DILEMMAS INVOLVED</b>	<b>CONDITION/PREMISES OF DILEMMA</b>
<u>A. CONTENT</u> Messages communicated and potential influence	* <u>dishonesty</u> *untrue messages are incorporated in people so that they will <u>act on wrong information</u> *lead to <u>misconceptions</u>	*the recipient's interpretations *actual action and behavior in view of exposure to messages
<u>B. IMPACT</u> Influence on potential consumers from advertising strategies of different kinds (not only message content)	* <u>encouragement and normalization</u> of something that can cause harm and can be dangerous for well-being and health * <u>seduction of the innocent</u>	*cultivation, influence on conceptions of reality *actual action and behavior (extent of normalization, imitation, and identification)
<u>C. VULNERABLE GROUPS</u> Ignorance and lack of societal structures and policy awareness	* <u>lack of sensitivity</u> for people that may be most vulnerable and suffer the most * <u>seduction of the innocent</u>	*existence of people who are more vulnerable to harms caused by gambling
<u>D. REGULATION</u> Ignorance and lack of societal structures and policy instruments to deal with the problematic aspects identified	* <u>lack of responsibility</u> by producers and by regulations leads to harm and problems for individuals and societies	*irresponsible operators *lack of political awareness and legal regulation in jurisdictions *impact of these two in society

The four dimensions of Table 1 is just one way of grouping the research foci of this area, as there are many other logics according to which the research can be categorized. One could look at how studies integrate aspects of prevalence and harm, or one could approach studies according to products being advertised, or according to advertising platforms. The four categories division is based upon my own interpretative impression of the main ethical problematizations in the literature.

I will next discuss some questions of studying the four aspects. For each category I will first unfold some main questions involved in the scientific reasoning and problematization surrounding the approach to the study of advertising of dubious or unhealthy products. I will then give three examples of typical themes or ways in which this aspect has been studied. For each

category I will mention some new issues that have become more important in a changing media landscape of supply and use.

For each approach I will also discuss emerging marketing technologies, instruments, and genres, which are changing the marketing landscapes and the roles of the parties and stakeholders involved.

## 2.1 STUDYING CONTENT

In studying content, the core question pertains to signification and prevalence of certain signification on commodities in the communication by producers wanting to sell their products.

Empirical inquiries within this perspective concern prevalence and character of connotations, notions, ideas, and fantasies that are involved in the meaning-making of products being marketed to consumers. The focus of study might include all signification that is produced and disseminated by different means aiming to be interpreted and used in ways that raise some sort of interest in the commodities and brands. By raising interest and serving certain associations, the messages aim at increased consumption of the product among recipients of the messages.

Content analysis is a research method for studying communication artifacts, which can be texts of various formats, pictures, audio, or video. It is used to quantify patterns in communication in a replicable and systematic manner, but the term is nowadays also used for qualitative inquiries.

In content prevalence studies, *how much* of advertising and *when* and *where* have been the main questions, but this group of studies typically combines inquiries into extent with the nature of the promotion, aiming to expose both likelihood of encountering and the likely signification and interpretations when encountering the messages.

The problematization materializing in the argumentation of this research moves on two levels in particular: (i) dishonesty, stretching the truth, and deceit are exhibited as moral wrongdoings in themselves, but there is also often an adherent (ii) hypothesized effect—good, bad, intended, and unintended—or some sort of social and cultural seating in which the content of the messages is seen as wrong or harmful. Thus: the core ontology is that the messages are deceitful or stretch the truth, AND that this will lead to bad decisions, action, and harm.

Analyses in the study of content tend to involve some sort of normative or referential view on what is good or correct. The study of content is bound to involve some sort of comparative framework, such as truth value. For example, upon critical scrutinizing, the product is shown to not actually contain any good nourishment values although the commercial portrays it as healthy (cf. Powell et al., 2007). Advertising messages can also be compared to standards of good practice or compliance with advertising codes. Examples of typical research scopes are:

- *commercials for unhealthy foods targeted at kids (2.1.1.),*
- *beer commercials spread narrow and misogynist gender constructs, and (2.1.2.),*
- *sports activities are skillfully and subtly coupled with unhealthy products (2.1.3. and 2.1.4.)*

In the next I shall account for some ways in which these subjects have been approached in empirical endeavours.

### 2.1.1 COMMERCIALS FOR UNHEALTHY FOODS TARGETED AT KIDS

The focus on children as a commercial target group of food commercials started to appear in the 1970s and continued epistemologically speaking rather unchanged into the 1980s. Prevalence and type of content were in focus in the 1970s (cf. Atkin & Heald, 1977) whereas the influence perspective was emphasized more in the 1980s, especially in view of increasing child obesity (cf. Dietz & Gortmaker, 1985).

An example of a classic content analysis study is by Earle F. Barcus (1971) on children's televised morning programs in the Boston area. The study videotaped and analyzed Saturday children's television programming, and found that promotion accounted for 19% of the time, the four major categories of promoted commodities being toys, cereals, candy, and other foods. This study design has a traditional setup involving a time-slot measurement that describes the prevalence of content a child is likely to come across when watching TV at a certain time of the week.

In its simplicity, the Barcus study can be rather directly translated into policy action. This makes it politically valuable. The audience and the commercial target group is separable from the rest of the population (underage children), the main concern is justified to be adjusted in governance (targeting children), and the adherent regulation principle and realization is potentially also neatly distinguishable (certain television times, morning programs).

In the 1990s, more advanced psychological statistical methodology gained ground, and aspects such as conditioned preferences in taste started to be explored (Johnson et al., 1991). Also, different experimental designs appeared in combination with discussions on content (Lewis & Hill, 1998; Sanders et al., 1993)

Content analyses of televised food and beverage advertisements targeted at children have continued as a research trait up until current days, although the focus has shifted between different aspects of the messages. For example, a content analysis of televised advertisements during 31 hours of school-age children's television programming by Folta and colleagues from 2006 sought to determine whether the contents of food and beverage advertisements are associated with physical activity and athletic ability more often than those for toys and games. Physical activity was made into an analytical category, defined as "*an activity done by a child or childlike character who would raise his or her heart rate by, for example, running, jumping, or playing a sport*" (Folta et al., 2006, p. 245). The study shows that food and beverage ads depicted children engaged in physical activity and associated the advertised product with athletic ability significantly more than did ads for toys and games. This

more or less explicit symbolic association of products with activities is also something that has raised increased interest in more recent studies on new native online advertisement (see also sub chapter 1.5.).

Due to its objectives of trying to respond to a need to map new phenomena, the focus on research on Internet content of food advertising targeted at children has followed rather clearly the advances of online marketing strategies. In the 1990s, Internet marketing typically involved rather plain banners, display ads, and pop-ups. It was, with some exceptions, not yet a very prevalent focus in the research on marketing of food to children (cf. Hertzler et al., 1999). Around the turn of the millennium online advertisers turned more to paid search and pay-per-clicks, and starting with the spread of social media around 2006, digital ads became more refined and hyper-targeted (Cook 2017). It was also around this time that the literature on online marketing of food to children seems to have grown more common.

At the point of departure, the research tasks of online content may resemble a classic content analysis of any sort of media content: the researcher looks for frequency of certain signification. However, the study of Internet as a platform of advertising will inevitably involve analysis of techniques and advertising strategies. Internet food marketing content targeted at children and adolescents were in 2006 analyzed by Weber et al. (2006) at food and beverage brand sites. The targeting of children and adolescents was shown to proceed through a number of strategies involving advergames (advertised product part of a game that is provided); use of cartoon characters or spokescharacters, or a specially designated children's area with a direct link from the homepage (Ibid.). More about advergames under sub-heading 2.3.4.

The ongoing phase of online advertising is especially characterized by native advertising, a format that matches the form and function of the platform upon which it appears. A rather classic content analysis is performed by Hurwitz and colleagues (2016) regarding mobile marketing to children by a content auditing of food and beverage company apps.

### **2.1.2 BEER ADVERTISING CONTENT AND GENDER STEREOTYPES**

In the 1980s and the 1990s critical analyses started to point out that a masculinity mythology seemed to constitute the very ethos of beer commercials (cf. Strate, 1992; Wenner, 2009; Postman, 1987). The studies showed that female characters functioned mostly for bolstering male ego, reassuring its sovereign position. The target audience of beer commercials is easily discerned from their style, format, and content; it is first and foremost men or people drawn to beer-related hegemonic images of masculinity.

Strate (1992) mapped the "social types" who appeared in beer commercials and showed that the genre is underpinned by a collective view on hegemonic masculinity. This tied in with the 1970s and 1980s scholarly work on gendered body-ism and face-ism. A confirmation of the stereotypical combination of

men's faces and women's bodies is produced in a content analysis by Hall & Crum (1994). A total of 70 hours of televised sports programming was taped and 59 beer commercials were analyzed. The commercials were coded on the number of females and males, type of apparel, and shots focusing on chest, legs, and other parts of the body. The content analysis shows that while women appeared less than men, their bodily exposure was greater.

It is no coincidence that the alcohol marketing grammar is indeed gendered. It follows general consumption patterns: the proportion of men's beer consumption of the total beer consumption is over 60%, sometimes a lot more, in all European countries (WHO-Europe, 2013). Furthermore, the prevalence of heavy episodic drinking, which is heavily associated with beer consumption throughout Europe, is much higher among men than among women (WHO, 2016). Given women's increasing socioeconomic power and their increased drinking, companies have, however, started to an increasing degree also to target women (Robinson & Kenyon, 2009).

The older literature on this subject sometimes involve rather straightforward statements regarding relations between drinking and gender-related behavior. For example, Hall and Crum (1994) contemplate that "*Mixing sexist images of women (as decoration or fun) with beer may be dangerous.*" This because "*violent erotica*" has been "*found to increase sexually aggressive behavior and promote false beliefs that women want to be hurt or raped.*" (Ibid., p. 336). While this is indeed an important point, it is rare that research in the 2010s links alcohol-related violence and objectification of women.

