

Alcohol-Flavoured Food Trends in Alcohol Marketing



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Introduction

After the launch of alcohol-flavoured biscuits in Australia (Tia Maria flavoured Tim Tams), Geof Munro, spokesman of the Australian Drug Foundation expressed his concern about alcohol related products. He said "We face the taste of alcohol being injected into every possible food-stuff. We could see breakfast cereal laced with alcohol" (The Age, 2004). Only two years later his concern became reality: An outlook to innovations in the drink and food industry reports the appearance of alcohol flavours in "unusual" food product groups such as cereals (Meziane, 2008).

The growth in alcohol flavoured food offers an opportunity for the future of the drinks and the food industry (Meziane, 2008). It broadens the spectrum of options available to manufacturers of which there is a constant pressure in mature markets such as Europe, Australia and the United States. New products can build bonds of loyalty with consumers and can increase sales. Alcohol flavoured products circumvent most existing alcohol marketing regulations. Consequently, it is expected that the growth in new flavours and of alcoholic flavoured food continues in the future.

The following paper by EUCAM reports on the prevalence of marketing alcohol flavoured food and the attached risks involved in marketing these products. Additionally, the paper reports on limitations of existing regulations of marketing of alcohol flavoured food.



Up: Tia Maria flavoured chocolate biscuits in Australia, launched in 2006.

Danger of Advertising Alcohol-Flavoured Food

The risks of food which contains (large) quantities alcohol seems self-evident. There is a risk of unaware consumption of alcohol. This can result in, for example, driving with a higher BAC-level than allowed. Moreover, children may consume alcohol unintentionally while eating the products. For this reason the Vodka Flavoured ice pops Freaky Ice (with 4.8% alcohol) was banned in New Zealand, Australia, Spain, England, Sweden and many US states (Forester, 2006). Alcohol in food can also be a hidden pitfall for recovering addicts.

However, most alcohol flavoured food contains no or only limited volumes of alcohol. A spokesman for Arnott, the producer of the above mentioned alcohol flavoured biscuits, said men need to consume about 40kg of Arnott's cookies in one sitting to register a blood alcohol reading on the Australian drunk-driver limit (the Age, 2004).

Nevertheless, the risks of marketing these alcohol flavoured products without alcohol or only small quantities of alcohol can be substantial:



Freaky Ice, Ice cream with alcohol originally made in the Netherlands (2004) then exported to other countries.

- It can familiarise children with the taste of alcohol. By eating alcohol flavoured products, children can get used to the taste of alcohol before they start drinking alcohol or reach the legal drinking age;
- Children can associate the brand of alcoholic beverages with sweets and other alcohol flavoured food. In this way, alcohol producers can start building loyalty of young consumers to the brand before children actually start drinking alcohol.
- By producing alcohol flavoured food, alcohol producers can market their brand in non-alcohol settings. In this way, consumers are exposed to alcohol brands even when they are in a bakery.

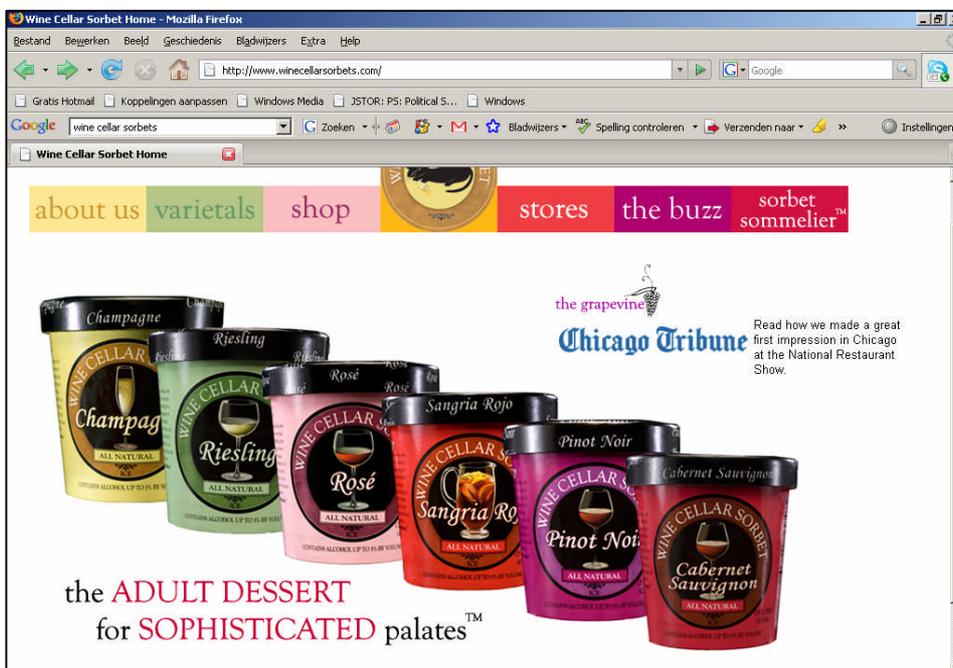
To our knowledge there is a general lack of research conducted on the effect of alcohol flavoured food on the consumption of alcohol among young people. As this paper will show, alcohol marketing regulation do often not include alcohol flavoured food which contains no volume of alcohol.

