

The Influence of Alcohol Industry-sponsored “Gulder Ultimate Search” Reality Television Series on the Drinking Behaviours of Nigerian Youths

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Abstract

Background: Alcohol consumption among youths and its related problems are increasing in Nigeria. Whilst one of the reasons for this is due to the marketing activities of the transnational alcohol corporations, there are no written national alcohol control policies that regulate alcohol marketing in Nigeria.

Methods: This article draws on in-depth interviews with 31 Nigerian university students (aged 19-23 years) to explore the extent to which the “Gulder Ultimate Search” (GUS) reality television show influences alcohol consumption amongst GUS contestants, television audiences and those who participate in GUS promotional activities.

Results: The results show that GUS was very popular amongst students and their knowledge of the reality show was high, to the extent that they were able to identify the particular alcohol company that sponsors the reality television programme, the number of contestants that compete for the prizes in each season, and what can be won by the contestants or

television viewers. GUS influences the drinking behaviours of contestants because one of the criteria for participation is to present 10 or more recently used 'cans' of "Gulder beer" during the screening exercise. GUS also appears to influence the drinking behaviours of television viewers and those who participate in promotions due to product placement, direct advertisements and promotional activities that accompany the "Fan-Based Edition" aspect of GUS.

Conclusion: Overall, GUS is a disguised marketing strategy to promote brand awareness, and to increase sales and consumption. Alcohol control policies that regulate event sponsorship and promote public health should be implemented in Nigeria.

Keywords: Alcohol marketing; Gulder Ultimate Search; Nigeria; sponsorship; students

Introduction

Transnational alcohol corporations (TAC) in Nigeria use sophisticated multi-platform marketing strategies such as advertising, sales promotions, sponsorship of social events, etc., to reach their target populations (de Bruijn, 2011; Dumbili, 2013). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, alcohol companies sponsored youth-oriented fashion shows, concerts, carnivals and secondary school essay competitions (Obot & Ibanga, 2002). While some of these strategies still exist in contemporary Nigeria, others have also been introduced. These new strategies include "Star Music Trek" (an all-night music concert where local musicians and comedians are contracted to entertain attendees in different 10 Nigerian cities (Dumbili, in Press)) and the widely televised "Star Quest"- a musical talent hunt (Nigerian Breweries Plc, 2014). Additionally, sales promotions such as 'Buy-two-get-one-free' and 'Open-and-Win' (where codes are concealed under crown corks of bottles) are increasingly used in Nigeria (Nigerian Breweries Plc, 2013a). Similarly, one of the TAC sponsored Nigerians to visit Dubai in 2013 for shopping trips (Agency Reporter, 2013) and also engaged in a promotion where 11 people were sponsored to watch the 2014 world cup in Brazil (Agency Reporter, 2014).

Internationally, evidence shows that alcohol promotion or the sponsorship of social events facilitates brand preference and alcohol use amongst youths (Gordon, MacKintosh, &

Moodie, 2010) and also engenders a readiness to initiate drinking amongst adolescents (Gordon et al., 2011). Evidence from the UK (O'Brien et al., 2014) and USA (Kuo, Wechsler, Greenberg, & Lee, 2003) shows that sales promotion or the sponsorship of events influenced students to consume alcohol and to engage in binge drinking. The effect of sales promotion has also been reported in Nigeria, where it facilitated adolescents' desire to initiate alcohol use (de Bruijn, 2011) and influenced university students to consume large quantities of alcohol (Dumbili, 2015a).

Presently, Nigeria ranks second for per capita consumption and heavy episodic drinking in sub-Saharan Africa (World Health Organization, WHO 2014), and alcohol-related problems such as injuries, accidents, mental disorder, especially amongst adolescents and young adults are common (e.g., Abayomi, Babalola, Olakulehin, & Ighoroje, 2015; Dumbili, 2015b). Although participating in drinking games and other similar drinking rituals contribute to alcohol-related problems in Nigeria (Dumbili, 2015c), the growing alcohol production and marketing activities appear to exacerbate the problems (Jacks, 2014).

Despite that a number of studies have investigated how alcohol marketing influences alcohol consumption in Nigeria, no empirical study on how the sponsorship of social events contributes to these trajectories was identified. This exploratory study attempts to fill this gap. Specifically, the study explores two research questions: (I) How does participating in 'Gulder Ultimate Search' reality television series influence contestants' alcohol use? (II) To what extent does the viewing of 'Gulder Ultimate Search' reality television series influence viewers' alcohol use?