In a more recent article, Jung and Hovland (2016) discuss advertising strategies that are likely to have special appeal for men or women by examining alcohol advertising in magazines. Their study shows that the substance of the messages is the same for men and women, but they differ in terms of presentation.

A point put forward by Hellman and colleagues (in review) is that research on alcohol advertisements has treated the encouragement, glorification, and normalization of alcohol consumption and the reproduction of discriminating gender stereotypes as two separate problems. The first question pertains to the encouragement of drinking, which can counteract health and well-being objectives for individuals and societies, whereas the second has typically been condemned as a systematic discrimination of women through objectification and sexualization. A recent study suggests such problems to be partly a result of narrow gender male role repertoires (Seedat et al., 2009). Poor interpersonal relationships, including those to the other sex are associated with low well-being scores and mental health problems among men (Wissing et al., 2006; House et al., 1988). Hellman and colleagues (in review) argue that the questions can be seen as two sides of the same coin: together, the imagery of drinking and gender forms a problematic deep-seated citizen stratification in advertising language. This perspective could be of great value in view of citizens' rights in cyber targeting, because the moral implications of forcing



citizens into production and consumption of commercial messages must be spelled out on a societal and democratic level.

### **2.1.3 COMBINING AND COUPLING SPHERES: SPORTS SPONSORSHIP**

Companies' public relations work involves a number of techniques for associating products and brands with events, activities, and lifestyles. Due to its connotations of fun and good health as well as its inhabitants of superstars and heroes, the world of sports is considered an ideal realm for connecting consumer associations. The need for companies to associate with and be visible at sport games has also become more or less a necessity at a time when consumers opt away commercials in streaming platforms of film and series (cf. Baek & Morimoto, 2012). Sport events constitute the few occasions left that still collect massive audiences during a certain time slot, and have a context that PR firms and marketing planners can predict. Both contexts and audience segments are well-known to advertisers in advance of the games and provide excellent ways of displaying brand logos and slogans: "*When successful, this process results in a reading of the sponsorship campaign that extends the brand's identity intertextually through association with the related sport texts, narratives, and experiences,*" explains Dewhurst & Sparks (2003, p. 373). Classic associations have been made between:

- *cigarette brands and motor sports, as well as other risky and fast sports,*
- *beer and football, and,*
- *sports betting, which is a combination of gambling and watching football and rugby. Especially, in the era of online marketing this phenomenon goes under the name of gambification (see 2.1.4.).*

The effectiveness of particular formats of advertising through sport in terms of recall and recognition has been examined a great deal, especially during the 1990s and the 2000s (cf. Young Pyun & James, 2011). In their text on strategic sports marketing, Shilbury and colleagues (2003) emphasize the marketers' understanding of the sports consumer, which involves different segmentations of target groups according to branch of sport and associations. In the study of content of advertising in sports, attention has been paid both to the types of visibility and the frequency of advertisement shown during sport events and in commercial breaks.

Historically, tobacco brands have associated themselves with motor sports of different types, raising consumers' awareness of the products (Aitken, Leather, & Squair, 1986). Especially with the increasing public health policy awareness of the question of tobacco in the 1990s (see Hellman et al., 2016), research started to produce more evidence on the amount of tobacco

commercial images permeating people's daily lives. Televised sports was analyzed through both appearance of commercials during the program and through brands on stadium signs and other equipment of the sporting event (Madden & Grube, 1994). At the time, a new awareness had been raised of the impact that stricter regulation of sponsorship could have on views on smoking, but a few critical voices were also heard regarding its impact on sports sponsorship, which was seen as important for funding sports activities (Furlong, 1994).

New angles to the study of the content and strategies of tobacco marketing appeared in 2002, when the tobacco industry documents were exposed in the Legacy Tobacco Documents Library (now called The Truth Tobacco Industry Documents archive) created by University of California and San Francisco UCSF Library and Center for Knowledge Management. The archives are available online, with documentation of the industry's tactics.

Drawing on Kristeva's concept of intertextuality (Kristeva, 1984), Dewhirst and Sparks (2003) have analyzed sport sponsorship strategies for tobacco manufacturers in Canada. Their study examines industry documents that were publicly accessible from Canadian and US court proceedings. The authors discuss the tactics in light of various studies on the phenomena of marketing tactics, and connotations of sport and smoking.

The study shows that the industry has aimed at discerning target groups most likely to start smoking and has sought to reach and influence these groups through sponsored activities that link the sponsoring cigarette brands intertextually to desirable, peer-defined attributes, identities, and personalities. With adolescents, the significations needs to be in line with the aims of getting people to start smoking. The industry had found that this must happen especially through peer approval. The industry had identified a strong desire among male adolescents to be perceived as physically competent and mature, ready to rebel and take risks, and a desire to be independent and to be admired by their peers. That is, they wanted to construct a masculine identity that has peer status. In order to answer to the young males' quest for a mature and independent identity, a tobacco company launched in the 1980s a campaign with imagery of windsurfing, hang gliding, and mountain climbing (Ibid., p. 384). A symbolism aimed for was also a lone masculinity and outdoor physical activity through skiing and snowmobile events in the 1990s.

The study by Dewhirst and Sparks (2003) showed that sponsorship of extreme and motor sports events allowed brands to be associated with similar lifestyle constructs. Both ski racing and auto racing involve similar risk-control elements of speed, finding the edge and pushing it (Ibid., p. 389–390). The industry documents helped the researchers to approach the question of advertising content evidence from the angle of the producer and the producers' knowledge and reasoning.

Sponsorship of sports grew in the 1980s, biased toward televised sports. An interesting connotation is that between beer and football, which have negative synergy due to football hooliganism (Meerabau 1991, p. 50). Still, the coupling

of beer with football is a mythology that advertisers return to gladly. In a frequency analysis by Graham and Adams (2013) prevalence of alcohol marketing is audited during English professional football. In the book “Sport, beer, and gender: Promotional culture and contemporary social life” edited by Wenner (2009), the mechanisms underpinning the entangled fields of brewed beverages, sports, and gender are discussed from several perspectives. In a piece on hegemonic masculinities in Australian beer advertisement, Emmison and Mikosza (2009) discusses the new type of lad culture that rose through certain media publications in the 1990s, entangled with certain advertising language related to beer.

#### **2.1.4 STUDYING CONTENT IN A CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE**

As a study object, websites are able to incorporate many elements of interactivity in comparison to television or print advertising. While still resembling “old” media classic content analyses in their pursuit to map frequency and characteristics, the content analysis of online material that started to appear in the 2000s came to inevitably involve the recognition or evaluation of “strategies” and multimodal techniques. The last sentences of the abstract by Weber et al. on online food advertising targeted at children read thus: “*With interactive media still in its developmental stage, there is a need to develop safeguards for children. Food and nutrition professionals need to advocate for responsible marketing techniques that will support the health of children*” (Weber et al., 2006, p. 1463). The reference to a changing landscape of commercial activities and adherent advertising strategies is also characteristic of the literature on online marketing content.

Another message and practice-based endeavor that has received increasing attention is the “natural” alignment of gambling and sport, the “sportification of gambling” and the “gamblification of sport.” Through combined and merged online availability, new app and online platforms normalize gambling. This has been shown to especially occur among young male subcultures. There are many further concerns involved in this trend, of which fixed matches, organized crime, bribes, doping are some examples. A discussion on these are left out here due to lack of space. (for more on these trends, cf. Forsström, 2017)

Gainsbury and colleagues (2016) point out that the alignment of gambling with sport is thought to convey the message that gambling is a way to demonstrate team loyalty, masculinity, sporting knowledge, and skill. Gambling, like sport, is portrayed as healthy harmless fun. The convergence of online sports betting markets is studied further by Lopez-Gonzalez and Griffiths (2016): as a backdrop, they examine the integration of social and technological processes that have enabled the cultural salience of contemporary online betting. They show that betting on sports via online platforms is partly the result of other, at times non-sporting, historical

processes. They also analyze more broadly market integration of online betting with other neighboring industries, and identify the obvious synergies for reaching potential consumers.

The ubiquity of messages enabled by mediation technology has thus become a new focus for studies involved with content (see also Hing et al., 2017). The production, consumption, and interpretations of messages and their content, as well as the producer and audience positions, tend to blend together. Sometimes, turning to content analysis can offer a way of excluding complicated entanglements and chopping off interactive communication. It can serve as a practical solution for dealing with a changing media landscape where it is impossible to cover all dimensions of exposure and consumers' co-production of messages.

An interesting translation or transformation of content analysis into a social psychological endeavor is the study by Oksanen and colleagues (2015). They examined hundreds of videos and 12,161 comments in their analysis of the most popular pro-anorexia and anti-pro-anorexia user channels on YouTube, and divided these videos and comments into positive and negative sentiments and ratings by viewers. Through the extraction and coding of emotional content the study was able to show that while pro-anorexia content is widespread on YouTube, videos promoting help for anorexia and opposing the pro-anorexia community were more popular, gaining more positive feedback and comments than pro-anorexia videos. Their psy-based modeling added an interpretive factor of emotional content to the study, which thus stretches the content analysis into portraying mechanisms and phenomena beyond content.

#### *TAKE-HOME MESSAGES SUMMARY BOX*

- Content analysis maps likelihood of exposure (amount) and typical messages in the commercials. In addition, these studies typically involve some sort of claim regarding possible harmful impact.
- Gender is an important ingredient in the advertising, especially of products that have clearly gendered consumption patterns. However, thus far studies have treated the question of gender constructs and the consequences of marketing as separate issues. A fruitful approach may be to see the 'citizen' as an analytical entity that can incorporate both stereotypes of gender and harm of certain consumption patterns?
- Industry documents provide an inside perspective on how producers have addressed target groups and figured out messages.
- Gambification is a term used for the merging of gambling and sports. This is typically enabled by online marketing settings.

