Mojca Ramšak

Social Impact of Wine Marketing: The Challenge of Digital Technologies to Regulation

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The book *Social Impact of Wine Marketing: The Challenge of Digital Technologies to Regulation* is part of Springer's series *Contributions to Management Science* dedicated to emerging theoretical and empirical research. The author, Mojca Ramšak, Ph.D., is a professor of ethnology and philosophy at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, and her research interests are folklore, health and illness, public health, and alcohol addiction. The author, merging cultural anthropology expertise with a focus on public health, delves into the impact of alcohol marketing and addiction on people's lives. Particularly concerned about adolescents, she stresses the pressing requirement for better legal control of alcohol marketing and improved public health campaigns.

The book is divided into 15 chapters. Each chapter begins with an abstract that summarizes the key points being discussed in the chapter and covers a specific aspect of digital marketing or social behavior involving drinking. Therefore, readers can choose specific chapters that interest them, or read the book as a whole to get a more comprehensive perspective on the subject. The introductory chapter titled *Wine and Technology Between Cultural Attitudes to Alcohol, Sales, Legislation, and Health* begins by stating the aim of the book which is to "decode the strategies of alcohol advertising, which are cleverly embedded in the context of hedonism, luxury, social power and influence, and the concept of choice" (p. 1). The main concept explored in the book is "digiwine", "a neologism [which] refers to the production

and/or marketing of wine through the use of new technologies and robotics" (p. 2). While the automatization of wine production through electronic information gathering systems, sensors, drones, and robots in production, reduces costs and increases harvest quality, the sole purpose of using new technologies in marketing is to increase sales by expanding the customer base and, in turn, the number of lifelong users, starting at the earliest age possible. To conduct an anthropological analysis of how marketing changes the attitudes toward drinking and drinking practices, Ramšak researched legislation dealing with alcohol advertising, statistical data on alcohol consumption, direct and indirect marketing strategies, usage and behavior on websites, social media, and apps, as well as public health programs and more.

The second chapter summarizes the development of the "consumer voice", from the beginning of the 20th century, when consumer access to information regarding products was negligible, to the modern day era of smartphones, when the exchange of information regarding products and company business models is made readily available. It is often expected that the consumer participate in online discussions and share their experiences. However, the author cautions that new channels of digital communication and information exchange are also being employed by alcohol industries, as well as others, to capture consumers' attention and to manage information about their product (i.e., to only show positive experiences, and hide the negative consequences of drinking).

The following four chapters approach the use of emerging digital technologies within alcohol marketing in a critical manner, especially wearable technologies. The chapter *Wine Storytelling* examines a specific marketing practice called *e-storytelling*, which not only promotes a product through digital media, but communicates a specific narrative to make a product memorable and provoke specific emotions in consumers so that they form emotional attachments with the brand or product. As an example, the author illustrates how sharing winemaker's family stories is crucial for the success of wine tourism. This topic continues in the chapter *Wearable Technology and Wine*, which notes how the alcohol industry uses technological advancements like augmented reality, for example Google Glass, to increase their sales by providing a multisensory experience of choosing and consuming wine. The chapter *Smart Packaging: The Labels Come to Life* describes legal regulations regarding labeling and emphasizes that various exemptions are given to the wine industry. For instance, alcoholic beverages are exempt from having ingredient and calory information on their labels. Moreover, using digital and interactive technologies, like QR codes, in sales and labeling is still not sufficiently regulated, which the industry has used to its advantage and for profit. Additionally, the author critically examines the role of luxury in marketing which aims to promote sales and drinking by deceptively making consumers feel that buying certain types of products makes them wealthy

and powerful. On a positive note, chapter six shows how wearable technologies can and are being used for preventive and curative purposes. The author presents different uses of technologies designed for monitoring vital signs, activity levels, alcohol levels in the blood, as well as online resources for the recovery of alcohol addicts. These resources are a more affordable option than traditional therapy. They reduce the feelings that come with the stigma surrounding the subject matter, as well as apps intended to teach young people how to drink responsibly.

