

Underage Alcohol Sales—It Only Takes a Minute: A New Approach to Underage Alcohol Availability

JORIS J. VAN HOOF, PH.D.,^{*,*} AND JORDY F. GOSSELT, PH.D.[†]

^{*}Faculty of Behavioral Sciences, Department of Communication Studies, University of Twente, Enschede, the Netherlands

ABSTRACT. Objective: Because minors generally report higher accessibility than one would expect on the basis of the “compliance rates” established by researchers (the percentage of stores that comply with age limits for sales of age-restricted products such as alcoholic beverages), we propose a new method to better depict the availability of age-restricted products for minors as an alternative to the compliance approach, which in our view is too narrow. Method: Underage mystery shoppers were assigned to buy alcohol in a store of their preference, using any (legally allowed) purchase method. The time required to buy alcohol was the main outcome variable. As a benchmark, the time required to buy

soft drinks was recorded. Results: All underage mystery shoppers succeeded in buying alcohol, which means 100% availability. On average, buying alcohol took less than 10 minutes (including travel and shopping time), which was 2 minutes more than when purchasing soft drinks. Conclusions: Compliance at an outlet level can misrepresent the actual availability to minors. Both the proposed approach to availability and a new approach to age validation indicate that the general assumption that the traditional methods of age validation can effectively prevent the commercial availability of age-restricted products to minors should be seriously questioned. (*J Stud Alcohol Drugs*, 74, 423–427, 2013)

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION AMONG adolescents is considered a major public health issue because the early use of alcohol is a strong predictor of alcohol consumption in adult populations and consumption-related problems (e.g., Grant et al., 2006). For this reason, most societies have imposed legal age limits to restrict the sales of risk substances, like alcohol, to people under a certain age. Since 1992, researchers have studied the effectiveness of legal age limits by measuring compliance rates at the level of alcohol outlets. Because self-reported data by vendors tend to overestimate actual compliance, the mystery shopping method (also known as decoy operations) is used to determine compliance with age limits regarding the sale of alcohol, resulting in compliance rates representing a percentage of shops complying with this legislation (Britt et al., 2006; Freisthler et al., 2003; Gossett et al., 2007; Preusser and Williams, 1992; Preusser et al., 1994; Wagenaar et al., 2005; Willner et al., 2000; Wolfson et al., 1996).

These compliance rates on the outlet level, however, cannot simply be used to represent actual availability to minors. Consistent (i.e., predictable) noncompliance by cashiers, for example, can lead to compliance rates totally misrepresenting the actual commercial availability of alcohol to minors. Minors may very accurately know which stores, types of stores, or cashiers consistently do not comply with age limits, enabling them to buy alcohol by simply circumvent-

ing the compliance that they would encounter elsewhere. Availability in that case is 100%. Also, minors without this knowledge may challenge a compliance level by conducting more than one purchase attempt in order to succeed. For instance, in a town with a 50% compliance level, if minors randomly choose an outlet to conduct a purchase attempt (which is somewhat artificial) and when the binary chance of success is the same for all cashiers (which is most likely not the case), these minors have a 50% chance of buying alcohol at the first outlet or cashier they visit. When they do not succeed and decide to try again in a second outlet or through another cashier (with again a 50% chance of success), the overall success rate increases to $1 - (0.5 \times 0.5) = 75\%$, and so on.

In this article, we propose a new method to determine the availability of age-restricted products to underage customers that incorporates the predictability of noncompliance as well as the number of purchase attempts minors conduct. By developing a new research protocol that allows mystery shoppers to act as minors do in real life, we were able to measure the commercial availability of alcohol in the most realistic way. Instead of a percentage score as an outcome variable (compliance level), we introduce the time required to buy alcohol as the new outcome variable. To compare the new alcohol availability data with established compliance rates, we also collected data in the conventional way.

Method

Research design

Data were collected in two regions in the Netherlands during a 3-week period. During Week 1, compliance on an

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Teleconnect Inc./Agencies partially covered the cost of the decoy operations for this study.

*Correspondence may be sent to Joris J. van Hoof at the University of Twente, Faculty of Behavioral Sciences, Department of Communication Studies, P.O. Box 217, 7500 AE Enschede, the Netherlands, or via email at: j.j.vanhoof@utwente.nl.

Memo

Datum: 4 december 2012
Van: Mr. W. Seinen, advocaat
Aan: Belangstellenden privacy aspecten Ageviewers

Betreft: Verklaring beoordeling privacy aspecten Ageviewers systeem

Introductie

Het belang van privacybescherming en naleving van de Wet bescherming persoonsgegevens heeft centraal gestaan bij de inrichting van processen bij cliënte, Hollandsche Exploitatie Maatschappij, h.o.d.n. "Ageviewers". Om die reden heeft Ageviewers mijn kantoor ("CMS") reeds in 2007 ingeschakeld, nog tijdens de ontwikkelingsfase van de systematiek.

Als vertrekpunt is ervan uit gegaan dat het communiceren van een camerabeeld van een aspirant-koper en / of diens identiteitsdocument naar een extern controlecentrum en de (tijdelijke) weergave van deze beelden op een beeldscherm, een verwerking van persoonsgegevens is als bedoeld in de Wet Bescherming Persoonsgegevens ("Wbp"). Naast de eisen die voortvloeien uit de Wbp, is ook gekeken naar de persoonlijke levenssfeer van aspirant kopers. In dat kader is onder meer het Ageviewers systeem vergeleken met de inbreuk op de persoonlijke levenssfeer die andere manieren van leeftijdscontrole met zich mee brengen.

Bij de beoordeling van het Ageviewers systeem heeft CMS in het bijzonder aandacht besteed aan:

- de grondslag van de gegevensverwerking die met de communicatie en weergave van beelden gepaard gaat;
- de mate waarin persoonsgegevens worden verwerkt, met name in het licht van het proportionaliteits- en subsidiariteitsbeginsel;
- de technische en organisatorische beveiligingsmaatregelen van Ageviewers; en
- de informatievoorziening aan betrokkenen.

Privacy by design

Wezenlijk voor de beoordeling is dat het Ageviewers systeem geen volledig geautomatiseerd controlesysteem is. Er is geen sprake van computergestuurde verwerking en herkenning van biometrische eigenschappen. De digitale verwerking van persoonsgegevens blijft beperkt tot het transport van het beeldmateriaal naar het controlecentrum van Ageviewers en de weergave ervan op het beeldscherm van speciaal geïnstrueerde controlemedewerkers, die de daadwerkelijke controle uitvoeren.

Het systeem is zodanig ingericht dat de te verwerken gegevens in alle gevallen worden beperkt tot het absolute minimum dat nodig is voor een verantwoorde verificatie. Zo wordt als eerste fase in het verificatieproces uitsluitend een afbeelding van het gelaat aangeboden aan de controlemedewerker. Andere persoonlijke of identificeerbare gegevens (zoals koopgedrag, locatie en lichaamskenmerken) heeft de controlemedewerker niet.

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