## 2.2 STUDYING EFFECT AND IMPACT

The main ontology in studying the effect of advertising controversial products pertain to the influence that commercial promotion have on people's activities and habits. From the producers' point of view, the effects from marketing include brand establishment, growth within a target market segment, discovering new secondary markets, customer loyalty, and defense against competition.

Traditionally, the idea of a potential harmful effect of messages crosses through different types of questions of impact and is longstanding, but the conduction of measurement of impact has mostly started in effect-focused communication research and in behavioral sciences. Exposure and behavioral effect studies in the 1980s and 1990s tackled, for example, television violence and pornography's effects on violence and aggressiveness (Freedman 1984; Donnerstein 1984; Wood et al. 1991)

This literature involves a number of theories of the ways in which audiences integrate messages in their attitudes and behavior. For example, priming theory sees media images as stimulating related thoughts in the minds of audience members. In the 2000s, the effects of video games and too much screen time have been discussed in terms of concentration abilities and real-life violence imitations (Carnagey et al., 2007). Script theory sees that human behavior largely falls into patterns called scripts, while affect theory regards human beings' emotional responses to stimuli as falling into categories called affects.

Cultivation theory offers an ontology which presents a more macro-analytical and gradual in its explanation of influence. It stems from the view that cultivates the mind of the viewer and examines the long-term effects of television. The primary proposition states that the more time people spend in the television world, the more likely they are to believe social reality aligns with reality portrayed on television. According to this theory the messages transmitted through popular the media influence peoples' perceptions of the real world.

The effects of marketing are due to a bundle of factors, some related to the characteristics of the communications itself (under control of marketed) and others pertaining to rather uncontrollable factors such as consumer characteristics and the competitors' marketing communication (Stewart & Pavlou, 2009, p. 364). Research on effect and impact has for example concerned:

- *Population-level effects (2.2.1.)*
- *Experiments (2.2.2.)*
- *Uses and gratification and the construction of meaning (2.2.3.)*

### 2.2.1 EXPOSURE AND EFFECTS: POPULATIONS

A great many studies explore the effects of exposure to advertising on behavior especially among young populations. The evidence of the influence has often been provided through longitudinal designs, aiming to show how certain people over time start internalizing and acting on messages. In a study by Snyder et al. from 2006, 15–26-year-old individuals from different media markets in the US were sampled and surveyed between 1999 and 2001. Both exposure and the number of alcoholic drinks were self-reported by the surveyed individuals. The study shows that those who reported seeing more advertisements on average drank more, and it concludes that “*alcohol advertising contributes to increased drinking among youth*” (Ibid., p. 18). The study, published in the *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, focuses on the association between alcohol advertising and use as a causality without formulating any explanatory mechanisms of this causality. Input and output variables are measured as a natural circumstance without any communication theoretical bridging in between.

In their study, Hanewinkel and colleagues (2014) investigate the hypothesis that exposure to alcohol consumption in movies affects the likelihood of low-risk adolescents starting to drink alcohol. With data from schools in Germany, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, and Scotland, they had a total sample of 2346 adolescent never drinkers who reported at baseline their intent of not drinking in the next 12 months (mean age 12.9 years, SD = 1.08).

In these types of designs the exposure to alcohol marketing can be integrated in the design in different ways and on different levels. This can relate to the total frequency and salience of marketing in a country (according to legislation) or to certain programs that are typically watched by the groups studied. Also, an average likelihood frequency can be calculated on the basis of some sort of estimations of multimodal exposure (on average  $x$  number of radio programs,  $y$  number of TV programs,  $z$  number of social media sites, etc.).

Hanewinkel and colleagues (2014) estimated the exposure to alcohol consumption in movies from 250 top-grossing movies in each country in 2004–2009. Multilevel mixed-effects Poisson regressions were performed to assess the relationship between baseline exposure to movie alcohol consumption and initiation of trying alcohol, and binge drinking. Through this design the researchers were able to show that 40% of the sample initiated alcohol use and 6% initiated binge drinking by follow-up. Estimated mean exposure to movie alcohol consumption was 3653 (SD = 2448) occurrences. After age, gender, family affluence, school performance, TV screen time, personality characteristics, and drinking behavior of peers, parents, and siblings were controlled for, exposure to each additional 1000 movie alcohol occurrences was significantly associated with increased relative risk for trying alcohol. By controlling other possible influence elements, the researchers are

believed to be closer to the truth of “actual influence” by the messages under study.

The proven impact in such longitudinal surveys may then be gathered and meta-analyzed further in order to reach some sort of conclusions on the proven effect. (See more on this in the sub-chapter on the increasing influence of reviews, 2.4). This is the aim of a study by Lovato and colleagues (2003) that assesses the effects of tobacco advertising and promotion on non-smoking adolescents’ future smoking behavior. The researchers searched the literature data bases and registers of Controlled Trials and selected longitudinal studies that assessed individuals’ smoking behavior and exposure to advertising, receptivity, or attitudes to tobacco advertising, or brand awareness at baseline, and assessed smoking behavior at follow-ups. Participants were adolescents aged 18 or younger who were not regular smokers at baseline. While the nine longitudinal studies that were included could cover a research population of over 12,000 baseline non-smokers, and the conclusions do emphasize an influence, due to the different designs they also stress the variation in the strength of association and the degree to which potential confounders were controlled for.

A relationship between different kinds of prevalence studies, namely those by surveys of advertising and prevalence of obesity among children is explored in a piece by Lobstein & Dobb (2005). The data, existing surveys, were gathered from the USA, Australia, and eight European countries. The authors found a significant association between the proportion of overweight children and the numbers of advertisements per hour on children’s television, especially those advertisements that encourage the consumption of energy-dense, micronutrient-poor foods. A weaker, negative association was found between the proportion of overweight children and the number of advertisements encouraging healthier diets.

What one needs to keep in mind and be aware of is that the meta-analysis and evidence review designs incorporate a multiple distancing process from the actual studied populations: first they are formulated and modeled into original studies, and then they are put together under some sort of criteria, which might not perfectly match between countries. After this they are summarized together in the new meta-analysis that draw conclusions. While striking and effective in their grand scale these endeavours will always, to some degree, constitute generalizations of generalizations.

### **2.2.2 EXPERIMENTS**

A problem with measuring the impact of advertising is that the users reached can differ radically from those not reached. As the variable that deviates the groups from each other might be unknown, it is impossible to know the impact. Experiments may offer solutions to this dilemma, dividing target users into different groups. Typically, the researchers show one group the ads and

withhold ads from the other. This creates a group with exposed users and a control group with users that are not exposed.

Experimental designs draw heavily on behaviorism and its entanglement with cognitive media effects. The underpinning idea concerns a direct effect from exposure on behavior. The point of departure is some sort of hypothesis regarding the impact relationships studied. For example, Engels and colleagues (2009) trialed whether portrayal of alcohol images in movies and commercials on television promotes actual drinking. Young adult male pairs watched movie clip for an hour in a bar lab with two commercial breaks and were allowed to drink non-alcohol and alcoholic beverages. The participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions varying on the type of movie (many versus few alcohol portrayals) and commercials (alcohol commercials present or not). Those participants who were in the condition with alcohol portrayal in movie and commercials drank on average 1.5 glasses more than those in the condition with no alcohol portrayal. The researchers claim that they, with this study, for the first time had proven a causal link between exposure to drinking models and alcohol commercials on acute alcohol consumption (Engels et al., 2009, p. 244).

The above experiment of how alcohol images impact drinking is situated in a direct effects ontology. This is a standard lab design for proving effects among behaviorists. A similar design is employed by Harris and colleagues (2009) regarding food advertising targeted at kids. In an experiment, elementary-school-aged children watched a cartoon that contained either food advertising or advertising for other products. The children received a snack while watching. In a second experiment, adults watched a television program that included food advertising that promoted snacking and/or fun product benefits, food advertising that promoted nutrition benefits, or no food advertising. The adults then tasted and evaluated a range of healthy to unhealthy snack foods in an apparently separate experiment. The experiments showed that the children consumed 45% more when exposed to food advertising. Adults consumed more of both healthy and unhealthy snack foods following exposure to snack food advertising compared to the other conditions.

Psychological tests on measuring media effects have been severely criticized, as they tend to have serious deficiencies. Laughey (2007) mentions the notorious “Bobo” doll experiment by Bandura and Walters from 1969 as unsurpassed in its artificiality and nonsensicality. In the study, nursery-school children were found to act more aggressively toward an inflated plastic doll after viewing a film of an adult acting aggressively toward the doll (Laughey, 2007, p. 14). Psychological approaches are found problematic for their inability to explore wider sources of seduction that foster certain behavior other than the screen or the pop-up windows. This will also lead societal discussion on the problems of advertising to evolve around the regulation of media content on the expense of aspects such as dysfunctional families, inadequate housing, poverty, and lack of education (see Laughey, 2007, p. 16).



The complexity of producing impact proof has inspired scholars to dig deeper and wider in their modeling: in a theoretical piece from 2013, Valkenburg and Peter introduce the Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects Model (DSMM), which they present as “a new, integrative model“ to improving understanding of media effects: “*The DSMM organizes, integrates, and extends the insights developed in earlier microlevel media–effects theories. It distinguishes 3 types of susceptibility to media effects: dispositional, developmental, and social susceptibility. Using the analogy of a mixing console, the DSMM proposes 3 media response states that mediate media effects: cognitive, emotional, and excitative. The assumptions on which the DSMM is based together explain (a) why some individuals are more highly susceptible to media effects than others, (b) how and why media influence those individuals, and (c) how media effects can be enhanced or counteracted,*” reads the abstract (Ibid., p. 221). Certainly, new models and trials can be developed, but scholars and their funders need to weigh the benefits and costs involved in each endeavor.