Examples of Marketing of Alcohol-Flavoured Food

The presence of alcohol flavoured food is not new. There is a long culinary tradition of using alcohol in meals and deserts. Famous examples are of course 'coq-au-vin' with wine and 'tiramisu' with Marsala or liquor. Other more "unusual" products were also available on the market for a long time. For example, whiskey flavoured toothpaste was already available in 1954 (toothpasteworld, 2006). However, recently we have seen an increase in new alcohol flavoured products on the market.

Non-branded alcohol-flavoured food

Food producers are always seeking for launching new products on the market. A combination between food and alcohol offers opportunities for new tastes of food. This may be the reason of Wine Cellar Sorbets to launch the first wine-based sorbets in the US in 2006 (the nibble, 2006). Flavours of these sorbets will change on a rotating basis. The target group of these sorbets are said to be adults: 'the adult dessert for sophisticated palates' (wine cellar sorbets 2008). Unlike most sorbets these sorbets are not particularly sweet.



Up: Wellington's Whisky Flavoured Toothpaste. 'The Refreshing morning-after pick up. Extra special. Made in the UK by Wellingtons LTD. No indication of real alcohol present.

Left: Website of wine cellar sorbets 2008. www.winecellarsorbets.com

Another example of alcohol-flavoured food which does not market a clear brand is Champagne Flavoured Marmite. This marmite flavour was especially made for Valentine's Day (Ladies with bottle, n.d.).

Alcohol flavoured popcorn (Sambuca and Irish cream) which was sold in the UK around Halloween. The spokesman of the cinema was aware of possible concerns about children eating the food. He said: "We'll obviously only be limiting it to 18 certificate films, strictly for adults only!"

Alcohol is often an ingredient in bonbons. Less traditional types of alcoholic beverages are used in chocolates now. A look on an online sweet store shows that cordials (sweets with a liquid center and surrounded by chocolate) are available in different types of flavours: Sambuca cordials but also whisky, vodka, tequila, rum, port wine, brandy, margarita, cognac and amaretto.

The firm Lollyphile makes use of the controversies and concerns around their key ingredient Absinthe. The liquor made a come back, after its ban was not upheld anymore in most countries. The lollipops contain the real liquor but the alcohol has been evaporated during the production process. On the website of Lollyphile it is said that 'Absinthe lollipop experts have found they go really well with drinks!' (<http://www.lollyphile.com/>).

The alcohol industry serves well by this 'free' advertisement of alcohol. Consumers get familiarized by alcohol as an ingredient in their meals. The flavour of alcohol is enjoyed in combination with products such as sweets, chocolate and ice-cream. A positive image of alcohol is made.



Up: Champagne Flavoured Marmite. An association is made between champagne, love and breakfast.

Below: Absinthe flavoured Lollipops available on the internet.



Branded alcohol-flavoured food without large quantities of alcohol

In recent years we notice that more and more alcohol flavoured products are branding specific alcoholic beverages. In this way alcohol beverages are marketed by non-alcoholic products. The Australian biscuit with Tia Maria flavour was already mentioned and shown in the introduction of this report. A member of the Green Party in Australia raised her concern about the alcohol flavoured cookies. Sue Kedgley says Arnott's bakery should stop distributing it Kahlua-flavoured Mint Slices and Tia Maria-tinged Tim Tams and insisted the firm is targeting children. "Introducing booze-flavoured chocolate biscuits is going far too far. Marketers are targeting children and young people at ever-younger ages in an attempt to get them hooked on the taste of alcohol" she said (Park tribune, 2004). The spokesman of Arnott's Bakery responded by saying that the biscuits are not targeted at children but at women aged 20 to 45 (Park Tribune 2004).



Cult, a Danish producer of alcoholic and non-alcoholic energy drinks, has brought 'Energy' bars on the market. By using the same brand name, the producer is able to market its alcoholic energy drink by showing only the non-alcoholic versions of the drink or the energy bar.