Alcohol Marketing on Social Networking Sites

As indicated above, there are multiple alcohol marketing strategies in Nigeria, but one of the significant and developing aspects of this multi-platform marketing is the use of social media. Alcohol companies not only use the traditional media such as television to publicise their promotional activities or social events, but they now upload brand-authored marketing messages and associated images on social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram (Dumbili, 2014a). For example, the producer of 'Gulder beer' has multiple Facebook pages that are used to promote either Gulder brand or Gulder Ultimate

Search (GUS) programme and promotional activities that accompany GUS. Based on the user-figures collated on January 13, 2016, one of its Facebook walls had 228, 809 “likes” for GUS brand-authored content (Gulder Nigeria, 2015) while another wall had 103, 094 “likes” for “GUS TV series”. Again, several comments and questions on how and where to redeem prizes, when the registration for the next episode of GUS will commence, and other contents that appear to promote Gulder beer were found (Gulder Nigeria, 2015).

Studies conducted in Western countries (e.g., Nicholls, 2012; Winpenny, Marteau, & Nolte, 2014) show that alcohol industries have recently increased their use of SNS (as a part of their ‘marketing mix’). Nicholls (2012) for instance, reported that SNS such as Facebook and Twitter are used to promote industry-sponsored marketing events in the UK. Similar, Winpenny et al. (2014, p.157) revealed how young people engage “with specific brand pages through the ‘likes’, ‘follows’ and video views recorded on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube”.

Indeed, SNS not only facilitate the promotion of social events or brands to young people, but they have become the channels through which “young people display a reciprocal relationship” with alcohol industries and their marketing activities (Atkinson, Ross, Begley, & Sumnall, 2014, p.6). This is especially because youths ‘like’, ‘share images’, ‘post’ and repost comments, and also join groups that promote particular brands (Atkinson et al., 2014). Because alcohol companies also facilitate this reciprocal relationship by “requiring *users* to ‘like’ a page before they could enter a competition” (Winpenny et al., 2014, p.156), this increases the exposure of SNS users to brand-related contents. Therefore, they may be influenced to consume the brands they see online, especially because exposure to “alcohol advertising and promotion increases the likelihood that adolescents will start to use alcohol, and to drink more if they are already using alcohol” (Anderson et al. 2009, p.299).

Alcohol Regulation in Nigeria

In terms of regulation, while there are advertising ‘Code of Practice’ that is supposed to regulate alcohol advertisement on the television and radio (although this is not enforced (de

Bruijin, Ferreira-Borges, Engels, & Bhavsar, 2014)), alcohol promotion or the sponsorship of social events is not regulated in Nigeria (WHO, 2014; Dumbili, 2014b). Similarly, alcohol marketing on the internet is unregulated in Nigeria. This is contrary to the UK, where 'Advertising Code of Practice' for internet marketing exists (Winpenny et al., 2014). Although the aforementioned UK's regulatory measure has been criticised for its inherent weaknesses, scholars (e.g., Winpenny et al., 2014) have recommended how to improve on the laws.

While alcohol control policies and other regulatory measures that seek to either ban alcohol advertising or other portrayals exist in many Western countries and even in some African countries such as South Africa (Siegfried et al., 2014), the opposite is the case in Nigeria, where alcohol companies largely rely on marketing self-regulation (Dumbili, 2014b) due to the lack of written national alcohol control policies (WHO, 2014). As Obot (2007) argued, the lack of alcohol policies or the non-enforcement of the existing code is related to the government's economic interest in the activities of these companies, and this has serious implications on public health. This is because self-regulatory messages do not reduce alcohol availability or consumption (Babor et al., 2010; Hastings et al., 2010) because they are designed to serve the interests of alcohol producers (Babor et al., 2010). Because of a lack of effective regulatory measures in Nigeria, alcohol companies have been employing diverse aggressive marketing strategies that increase the physical, economic, and psychological availabilities of alcohol in the country (Babor, Robaina, & Jernigan, 2015).

Gulder Ultimate Search

Gulder Ultimate Search (GUS), an annual reality television series that started in 2004, is sponsored by 'Nigerian Breweries Plc' (NBP) (Njoku, 2013). NBP, a company that is partly owned by Heineken, produces "Gulder beer", amongst other brands. With regard to how GUS is made, a forest location is selected (from one of the 36 states in Nigeria) where an "Ultimate Treasure"¹ is hidden and young men and women between 21 and 30 years go into the forest to uncover the treasure (Nigerian Breweries Plc, 2013b; Njoku, 2014). The

¹ An 'Ultimate Treasure' could be an art work, such as a sculpted head or 'Staff of Office' of a known king or warrior, etc.

event starts with an online registration and screening, and those who pass the online screening exercise are invited to attend further screening exercises, such as swimming, running, etc. At the end of the physical screening exercises, those who pass are camped in a forest from which they go to different locations in the forest in search of the hidden treasure (Gulder Ultimate Search, 2015b). Here, they have to scale fences, climb trees, swim across streams, and perform other activities in search of the treasure, all of which are televised. Some are strenuous or require special skills; as such, one contestant drowned while swimming during the first edition of GUS (BBC News, 2007).