### **2.2.3 CONSTRUING MEANINGS**

In his classic encoding/decoding text, Stuart Hall (1980) points out a general awareness among scholars regarding how message meaning is “re-entered” into practices. Hall emphasizes that this use cannot be understood in simple behavioral terms. The typical processes identified in positivist research on isolated elements—effects, uses, gratification—are themselves framed by structures of understanding, as well as being produced by social and economic relations. These relations shape their “realization” at the reception end of the chain and permit the meanings signified in the discourse to be transposed into practice or consciousness, to acquire social use value (Ibid., p. 131). This is naturally thought to be in line with a meaning-based understanding of the structures within which people act: people read meaning and decode meanings also in accordance with certain preferred readings that have institutional, political, and ideological orders imprinted in them. The meanings have themselves become institutionalized (Ibid., p. 134). What Hall does is point to the ways in which meanings are structured ideologically and how this permeates what we see in all that surrounds us. We use the meanings for our own collectively scripted purposes.

The focus on what people do with media and its messages has been articulated especially in the uses and gratifications theory (UGT). UGT is an approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. If other media effect theories ask “how the media affects people,” UGT focuses on “what people do with media.”

What people do with the media will, naturally, vary between cultures, segments of populations, and individuals. An understanding of the structures of meaning, or the perspective of use value by audiences is today often

combined with the concept of social identity. Psychologist Henri Tajfel (1979) argues that social identity is a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s). Groups, such as social class, family, and sport teams are important sources of pride and self-esteem. Groups give us a sense of belonging to the social world. This is why, for example, it is important to combine beer brands with football teams and masculine signification; the messages connote a group adherence, which is seen in a positive light by people who want to belong and have that social identity.

In order to increase our self-image we enhance the status of the group to which we belong. This is of course an important element for marketers to pay attention to when targeting audiences. The tobacco industry has been targeting demographic subgroups by emphasizing certain elements that will impact on consumption due to social identity connotations of belonging. A study by Fellows and Rubin (2006) investigated the targeting of Asian, and Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs). Based on prior tobacco document research citing the use of identity-based marketing strategies, the researchers performed a content analysis to assess whether these strategies were applied to the Asian and AAPI populations. The data suggested that the tobacco industry targeted Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States and abroad via interpersonal and commercial communication tactics. These strategies were carefully orchestrated and employed as a result of sophisticated analyses of the social identities and value systems of the source culture populations. Barriers to reaching this culturally and linguistically heterogeneous market were overcome via the construct of collectivism. At the same time, more Westernized Asians were targeted through advertisements that blended a hybrid Western style identity. For both source and immigrant cultures, the industry attempted to facilitate identity construction and maintenance through smoking.

In societies increasingly dominated by consumerism, advertising plays a key role in mediating identities, power, and rights. In her book *Advertising and consumer citizenship: Gender, images and rights*, Ann Cronin (2005) uses a close analysis of print advertising to highlight gender's organizing function in contemporary culture of the image, and its articulation through the sexed, classed, and racialized construction of the consumer created by advertising. Her conceptual framework considers an interesting dilemma in how advertising is viewed as playing a certain part in our lives: first, we are claimed to apply individual agency by using the meanings in advertising as symbolic resources in the processes of the construction and communication of our identities. Secondly, and simultaneously, advertising manipulates us and bends our individual agency to its own commercial ends. Cronin unfolds this dilemma by showing the meaning-based structures of advertising and presenting a discussion on the construction of the self.

According to Cronin (Ibid., p. 134), the visual can operate as a site of the performative constitution of the self and relation to others. Paradoxically, the self is produced in the moments of engagement with discourses of rights, and

yet it requires the status of selfhood in order to begin the processes of engagement with those rights. Hellman and colleagues (2013) have studied qualitatively how adolescents (326) from six European countries—Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Poland—view televised beer commercials. A general skepticism permeated the focus groups material as a whole. Although the young participants had different interpretations regarding the gratification of beer and its cultural position, they expressed a high level of ad literacy, genre skepticism, and persuasion knowledge. The paper concludes that ad literacy might not be as culturally bound as is the attitude toward drinking, which varied more between the studied countries. As a subject, its identification function and signification for identity formation may at the time of the performed group discussions have been more important than alcohol drinking.

The relevance of knowledge of uses and gratifications, what it does for social identity and construction of self cannot be understated in the age of social media use. People post on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to socialize, vent personal feelings, gather information, and reaffirm their identity and social status. Commercially beneficial ingredients in the construct of the self are underpinned by hierarchies of preferred readings (Hall), which the industry have better ways of manifesting today than ever before.

A globally unique adjustment to the Finnish Finnish Alcohol Act (Amendment 152/2014) came into practice in 2015, which prohibits the use of visual or textual content produced by consumers on corporate-sponsored social networking platforms, the use of textual or visual content that is intended to be shared by consumers, and the promotion of games, lotteries, or contests. This is a new way of seeing that citizens need to be protected from being put into the role of advertiser though the invitation to share and partake in social media environments. The restrictions were primarily justified by the protection of children and youth. The Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (STM) explains on its web page:

*“The 2015 law amendment concentrates on means that protect children and youth. Outdoors marketing is forbidden because it is on display for everybody to see. A [post-] 10 pm time slot was given for TV and radio commercials. The use of prize competitions, marketing lotteries and the sharing of advertisement in social media was forbidden due to the increasing popularity of these forms of marketing strategies”* (STM 2016) The law amendment is being evaluated by Finnish and Swedish researchers in 2017-2018, and this research will be the first of its kind to focus on the effects from policy efforts targeted at this type of online marketing of coercive commodities.

## **2.2.4 STUDYING EFFECT IN A CHANGING MARKETING LANDSCAPE**

The more multimodal and integrated marketing techniques get, the more genres and platforms must be taken into account when studying the effects of marketing. As public health initiatives view the impact process from the perspective of “afterward,” the industry and disciplines in production economy, management technology, and marketing are the forces that set the scenery of the study object that pave the way for our understanding of effect by the new landscape of commercial communication.

Marketing mix modeling (MMM) is a statistical analysis that estimates the impact of various marketing tactics (marketing mix) on sales used by businesses. Typically this modeling involves forecasts on impact of future sets of tactics. The MMM responds to the circumstance that new types of platforms, synergies, and content involve new types of dimensions in effect studies. One can assume that it means more sophisticated computer data analysis models which allow for billions of units and at least as many variables.

Larger entangled logics are addressed in a study by Saboo and colleagues (2016), who discuss marketing and consumer effects from the point of view of time variation. The researchers argue that while firms have all this new data on their customers, existing estimation approaches do not readily lend themselves to modeling the temporal variations for big data. The marketing-mix effectiveness varies according to Saboo and colleagues (2016) with the evolution of the consumer–brand relationship. They suggest the modeling of such temporal variations by a time-varying effects model (TVEM) that accounts for self-selection of customers into receiving marketing communications and endogeneity of the number of such communications.

Saboo and colleagues combine transaction data from a Fortune 500 retailer with demographic information obtained for over a quarter million customers. They found that the influence of marketing mailers, other transaction characteristics (coupon redemption, returns, and cross-buy), and demographic factors (age, income, household size, and interests) on sales varies significantly over the customer life cycle. The result is spelled out from a producer’s point of view: ignoring such temporal variations can lead to gross misallocation of marketing investments by businesses. The findings suggest that firms can increase their revenues by over 17% by just reallocating their resources based on the proposed framework. This type of endeavors provide the industry with tools that potentially make their marketing strategies more efficient.

The interesting point made is the importance of consumer–brand relationship and how it develops over time. Another angle on marketing-mix models is presented by Hanssen and Dekimpe (2017), who include a financial performance criterion in the equation. Marketing is treated as an investment in customer value creation and communication that ultimately leads to shareholder value.

## TAKE-HOME MESSAGES SUMMARY BOX

- Large-scale longitudinal designs set out to measure the attitudes and behavior influence in populations. The impact is seen in view of different amounts and types of advertising exposure.
- Experiments hypothesize and measure effect, typically in lab settings. Their applicability depend on how well they agree with how people act outside the experiment context.
- The focus on what people do with media has been studied within the framework of uses and gratifications. It aims at understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs.
- The industry and its scaffolding knowledge production are typically seen as a step ahead in research on marketing effects. Different types of statistical analysis for Marketing mix modeling (MMM) estimate impact of various marketing strategies on sales.

### 2.3 STUDYING COMMERCIAL MESSAGES AND VULNERABLE GROUPS

A large and important sub-category that cuts across the other three framings presented in this book (content, impact, policy) is the research that argues for stricter control due to harmfulness of the commercial messages for sensitive and vulnerable groups. The main questions here pertain to the ways in which certain people—in terms of constitution, life context, or certain situations—are more vulnerable and should be protected. The justification of the framing partly still draws on a classic moral view of “the seduction of the innocent” expressed by Fredric Wertham’s work in the 1950s, according to which the minds of children are affected when they come in contact with messages on violence, brutality, and sadism.

Wertham (1954) asked children to tell stories about pictures shown to them. The grand and later much maligned assumption was that the effect could somehow be read out of the meaning produced by the participants for the researcher’s benefit (see, e.g., Laughey, 2007, p. 12). The onto-epistemology thus involves a superficial and direct impact association that implies that the hypothesized vulnerable groups explain why they are somehow sensitized. This approach has partly lived on in this genre of research.

The great onto-epistemological exaggerations and superficiality aside, there are some important and urgent motivations for studying how certain groups are affected and act on commercial persuasion attempts. Just as in effect and impact research this is justified by three circumstances in particular: first, there are groups that inherently need to be protected for some reason, whether it concerns mental impairment and illness, weak socioeconomic situation, or other situational circumstances.

Second, the changing landscape of commercialism stretches potential target groups. Children as consumers are better targeted and hence construed by the industry. Although the kinds of products marketed to children have remained much the same, the purchasing power of children and adolescents has shown to have increased exponentially over time (Calvert, 2008). The commercial interest in a consumer population can increase while at the same time the regulation of marketing towards this group becomes stricter. This can lead to marketing innovations, such as in the case of children's advergames.