The sixth and seventh chapters unravel the influence of specific marketing practices that target young people as well as the cultural norms and behaviors on social media that promote drinking to young people. Ramšak draws attention to different strategies, such as developing low-alcohol percentage drinks called "alcopops" targeted at teenagers or alcohol-free drinks that resemble regular ones, the purpose of which is to normalize drinking at a young age and promote it as desirable behavior. Product design, in the form of shiny and/or colorful packaging, plays an especially important role in attracting a younger audience because "what we buy is frequently not simply a product, but a concept that object symbolizes" (p. 46). Additionally, normalization and desirability of drinking are promoted through "alcoposts" on social media, which depict only positive experiences of drinking, while negative consequences or addiction are not represented.

Chapters *Masculinity and Practices of Drinking* and *Femininity, Online Practices of Drinking and Women in Alcohol Industry* discuss the gender differences in social norms regarding drinking and how consequently brands employ different marketing to target specific social groups. Drinking practices are embedded in the patriarchal framework which reflects different power relations and stereotypical gender roles: for men choice and price of drinks and drinking stamina are a way to affirm hegemonic masculinity, but for women, while drinking is more encouraged, there are also concerns how safe and feminine it is. The author also discusses the phenomena of "Wine Queens" (the topic of her previous book of the same title, published by Springer in 2015). Wine Queens use their appearance to promote drinking to younger audiences (e.g., beer-girls) and are often victims of microaggression or sexual assaults.

Chapter ten, *Drinking Games*, shows that even though the ritual of playing different types of games while drinking originated in Ancient Greece, only recently has the main purpose of those games become to promote the intoxication of players. The discussion on how digital marketing and apps change routines and drinking behavior continues in a chapter titled *Digital Marketing Strategies during a Coronavirus Pandemic* which shows that rapid digitalization during the 2020 pandemic made it possible for the wine industry to explore new technological advancements, like digital wine tastings, making wine a form of entertainment and coping mechanism

for isolation (new apps for drinking games, challenges and memes), to promote new products (canned wine), and most importantly to make alcohol available via online delivery services.

Different strategies, such as brand stretching, indirect advertising, or product placement, employed by the alcohol industry to overcome advertising bans on alcohol products are explored in the chapter *Brand Stretching and Popular Culture.* Onscreen, alcohol consumption has been rising notably in movies, TV shows, and particularly in reality programming. When paired with beer sponsorships and ads during sports events, this increased exposure significantly impacts young people, normalizing and making drinking more desirable. The chapter *Legislation between Norm and Practice,* analyses the legal framework and regulations of alcohol advertising in the European Union. The author concludes that laws are not uniform, penalties are often lax, and regulations are often not comprehensive enough to include advertisements on emerging new platforms such as social media. The concluding chapter titled *The Unplugged Path to Alcoholism* comments on the current state of public health campaigns about alcohol prevention, which due to limited resources and a focus on "information intimidation" (p. 108), have insufficient effect compared to the highly sophisticated marketing techniques of the alcohol industry. The author concludes that it is very urgent to update and tighten legal restrictions on alcohol advertising, which includes digital technologies.

The themes discussed in this book highlight the worrying influence of different marketing strategies employed by the alcohol industry, as well as the ineffectiveness of legislation and public health programs to mitigate those effects. The author makes a compelling and well-researched case for questioning different ways in which drinking is being normalized and even portrayed as desirable behavior in moden society, while often ignoring the destructive consequences of alcohol addiction. The book is a great jumping off point for researchers and policy developers, as it marks crucial areas that need to be addressed to protect health, especially that of young people. The way the book is organized, its accessible writing style, and an abundance of examples make it an important source of information for the general public, as well, because developing a critical approach to media content is rarely a part of the general curricula or public debate at the levels available for and engaging to the general public.

Ana Depope