An example that we have seen recently in Dutch supermarkets are chocolates with a taste of Malibu and Jack Daniels. On the packages of these chocolates by Turin, the logo of the original alcoholic brand is clearly recognizable. These products are placed in a shelf between non-alcoholic products.

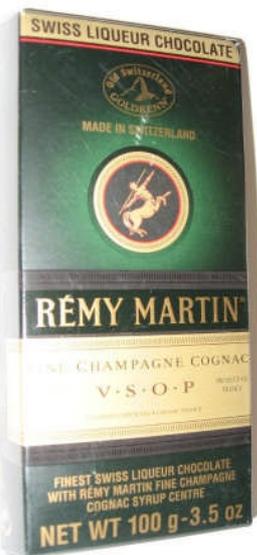


Left: Chocolates in Dutch Supermarkets (2008).

Middle: Malibu Chocolates available on US market.

Right: Original bottle of Malibu Rum with 21% alcohol.

Chocolate is very often used to market an alcoholic drink, especially in Northern European countries where the availability and marketing of alcoholic products is more restricted than in most other European countries. These products have a luxurious image.





Other examples of alcohol-flavoured chocolates together with the original alcoholic beverages.

The examples provided in this report show that not only the name of the brand name is mentioned on the product but the logo of the brand is also shown. Often the food is produced by the alcohol producer.

Besides sweets and bakery products, alcohol producers also connect their brand to other products. An example is lip gloss with an alcohol flavour. In the summer of 2007, an American gossip magazine gave away free alcohol-flavoured lip gloss with vodka, tequila or margarita flavour. They gave it away for free to its young readers. The spokesman of the marketing campaign said: "The softlips Lip Protectant does not contain any alcohol, but it is named after alcoholic drinks with the marketing line that your lips get thirsty too, so why not give them a real drink" (Foxnews, 2007). The magazine is classed in the US as a "youth title". However, the magazine said that the campaign was directed at 18 to 34-year-old women (Foxnews, 2007). In Europe, we have seen that alcohol producers appeal to young girls as well by providing free alcohol flavoured lip balsam with their alcoholic beverage (the Netherlands, 2008).



Gajol Vodka provided free throat pastilles. There is made an implicit association between vodka and a release of throat pain.

Up: Free Lipgloss with every bottle of Coebergh, a sweet Cherry Likorette.

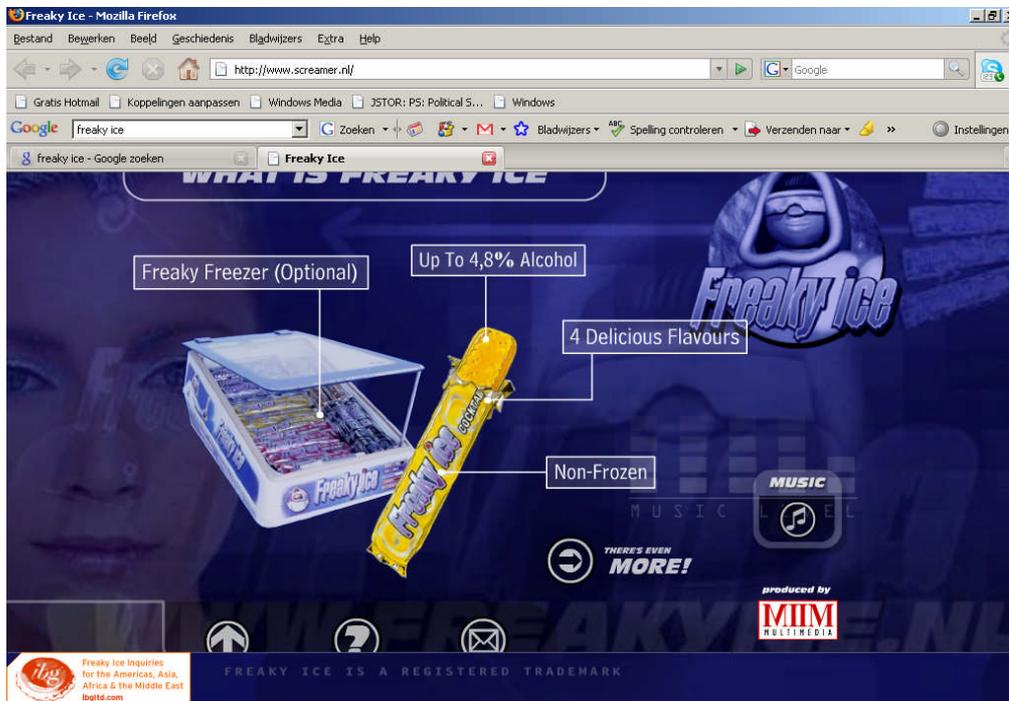
Below: throat pastilles of Gajol Vodka.