We are witnessing a sophistication in the information of how to target audiences. The research on vulnerable groups as target audiences argues that unless there is awareness of the comprehensive consequences and implications, and unless we are able to formulate ways to protect weaker groups, people, such as elderly citizens may be at risk of giving out bank codes to shady gambling firms without knowing what they are actually doing. Examples of different kinds of approaches in this category articulates that:

- *something in the content that is targeted at a group will lead to harmful consequences (2.3.1.)*
- *the perspective of the person targeted: ethnography (2.3.2.)*
- *a cultural reason for a changed view among a potential consumer group (2.3.3.)*

### **2.3.1 CONTENT OF MESSAGE AND CONTENT OF PRODUCT ADVERTISED**

Often, when the content of advertising is studied, a point of comparison is the kind of product that the marketer is making their claims about. This constitutes a justification fundament for studying the content and its truthfulness and imaginary in the first place. An example of when such a claim is made between the lines is from a study by Alvy and Calvert (2008). They delved into popular children's websites and audit food marketing. Using a standardized coding form, they examined the sites page by page for the existence, type, and features of food marketing. The study shows that the products marketed were primarily candy, cereals, quick-serve restaurants, and snacks. The study concludes that "*Because the foods marketed to children are not consistent with a healthful diet, nutrition professionals should consider joining advocacy groups to pressure industry to reduce online food marketing directed at youth.*" (Ibid.)

Child obesity and the claim that "kids love sugar" is a relationship that underpins a great deal of work in this area. The characteristics in a product that attracts consumption and ingestion are used for exposing the wrongfulness in inviting or convincing people to consume the marketed products. The marketers can utilize the sweet tooth of adolescents and their non-familiarity with the kind of classic alcohol drinks which might not taste so

good for minors. For example, the sweet drinks of so-called alcopops have shown to impact alcohol drinking (Metzner & Kraus, 2007). Alcohol ice cream is a new product that received increased attention in Sweden in 2016 when the Public Health Authority declared that the ice cream was to be regarded as an alcohol product. This limits marketing in line with other alcoholic beverages. In 2006 the Danish authorities made the public aware of tubes with sweet alcohol products that were targeted at youth for their practicality: they could be carried in bags without parents getting suspicious, and they could be enjoyed anywhere, such as in traffic and parks.

The products marketed towards certain population segments can be audited by looking into the content actually being advertised. A British study by Boulton and colleagues (2016) addressed the sugar content of all fruit juices, juice drinks, and smoothies (FJJDS) marketed to children and sold by seven major UK supermarkets (supermarket own and branded products). Only products specifically marketed to children were included. The study shows that 117 out of the 203 FJJDS surveyed would receive a Food Standards Agency “red” color-coded label for sugars per standardized 200 ml serving. Only 63 FJJDS received a “green” color-coded label. As many as 85 products contained at least 19 g of sugars, which amounts to what has been set as a child’s entire maximum daily amount of sugars. The rather simple yet effective and valuable design could point out that the sugar content in FJJDS marketed to children in the UK was unacceptably high.

The same kind of effective point regarding the advertised content is made in a study collaboration with 13 research groups in Australia, Asia, Western Europe, and North and South America (Kelly et al., 2010). Each group recorded TV programming for channels most watched by children between October 2007 and March 2008. The study classified advertisements according to product content: core (nutrient-dense, low in energy), noncore (high in undesirable nutrients or energy, as defined by dietary standards), or miscellaneous. The researchers were able to show that noncore foods were featured in 53% to 87% of food advertisements, and the rate of noncore food advertising was higher during children’s peak viewing times. Most food advertisements containing persuasive marketing were for noncore products. The study design of auditing type and content of products advertised to certain groups is a rather easy way of demonstrating the ways in which certain emphasis is made in marketing efforts.

### **2.3.2 ETHNOGRAPHY**

Despite the great big data buzz, there has been an increased interest in ethnography to explore marketing and consumer issues (e.g., Boddy, 2011). In seeking to identify what motivates people’s behaviors, emotions, and speech, and the underlying cultural beliefs and norms that both influence and constrain them, ethnographic approaches can be of great value for

understanding new consumer contexts. When performed skillfully, ethnographic research is able to capture both practices (what people do) and dialogue (what people say, feel, and think about their experiences) (Venlathesh et al., 2015, p. 8). This is why it has also become valuable for research that aims to formulate marketing strategies (cf. Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994).

Originating from cultural anthropology, ethnography has been adopted by marketing researchers to give insights into marketing problems where these insights are deemed to be attainable through appreciation of the meaning making of acts and artifacts. By this grasp, anthropologists can, for example, focus on value chains in production and consumption, and expose the ways in which ingestion is a moral, economic, and a political act (Cavanaugh & Riley 2017, 267)

Ethnography has, to some degree, been employed in food habits and addiction studies (Raikhel & Garriott, 2013), but as it involves by definition the understanding of a comprehensive picture, marketing and advertising have not typically been articulated as separate foci, but have been integrated as a part of a wider understanding of how certain people's everyday life content looks like. For example, Dow Shüll (2013) has examined gambling machine addiction in Las Vegas and noted the environment of advertising that meets the gamblers in their everyday lives (Ibid., p. 80).

From an early point in research on the Internet, online marketing was exposed as targeting and exposing children (Austin & Lynn Reed, 1999). In kids' consumer cultures, word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM) in online communities and in school contexts is of great relevance. Using netnography (Kozinets 2007), Kozinets and colleagues (2010) have investigated blog content and showed the ways in which marketers employ social media marketing for networked coproduction of narratives. In a study that is said to employ "cyberspace ethnography," Griffiths & Casswell (2010) draw their data from information posted on around 150 Bebo web pages analyzed by way of textual analysis. The authors conclude that young people create "intoxicogenic social identities" as well as "intoxicogenic digital spaces" that the researchers see is contributing to a normalization of youth alcohol consumption.

Griffiths and Casswell do not explicitly formulate the ways in which the proposed normalization occurs or is "made" in rituals. Researchers in other areas of inquiries than those primarily interested in public health and alcohol are however using new topographies, technologies, and technocultural rituals and routines in order to reconceptualize what market actors are and do, and how they should be studied (Kozinets & Arnould, 2017). New topics concern the ways in which consumers extend themselves in more networks of data and information and are incorporated into supra-individual networks. While cyborgs may be ubiquitous, their anthropology may not be that, claims Kozinets and Arnould (2017). The main problem may not be the performing of ethnography, but its writing. By the time we get around to writing the cyborg ethnography we may have forgotten what it meant before we started changing into them, Kozinets and Arnould points out (2017).



### 2.3.3 GROUPS WITH SENSITIZED OR CHANGED VIEW ON PRODUCT

Elderly and retired people are an example of a group portrayed as sensitive to marketing of gambling and more aggressively targeted by gambling advertising. Elderly retired people may be lonely and interested in pastime activities that could stimulate them. Their life situation and lack of knowledge of new and more subtle marketing strategies have been discussed as circumstances that make them more vulnerable. Such “sensitized” populations and how they are targeted by the industry have been described, for example, in questions of elderly gambling.

Health correlates of recreational gambling in older adults show that alcohol use and abuse/dependence, depression, bankruptcy, and incarceration associate with recreational gambling. An American study by Desai et al. (2004) showed that older adult past-year recreational gamblers were more likely to report past-year alcohol use and better health than were older nongamblers.

In Gosker’s (1999) review of the American market of gambling more generally and with a specific focus on how the elderly are targeted by marketing, the point of departure is market demand for the gambling industry’s profit potential. As the elderly population segment is growing, specific marketing efforts by casinos and lotteries include strategies aimed at elderly consumers. When Gosker’s article was published (1999), the elderly were a segment of the population that would purchase more than 20% of the 1 billion lottery tickets sold in the state. This share is likely to have grown further (Moseley et al. 2003). Studies on investments scam vulnerability have shown that the elderly more easily fall victim due to insecurity over their economic situation (Gosker, 1999, p. 200).

Casinos tend to monitor consumer behaviors and habits, as well as background information such as age, income, and occupation through membership cards. Their monitoring occurs directly on the basis of activities happening within their facilities, which adds information to databases on spending habits. How the casinos and other gambling producers target elderly can, for example, happen through gambling campaigns that coincide with Social Security checks. According to Gosker (1999, p. 198), some businesses even have a name for elderly gamblers who gamble once they have received their social security checks: these gamblers are members of the “third-of-the-month club”. Lotteries giveaway promotions can be targeted at nursing homes and malls where senior citizens walk for exercise. Gosker points out that marketing that focuses on winning a jackpot is especially cruel, as this may, for the elderly in nursing homes, translate into an opportunity to move home and reunite with a previous life context and role.

Within the group of vulnerable marketing, a study by Moseley et al. (2003) pinpointed a group of elderly females that would need to be targeted with messages regarding their own personal safety, socialization, and basic gambling education. The study showed with the help of regression analysis that southern Nevada elderly were more likely to gamble in casinos than the

non-elderly. Overall, the elderly were not more likely to gamble than the non-elderly, but elderly females were more likely to gamble than non-elderly females. The typical elderly female gambler was a recent arrival to southern Nevada, smoked cigarettes, had no college education, and was not low income.

The growing consumer segment of “Baby Boomers” represent an increasingly important customer for casinos, and are therefore argued to need special protection from marketing strategies. Another classic population group vulnerable to the marketing of potentially unhealthy and harmful products are those who have internalized and habituated a need and a repetitive—even compulsive—behavior that they have an urge to maintain. Heavy drinkers have shown to be more sensitive in acting on marketing strategies from the alcohol industry (Chen et al., 2016; Stautz et al., 2017).

Coercive products are commodities that may lead to addiction, which is by definition a sensitized urge and a will to do something or ingest a certain substance. Certain groups may thus be sensitized to commercial messages because they are somehow sensitized to the product being advertised.

Binde (2009) has explored the impact of gambling advertising in a qualitative interview study of 25 people with current or past gambling problems. The question remains whether such impacts can be evaluated on the basis of people’s own meaning-making of their behavior: A quarter of the participants in Binde’s study reported that gambling advertising had no impact on their problems, slightly over half reported that advertising had a marginal impact, and one fifth reported a tangible impact. The negative self-perceived impact was primarily that advertising triggered impulses to gamble. Advertising thus increased an already high involvement in gambling and/or made it harder to stick to a decision to gamble less or not at all. The reasoning surrounding the gamblers’ own behavior may be valuable information to a researcher but the evaluation of the own impact may be less so.

Some cultural circumstances pertain to historical reasons which have been seen as constituting a separate backdrop for groups who are sensitive to marketing messages. For example, historical suppression of some geographical areas and indigenous peoples has been coupled with social problems.

Within Indigenous Australian communities, gambling has been shown to be a common and widely accepted activity, a part of life as a leisure activity (Fogharty et al., 2016). The same sort of disproportionate prevalence is reported from different cultural contexts. A combined analysis of studies of gambling and problem gambling among indigenous groups in New Zealand and North Dakota in the US by Volberg & Abbott (1997) is able to show this. The methods used in the studies were similar enough to allow comparisons of Caucasian and indigenous groups from these two distinct cultures.

In the Australian study, Fogharty and colleagues (2016) explain that while unregulated card gambling is thought to predate British colonial settlement, engagement by Indigenous Australians in regulated commercial gambling such as lottery products, horse racing, sports betting, casino games, poker

machine playing, online gambling, has recently expanded and become increasingly available, accessible, and popular, especially in urban areas. Research shows that card games gambling prevalence is significantly higher than among other populations. Also, gambling participation and involvement is high, particularly on Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs). Misconceptions and erroneous beliefs about how EGMs work and lack of knowledge about the odds of winning were common among the gamblers in the study. By collecting the knowledge produced on gambling and adherent problems, Fogharty and colleagues have been able to propose a health promotion framework to address gambling problems in Australian Indigenous communities. This framework includes the information on gambling that counteracts commercial messages.

#### **2.3.4 TARGETING VULNERABLE GROUPS IN A CHANGING MARKETING LANDSCAPE**

The new expressions of marketing implies a more sophisticated modeling of content in view of target audiences. A technique which is popular for targeting children is advergaming. The advergaming is a video game which contains an advertisement for a product, service, or company. Advergaming can be created with the sole purpose of promoting the company itself or one of its products, and the game may be distributed freely as a marketing tool. Advergaming can also be an element in a popular video game: the producer sponsors the game or the company behind the game in some sort of way. A soft drink or a candy product may pop up in a children's gaming app and have some sort of function in the game as a whole. This is not to be confused with the kind of small pop-up windows of app games which can be deleted through the purchase of new levels or new skills in the games.

Mallinckrodt and Mizerski (2007) tested in an experimental design the ways in which five- to eight-year-old children played a Froot Loops cereal advergaming (which claimed that the cereal was superior to fresh fruit). The study measured on a total sample of 295 children their responses to the brand as well as their level of persuasion knowledge. Although the treatment group failed to believe the cereals were healthier than fruit, the older children in the group reported significantly higher preference for the brand over other cereals and other food types. This design exposes differences between content of advertised message and beliefs among consumers, but also the effect that the repetition of "untruthful" statements may have.

Social media has enabled gambling operators to promote products and brands with fewer constraints than in traditional media. In an exploratory study of gambling operators' use of social media, Gainsbury and colleagues (2016) audited the use of social media for marketing purposes by gambling companies. The sample comprised a total of 101 sites operating in Australia, including the biggest casino and lottery operators. The researchers refer to previous international research that suggests that gambling operators are

most strongly engaged with Facebook and Twitter, with an average of over 60,000 and 30,00 followers, respectively.

Gainsbury and colleagues (2016) audited websites and social media profiles of gambling operators to investigate the types of social media used for content of promotions. One of their articulated aims was to discuss this question in view of vulnerable groups. The study emphasizes that freely accessible and pervasive gambling promotions via social media have great implications for vulnerable populations: gambling operators use social media to convey information about their brand, products, types of bets, and betting events. This is likely to raise awareness of gambling options among the general public, and particularly among future users such as youth.

The producers used non-gambling-related content to encourage social media users to follow, like, and share messages, presumably to build brand engagement. The study shows that the use of social media also aligned with potential customers' demographics. Younger adults are more likely to be active social media users, and young wagerers, particularly sports bettors, are also more likely to gamble on these activities online and offline than the general population.

#### **TAKE-HOME MESSAGES SUMMARY BOX**

- The vulnerability of certain groups in view of commercial messages can be seen as depending on the products content, on personal constitution, situation and circumstances in life. Usually these are all addressed or at least acknowledged in the research.
- An approach that is potentially fruitful for insight into the perspectives of consumers, and especially of sensitive consumer groups, is the qualitative research approach of ethnography. Still, it has not been employed to an extensive degree.
- When studying qualitatively people's perceptions of advertising (with or without use problems) the question remains what sort of conclusions can be drawn on the basis of their own meaning-making of their behavior.
- Some vulnerable groups' special position in view of coercive products pertain to historical circumstances. For example, historical suppression of some geographical areas and indigenous peoples has been coupled with certain harmful consumption and adherent social problems. This question has been discussed in the field of gambling research.

## **2.4 STUDYING POLICY AND REGULATION**

In the study of marketing and advertising policy and regulation, the main questions pertain to ways in which jurisdictions regulate marketing of

unhealthy and otherwise potentially harmful or risky products, and to discussing, assessing, or evaluating how well this works. These questions are prevalent in many types of inquiry designs: from those that aim at portraying policies in descriptive reports to those that dig deeper into the political justifications and cultural significations that underpin the regulation of marketing.

As the basic tension between free markets and adjustments from state is a natural ingredient in the literature on marketing and advertising, research on policy regulation tends to involve some sort of reference point with this or similar tensions. Embedded in the inquiries are often evaluations of existing regulation and possibilities to develop them further.

Cosgrave and Klassen (2001) unfold some larger sociological and moral questions tied to the merchandizing of gambling, which is advanced both by private enterprises and the state. They point out that one of the arguments against legalized gambling has been the threat it poses to the work ethic and to the moral conceptions of reward and merit. The large lottery jackpots advertised in the mass media and the dreams of winning these have fostered can be interpreted as examples of the desire for instant gratification, immediate wealth, and the consequent instant transformation of life conditions in a consumer society (Ibid., p. 6). The creation and marketing of new gambling products to the public demonstrates the increasing commodification of gambling activity. It becomes what Cosgrave and Klassen (2001) refer to as a form of commodity fetishism. Governments, and the marketing firms they hire to promote gambling products, must constantly revolutionize these products and advertise aggressively to create and sustain interest in them. (Ibid., p. 5).

Policy mappings are seldom as argumentative and analytical as that by Cosgrave and Klassen. Often, they are reports that map how different jurisdictions regulate marketing. The European ELSA project (*the Enforcement of national Laws and Self-regulation on advertising and marketing of Alcohol*) was a partly EU Commission-funded project that ran between 2005 and 2007. It provided an overview of national laws and self-regulation on advertising and marketing of alcohol in the light of the 2001 Council Recommendations on drinking of alcohol by young people. The ELSA participants were the 23 Member States of the European Union and Norway, often through representatives of NGOs who gathered information from their country and created country profiles on the regulation of alcohol advertising and marketing. (ELSA 2007)

At the time, the European initiative to counteract alcohol marketing was expanding, and descriptions of national cases (cf. Beccaria, 2007) and discussions on different approaches to the study of alcohol advertising (Hellman 2011) started to appear more frequently. The alcohol beverage industry had been advocating self-regulation codes and was actively influencing and lobbying during the process of the European alcohol strategy and subsequently in the alcohol and health forum (Brujin, 2008). The

evidence production of the impact of alcohol marketing on people's behavior was a high-priority question for the public health field (Anderson et al., 2009).

The World Health Organization (WHO) also expressed increasing concern about alcohol consumption and related harms in developing nations, so more attention was paid to these countries where the alcohol industry happily promoted their products (Caetano & Laranjeira 2006; Farrell & Gordon 2012).

In the tobacco field, in which the epistemic consensus has been greater in the public health field (Hellman 2018), the WHO has been adamant on all sorts of advertising. This was further established in the 2013 report on the global tobacco epidemic, with a specific focus on "Enforcing bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship" (WHO, 2013). In the WHO Framework convention of tobacco control, Article 13 concerns advertising, promotion, and sponsorship: "*meaningful tobacco control must include the elimination of all forms of tobacco advertising, promotion, sponsorship (TAPS)*" (WHO, 2013, p. 18). The guidelines for implementation involve corporate social responsibility and comprehensive bans, and the report is critical toward what it calls brand stretching and brand sharing. The truthfulness in ambitions to be socially responsible is a question that is

Examples of perspectives and approaches in the study of marketing and advertising regulation and policies that are considered of great political value:

- *General and popular support of restrictions on marketing practice (2.4.1.)*
- *Evaluations of compliance with codes and legislation (2.4.2.)*
- *Policy recommendations based on existing evidence (2.4.3.)*

#### **2.4.1 SUPPORT FOR MARKETING RESTRICTIONS**

Citizens' support for restrictions started to be increasingly discussed in consumer research toward the turn of the millennium. Investigations into support for advertising regulation are considered important, because politicians are reluctant to move forward in this area without knowledge on the extent of popular support. There has been some widespread general support for the regulation of marketing of cigarettes (Eurobarometer, 2006). With alcohol, support has been stronger for restrictions on advertising targeted at children than that intended for adults (Tobin et al., 2011; Giesbrecht, 1999).

A paper by Goren and colleagues (2010) examined attitudes and knowledge about food marketing and support for restricting unhealthy food marketing among parents. Of the surveyed 807 parents those most likely to support food marketing restrictions were also more likely to have negative views on unhealthy food. Studies on food, as a type of commodities, are more likely to involve opinions about the products, as it is not evident that all people agree on their unhealthiness or the severity of their harm. Conversely, the harm

caused by smoking is considered a rather uncontested and consensual area: in a national survey from the US regarding students' opinion of tobacco control policies, 71% supported prohibiting tobacco advertising and sponsorship of campus social events (Rigotti et al., 2003).