Branded alcohol-flavoured food with large quantities of alcohol

In 2003, the world's first ice cream with alcohol was launched on the Dutch market. The alcoholic version of Freaky Ice contains 4,8 % alcohol and is available in the flavours: Red Vodka Energy, Cocktail, Tequila & Lime and Energy (which glows under black light). The alcoholic ice started in the Dutch party scene. There arised a large controversy around the frozen product due to similarities to child oriented ice pops. Parents were afraid children and young people might get their hands on the alcoholic versions. As we have written above, Freaky Ice was banned in New Zealand, Australia, Spain, England, Sweden and many US states (Forester, 2006). Nowadays, the website of freaky Ice



has changed its web address from www.freakyice.com or www.freakyice.nl to www.screamer.nl. The website contains, however, a similar content. Although required by the Dutch self-regulation system, there is no age check available on the website. Moreover, the text of the website suggest a link between consuming the ice and having fun at a night out due to its alcohol content: "But what if you could get an ice that actually ads to the fun. Freaky Ice does just that. Because Freaky Ice is the only ice in the world containing alcohol." (www.screamer.nl).



Freaky ice is no longer the only available alcoholic ice on the market. In 2007, Chiller was introduced in Belgium. The product is comparable to Freaky Ice. On the Belgian website (www.chiller-be), which is directed at consumers and retailers from Belgium, France and the Netherlands, no age check is available. The European website (www.chiller-ice.eu), although in English, is mainly focussed on the Dutch Market. On this website there is an age check available which limits access to minors below 16 years of age. According to the Dutch self-regulation system, there should be an age check to limit access to minors below the age of 18 instead of 16. On the photos on the website of Chiller Ice, young girls are consuming the ice. It is questionable whether these 'models' have reached the required age of 24.



Regulations of alcohol-flavoured food

In most countries, selling ice-cream with alcohol is only allowed in places with a license to serve alcohol. Ice-cream venues in the Netherlands are allowed (like supermarkets) to sell ice-cream with an alcohol content below 14.5%. These venues, however, are not allowed to serve alcohol. The alcoholic ice-creams may not be consumed within the venues (Kok, 2005).

Alcoholic ice-creams itself have been banned in some countries. However, in other countries it is still possible to market these products. Examples of the websites of Chiller Ice and Freaky Ice show that these producers do not comply with the self-regulation codes on alcohol marketing.

Alcohol flavoured food with a limited percentage of alcohol is more difficult to regulate. Although made with "original liquor", the bonbons in the Dutch supermarkets with Malibu (3,5% alcohol) and Jack Daniel's (5,5% alcohol) are identified by the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (VWA) as chocolate and not as an alcoholic product (personal communication with Mr. Kustner, VWA, June 2008). Consequently, the products fall under the Consumer Products Law (Warenwet). An age restriction is not applicable to these products since it is categorized as food and not as an alcoholic product.

In some cases we see that the producers or retailers choose not to sell to minors. The alcohol flavoured popcorn in the UK, discussed in this paper, is an example of this voluntary restriction. In other cases, minors are often free to buy these alcohol flavoured products with no or a limited amount of alcohol.

Restricting the marketing of these alcohol flavoured products with a limited volume of alcohol is only possible if the package contains a reference to an existing alcohol brand. To our knowledge, however, there is not yet any literature available on complaints of marketing practices of alcoholic marketing on alcohol-flavoured food.

Conclusion

In a mature market increasing alcohol flavoured food offers an opportunity to create innovative products which can appeal to new markets. Moreover, alcohol flavoured food which are produced by the alcohol industry can possibly be a way to circumvent existing restrictions on the availability of alcohol and alcohol marketing regulation. It is expected that the market share of alcohol flavoured products will increase in the future.

Young children can get familiarized by the alcohol brand by eating sweets of the brand on a very young age. In this way, the alcohol industry can build a bond of loyalty between very young consumers and the brand.

Some governments have banned alcohol flavoured food that contains (large) quantities of alcohol. This is far more difficult for products which contain the flavour of alcoholic products but not the alcohol itself.

The current alcohol marketing regulations do not cover alcohol-flavoured food particularly. It is not clear to which extend these "unusual" products fall under the existing self-regulation codes and legislation. At this moment, young people can still get exposed to alcohol marketing by eating candy and bakery products.

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This trend report is published by the European Centre for Monitoring Alcohol Marketing (EUCAM). EUCAM is set up to collect, exchange and to promote knowledge and experience about alcohol marketing throughout Europe.

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