The support for restrictive policies has been explained with an increased focus on third-person effect in a study by American researchers Youn et al. (2000). On the basis of survey study data from 1996, psychologists Youn and colleagues set out to investigate whether the high public support for banning advertising for gambling could be the result of people's perceptions of a third-person effect.

To determine whether a third-person effect can account for willingness to restrict or prohibit gambling advertising, the study looked at the perceived impact of advertising on two different groups of "others": other adults, and children. The survey instrument consisted of items designed to measure 1) third-person effect; 2) censorship attitudes toward advertising for each form of gambling; and 3) control variables including attitudinal items, political affiliation, media use, prior gambling behavior, and demographics.

Hypotheses were posed as: H1(a): People will judge advertisements for casinos to have a greater impact on other adults than on themselves. H1(b): People will judge advertisements for lotteries to have a greater impact on other adults than on themselves. H1(c): People will judge advertisements for casinos to have a greater impact on children than on themselves. H1(d): People will judge advertisements for lotteries to have a greater impact on children than on themselves. H1(e): People will judge advertisements for casinos to have a greater impact on children than on other adults. H1(f): People will judge advertisements for lotteries to have a greater impact on children than on other adults (Youn et al., 2000, p. 638).

A sample of only 194 adults participated in the survey, so the results can only be said to represent this group of people. A significant third-person perception was found in all cases. The results of surveying people by the help of these hypotheses pointed out a strong linkage between the third-person perception and people's willingness to censor gambling advertising. The researchers claim that the study provides support for the contention that a third-person effect occurs when people consider the potential impact of advertising for gambling. The third-person effect was in this study positively related to censorship attitudes toward gambling advertising, and this relationship remained robust, even after controlling for possible confounding variables. Even so, in this classic endeavor of trialling validity of hypotheses, the size of the surveyed population and the questions posed give rise to some question marks regarding the value of the results in view of generalizability.

## **2.4.2 COMPLIANCE WITH CODES AND SELF-REGULATION**

Researchers have developed different ways of measuring and evaluating the efficiency of control measures and regulation instruments. A way of approaching the results of one policy or the other is to compare countries with different degrees of marketing restrictions and the amount of influence that they have on the consumption level. However, deducing the impact from certain policies on behavior is as good as impossible to isolate from other circumstances. On the basis of a population-level approach one might say something more about the cultural acceptance of certain messages and the culture in which this behavior (such as smoking or drinking alcohol) is acceptable. Often, the more acceptable a certain behavior is, the more likely a culture is to contain messages on this behavior (see, e.g., de Mooij, 2010).

Advertising self-regulation (ASR) is typically a written code of ethics, conduct standards or principles, or a written statement of policies, guidelines, or procedures for the voluntary regulation of the advertising activities of members (Sheenan, 2013, p. 54). Self-regulation by the industry is a focus of interest that has long been the object of great debate. It has been portrayed as a sort of social control, as industry associations depend on community values. Self-regulation has been argued to “internalize such standards” (Boddewyn, 1989). Advertising is highly visible (on purpose) and identifiable, since company and brand names are used. This is why some argue that it is an area in which self-regulation is handled in an efficient good manner. As for alcohol and fast food marketing, self-regulation has been regarded as insufficient, especially as the codes tend to involve only content control and not ways of inscribing products with certain meanings and involving them on different types of platforms in people’s lives (Hastings et al., 2010; Noel & Babor, 2017).

A way of evaluating advertising code violations is the Delphi Technique involving a panel of experts. The experts will first and independently from each other evaluate the advertisements’ adherence to standards such as codes, legislation, or guidelines. After making their independent evaluations, the experts are given other evaluators’ answers and are asked to strive for consensus within the group for a common assessment of compliance with the codes under study. This process may proceed as a negotiation over a period of time. The main aim is to reach some sort of agreement of whether the advertising involves elements that are not allowed or recommended.

For example, in a study by Babor and colleagues (2013), a total of 289 beer ads broadcast in national markets between 1999 and 2008 during the US National Collegiate Athletic Association basketball tournament games were rated by fifteen public health professionals according to the 1997 and 2006 versions of the Beer Institute Code, the industry’s own guidelines for responsible advertising. Expert raters found that between 35% and 74% of the ads had code violations. The study concludes that the alcohol industry’s current self-regulatory framework is ineffective at preventing content violations but could be improved by the use of new rating procedures designed



to better detect content code violations. The Delphi Technique is an efficient way for claiming the consistency of sticking to legislation, codes, and guidelines by the industry. As the performance of self-regulation is an important ingredient in companies' good image it is especially important that it is critically examined.

A similar approach is taken in a study by Vendrame and colleagues (2015) that focuses on the self-regulation of beer advertising in Brazil. This time, in addition to an expert group of health-related professions (N=31) the study also involved a larger group of public high school students (N = 110), which adds the dimension of how young people perceive that the codes that are supposed to protect their interests manage to do so. This approach can be viewed in the light of the discussion of chapter 1.4. on policy-based evidence, as it is aimed at producing evidence on something that is to be dealt with on a political level. The study concludes that "*Beer ads in the sample systematically violated the self-regulatory standards for alcohol advertising in Brazil according to both experts and youth.*" (Ibid., p. 602). Indeed the design of asking people about compliancy with codes is an efficient way of displaying the ways in which advertisers violate external or internal codes for advertising.

### **2.4.3 EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: REVIEWS**

*"Public policies for more effective restrictions and prohibitions in alcohol ads should be considered"* is the final sentence in the abstract of the study discussed above by Vendrame and colleagues (2015, p. 602). These sorts of policy recommendations are common elements in the literature on marketing vices. Policy recommendations typically concern certain practice that is argued on the basis of evidence. It is rare that research does not take a stand on how to deal with the problematic aspects discussed. Evidence-based recommendations are frequent in gray literature of government documents and overview reports, but they are also a scientific genre of their own. But what is the recommendation genre all about? Where does it find its nourishment for its rhetorical outline?

Grant and Booth (2009) analyze the genre of literature reviews and note that the advent of evidence-based practice (EBP) in the early 1990s boosted the role of the library and information workers, with clinicians increasingly relying on health care literature in their decision making. Gathering research, getting rid of rubbish, and summarizing the best of what remains captures the essence of the science of systematic review. But there are many types of reviews, of which some are more systematic and numerical while others are discursive to their nature (Grant & Booth, 2009).

Evidence never speaks for itself. In a review on how policy is presented as evidence-based, Pawson (2002) notes certain temporal dimensions in how evidence is presented as relevant for policy action. The case for using a systematic review in policy research rests, according to Pawson, on a

*“stunningly obvious point about the timing of research vis-à-vis policy”*: in order to inform policy, the research must come before the policy” (Ibid., p. 158). However, as policy cycles revolve quicker than research cycles, the quest for evidence-based policy has turned increasingly to systematic reviews of the results of previous inquiries in the relevant policy domain. This circumstance has also come to mark the genre’s argumentation and rhetorical characteristics.

Pawson (2002) looks at two genres in this genre: the “meta-analysis” and “narrative review.” The meta-analysis relies on a more or less strict categorizing of literature according to a quality measurement of the studies involved. The “meta” in the meta-analysis could be seen as signifying a sort of refined and “extra much” truth-based knowledge built on what is known and proven. Embedded risks of this genre are that it contains oversimplified outcomes and certain contexts are concealed due to strict elimination and categorization of studies. If numerical approaches are very focused upon outcomes, the narrative reviews are pledged to preserve a “ground-level view” of what the literature describes (in Pawson’s examples, different program evaluations are in focus).

The typical setup of evidence-based argumentative texts is that they incorporate a main focus or concern, and the evidence on this is provided in support of practice suggestions. The researcher reviews the literature and then continues by drawing conclusions for best future praxis in terms of policy recommendations. The author typically presents proof as statistical inquiries that have produced evidence on how people act or think, and then the reasoning goes on to suggest the way forward in order to avoid going in a direction that causes continuous or increasing harm. For example, a paper by Monaghan and colleagues (2008) has a typical argumentative setup. It begins by presenting its case:

*“There is increasing evidence to suggest that minors are engaging in gambling and developing more gambling-related problems than any other age cohort.”* (Ibid., p. 253) It then goes on to note that changes are occurring that may increase challenges:

*“As the gambling industry expands, new technology is introduced, and social acceptability continues, several national commissions and prominent researchers have predicted that there will likely be a progressive increase in serious gambling-related problems experienced by youth.”* (Ibid.)

The classic lack of research dilemma is pointed out:

*“Despite the increasing awareness of the importance of addressing the issue of youth gambling, and steps taken towards implementing advertising codes, there is little empirical research on the impact of the marketing of gambling products on youth.”* (Ibid., p 254)

The text then reviews the literature regarding different gambling marketing strategies and content, and makes twelve recommendations *“based on the empirical evidence to date”* (p. 264), such as: *“Gambling advertisements should not be permitted to be shown during television and radio timeslots*

*primarily accessed by children or adolescents” and “Given the influence of point-of-sale advertising on children and adolescents, it is recommended that these advertisements be restricted from display in all stores entered by minors” (Ibid.).*

In the paper “Alcohol marketing and young people’s drinking: What the evidence base suggests for policy” Gordon and colleagues (2010) review studies on alcohol marketing’s influence on young people, taking into account econometric studies that do not suggest any large-scale impact on behavior. But in consumer studies, the researchers are able to point out that research has proved certain correlations between exposure and level of drinking. They conclude with the statement that *“The evidence base now favours the conclusion that alcohol marketing is having an effect on youth alcohol consumption”* (Ibid. p. 97). They argue that similar conclusions have been drawn for tobacco and food marketing: *“it is down to policymakers and regulators to shape the direction of alcohol marketing policy and regulation.* (Ibid.) Gordon and colleagues (2010) also propose that research in new areas such as examining new channels of communication, the impact of level of exposure to alcohol marketing on youth drinking should be in focus in the future, as should the effectiveness of regulatory systems: *“Attention must now turn more to protecting young people from exposure to, and the effects of, alcohol marketing, by ensuring the issue remains on the political agenda, that optimal regulatory systems are deployed, and by making use of relevant, high-quality research”* (Ibid.).

According to the conclusions and recommendations of the already mentioned ELSA project (2007) on alcohol marketing and young people, research shows that *“Young people are vulnerable to alcohol advertising”* (p. 3) and that *“The most appealing alcoholic beverages and alcohol advertisements to young people use elements associated with youth culture.”*

Furthermore, recommendations are spelled out regarding European and country-based regulations on alcohol marketing. They should be aimed at: (a) restricting the placement of alcohol marketing to reduce exposure to young people; (b) limiting alcohol marketing that is misleading about the characteristics or effects of alcohol; (c) prohibiting alcohol marketing that appeals to minors and other vulnerable groups; (d) including information that alcohol is not a risk-free product.

When the researchers take on a role of recommending something, they become “proactive evaluators” (Boaz & Hayden 2002). For some scholars this may compromise traditional academic roles and responsibilities. Sometimes scholars decide to stick to their comfort zone of expertise making recommendations only concerning the making of inquiries per se: *“Consistency in measures from evaluations over time would assist the development and interpretation of the evidence base on successful actions and measures to reduce the volume, exposure and impact of advertising for foods HFSS to children”*, concludes a study on advertising high-fat and sugar and salt food to children (HFSS). (Chambers et al 2015)

#### **2.4.4 POLICY AND REGULATION IN A CHANGING MARKETING LANDSCAPE**

The advertising for controversial products has come under increasing attacks for the potential harm it allegedly does to consumers. The most obvious examples of efforts to censor advertising for controversial products are the current debates over tobacco and alcohol advertising. The mapping of policies in different countries or over time are often descriptive accounts of what is being done and achieved.

The current big questions in the area of regulation reflect the larger challenges pertaining to content, merging platforms and genres and those concerning who have the rights to take part of citizens' whereabouts and own their private information. Scholars seem to agree on the need for comprehensive frameworks for grasping new media environments, and the need for more protective action in view of commercial interests.

New types of rather complicated consumer influences have been noted as marketing strategies that are not possible to regulate. They may correspond to "normal" interpersonal social influence situations but appear online in larger scales and with more immediate effect, and are as such almost impossible to discern or steer (e.g. Kimani & Ferraro 2017).

Brinson and Eastin (2016) point out a paradox in that icons for excluding advertising is emphasized as a way of serving consumers, but few consumers know about the icon or recognize it. To examine the complexities of this privacy paradox they measured attitudes toward personalized advertising with and without the presence of the icon AdChoices. Their study shows that advertising personalization did not have a significant effect on attitude toward the ad, but inclusion of the icon did. Respondents indicating no knowledge of the icon reported lower attitudinal responses toward the ad compared to those who were knowledgeable of its meaning. What this research means is that the type of instruments and devices used for protecting consumers and make them more aware of the commercial messages work in more complicated ways than just a turn off/ turn on logic. The choice devices in themselves may affect the ways in which people experience the messages from advertisers.

Even if research would be able to map all aspects of new types of marketing techniques and come up with efficient regulation techniques, a great concern for law makers concern the geographical control of online advertising. For example, Malta and Gibraltar are good places for online gambling companies to be registered (cf. Bonello & Griffiths 2017), but gamblers may function within other jurisdictions. The lack of some geographical control of jurisdiction is a problem when it comes to Internet safety and online consumer protection. A regulation that spans across national borders demands a consensus on some sort of international level. The EU's Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) is a directive that is being continuously trialed and reviewed, but is considered by many stakeholders as a rather soft framework of regulation in comparison to the national rooms of maneuver.

## *TAKE-HOME MESSAGES SUMMARY BOX*

- Studies that measure popular support for advertising restrictions are of great value for policy-making.
- Due to the expanding knowledge base and the fast tempo of policy making literature reviews in the paradigm of evidence-based practice (EBP) have received a more prominent role.
- Reviews that argue for policy recommendations follow a certain structure aimed at pointing out what "ought to be done".
- A way of evaluating advertising code violations is involving a panel of experts. The experts will first independently from each other evaluate the advertisements' adherence to standards such as codes, legislation, or guidelines.
- New policy issues reflect the changing business and new ways of advertising: geographical control and ownership of information are crucial and challenging questions for policy making and legislation.

### **3 EMERGING QUESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCHERS**

In this book I have discussed research that focuses on the marketing of the kind of products that may be considered enjoyable and fun, but harmful when used and consumed too habitually and in excess. I have portrayed the problem formulations and premises that this research embeds. The book exemplifies ways of studying the advertising of coercive products in different areas and with different approaches. I have mixed examples from a broad variety of disciplines and themes.

The research field discussed in this book involves articulations of some dilemmas, for example moral or health-related, as well as some onto-epistemological premises for embedding these dilemmas in research initiatives (see table 1, page 20). It can, more or less, be boiled down to the main ethical concern of commercial enterprises persuading people to consume.

Nevertheless, this persuasion is not problematic as such, but something that is spelled out as coupled with the products' nature; the targeting of certain groups and the messages and modes of the advertising. I have tried to point out ways in which the research field in question is underpinned by and entangled with the thought that it is unethical to encourage people to buy, consume and ingest certain products, due to the fact that they tend to cause harm and problems. If these products were healthy and good, the justification for doing these inquiries is likely to diminish altogether.

#### **3.1 EMERGING QUESTIONS**

In most countries misleading ads are illegal for ethical reasons. But approaching the 2020s there are a myriad of other concerns, such as the spamming of comment sections and forum threads, or hacking websites – all of which societies may be ill-equipped for dealing with. Through these or other techniques companies can exploit emotions sans limitations of time and place and spread knowledge without any quality or validity check.

Great transformations are taking place behind the scenes and out of reach for lay people, 'ordinary academics', or even governmental powers. The continuous collection of user profile based Big data and the development of sophisticated predictive analytics have the potential to influence behavioral patterns in ways unthinkable in previous times (cf. Smit et al. 2014, Chester 2012). Approaching the 2020s, we are already witnessing commercial forces' possibilities to orient Internet users towards products through advanced algorithms customized in line with e.g. daily location data retrieved from

mobile phones and computers. Internet research has provided warnings about invasion of privacy, Big Brother mentality, and 'bubbles', in which peoples' beliefs and truths are continuously confirmed, obstructing growth of critical views and intellectual imagination (Lanier 2014). Still, the area of profiled and targeted online commercial messages remains rather absent in both national and international legislation. Since most content on the Internet is available in all parts of the world, national legislation may not even be a sufficient tool for regulation.

Although the advertising industry still has broader access to techniques and platforms, users and consumers have today more possibilities to publish, get informed and communicate. Consumers and citizens have become "co-creators", and may therefore be better informed about the advertising logics. Still, the subtle and fuzzy borders between messages from different senders coincide with greatly enhanced insight by marketers into the ways in which people connect with products.

The PR pro blog Prowly.com discusses the power of emotion in new advertising techniques: "*emotion can be a powerful tool in business (it can build a relationship that can lead to brand loyalty), only if you know how to use it*" The text goes on to refer to a book by Kevin Roberts, CEO Worldwide Saatchi & Saatchi, claiming that "*by building respect and inspiring love, businesses can move the world' When brands – and branded content, by extension – make strong emotional connections with consumers, the feeling – says Kevin – goes beyond brand loyalty and leaves an indelible mark that cannot be replaced.*" (Kowal 2016)

Emotions is a key dimension of marketing of today as it is to such a great extent concerned with connecting brands to feelings and experiences. In experience economy, the emotions and memories constitute the product in themselves – i.e. the experience that is being consumed (cf. Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Atwal & Williams, 2017).

Much of that what has been studied thus far can seem outdated in light of the recent transformations in communication and marketing. However, I believe that the four problem foci are somewhat ageless as they contain a core thought of ethical responsibility which will be topical however messages are delivered. To begin with, questions of accountable and sound practice will always involve the dimension of what is being claimed when aiming to influence peoples' behavior (message content). Second, marketing research will always have to take a stand on the potentially harmful or bad effects on consumers and the impact that the commercial messages have on vulnerable or sensitized groups of people. Third, commercial communication will also remain a question that is to be dealt with collectively on some sort of systemic societal level through policies and legislation.

More rich media content – merged apps, video, interactive tools, gamification, etc. – evolve and so are audience tastes and expectations "*But will there really be a time when advertisers and consumers have equal power, or does tracking users online and offline lead to a situation where*

*advertisers have more information about the consumers than ever before?”*  
ask Siegert et al. (2017).

When it comes to the products that have been discussed in this book, the setup of commercial interests that gain from people’s potentially harmful behavior will require continuous monitoring and scrutinizing among independent scholars. My guess is that in the upcoming years these discussions will come to concern:

- *conflicting citizen-consumer roles in co-creation of content*
- *ownership of content and the tracking of citizens’ whereabouts*
- *online anonymity and consumer protection in terms of commercial action prediction*
- *international marketing regulation and adherent ethical code standards*
- *ethicalness in advanced physical measurements of impact and intent, such as those discerned in the brain*

### **3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCHERS**

- Don’t be afraid to mix traditions and disciplines.
- Look into the marketing business literature and business documentation in order to understand the logic and trends of advertising.
- Spell out your ontology and epistemology (or onto-epistemology) and update them throughout your research task.
- Spell out the aims of your endeavour on different levels, e.g. task-wise, study-wise, politically etc. Keep them as transparent as possible throughout your investigations.
- Critically investigate your aims and objectives and articulate their consequences throughout the research task.
- Discern the ethical questions in the core of your research problem. Try to incorporate a discussion on these in your reports, or, if it is not possible, in a parallel commentary.
- Familiarize yourself with the latest literature on how commercial communication works. It is a fascinating, stimulating and fast-changing area that channels and reflects societal change.



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