According to Bratich (2006), reality television shows are produced to spur interactivity, in that television audiences are meant to not only follow the show but to participate through texts messages, chats or votes. In the Nigerian context, television viewers participate (via short message service- SMS voting system) in choosing the 'Gatekeepers',² who assist the contestants in finding their way in the forest (Njoku, 2014). Viewers also participate in voting for/or against the contestants to either remain or be evicted from the competition (Abone, 2015). Indeed, the most revealing part of GUS is the prize. For example, the winner of the 2013 edition received 10-million naira (about £38, 000) cash prize and a brand new Mitsubishi Pajero 3.0L SUV car, while the second runner-up received three million naira (about £11, 000) (Njoku, 2013).

To make it more engaging, the sponsor promised to reward television viewers with diverse prizes (Ademigbuji, 2014; Nigerian Breweries Plc, 2013b). As Njoku (2013) reported, NBP promised during the 2013 edition that:

The consumers of the premium lager beer, Gulder will enjoy the privilege of being a part of the search tagged "Fan-Based Search"... The winner will be presented with a brand new Mitsubishi Pajero 3 GLX MT at the grand finale of the event.

While commenting on how the 2014 GUS edition was organised and on the impact of the programme, one of the Marketing Managers of NBP noted that:

This time, we rewarded the viewers with a programme that we called 'Watch, Vote Predict and Win'. You watch the show, vote for your favourite contestant, predict

² Gatekeepers are previous winners of GUS.

your favourite contestant and then win a Nokia Lumia 630 and other accessories... (Abone, 2015).

Participation in the 'Fan-Based Search' requires the viewer to send a code through SMS to a number provided by the sponsor, but the codes are concealed under the 'crown corks' of Gulder beer (Njoku, 2013). Raffle draws are then used to select the winners towards the end of the programme (Gulder Ultimate Search, 2015a). That winning 'codes' are concealed under the 'crown cork' suggests that the potential participants in the viewers' edition have to buy Gulder beer in order to uncover the codes.

Again, in the 2015 season, GUS introduced another promotional activity called the "Ultimate Chase", where youths participated in sporting activities. Eight government-owned stadia were selected across the country, and young people were invited to participate, but to compete, the potential contestant has to "gather six crown corks of Gulder [beer] marked 'Ultimate Chase', and go to any of the chase venues for accreditation and screening, after which they can participate in the competition" (Beverage Industry News, 2015). While the eight "Ultimate Chase Winners" won eight new 'Hyundai Elantra' cars, 200 others won cash, television sets, mobile phones, etc., in each stadium (Beverage Industry News, 2015).

Another unique feature of GUS is that it is favourably endorsed by celebrities and political actors. While it is hosted by popular Nollywood (Nigerian movie industry) actors, politicians also support the programme (Gulder Ultimate Search, 2015b). For example, during the 2014 edition, Mr Willie Obiano, the present Governor of Anambra State,³ endorsed the programme and visited the contestants in the forest (Onikoyi, 2014). GUS is televised by popular government-owned and private terrestrial and satellite television stations in Nigeria. As indicated above, each episode is also uploaded to SNS (Gulder Ultimate Search, 2015a). While product placement dominates each televised episode, direct 'Gulder beer' advertisements run intermittently throughout the programme.

Although there is a dearth of empirical studies on psychoactive substance portrayals on television in Nigeria, evidence elsewhere shows that alcohol (Blair, Yue, Singh, & Bernhardt, 2005; Russell, Russell, & Grube, 2009), tobacco, and other controversial products

³ Anambra State is one of the 36 states in Nigeria. It is located in south-eastern Nigeria; the state hosted the 2014 GUS edition.

(Hudson & Hudson, 2006) are highly endorsed and portrayed in reality television series. Again, the effect of these portrayals on young people is high. For example, Russell et al. (2009) argued that there is an association between young people's consumption of reality television series and the believability of the positive alcohol's messages that are portrayed in them. Empirical studies conducted in Belgium (Van den Bulck & Beullens, 2005) and Netherland (Engels, Hermans, van Baaren, Hollenstein, & Bot, 2009) also show that viewing alcohol portrayals or alcohol commercial messages on television influences young people to consume alcohol.

Although it is argued that young people's consumption of digital media has increased in recent years, but "television remains *one of the primary*" sources through which youths are socialised into psychoactive substance use (Eggermont & Roe, 2014, p.1). As 'Cultivation theorists' argue, this is because "television *is a significant source of general values, ideologies and perspectives*" (Gerbner, 1998, p.185) about alcohol as a social lubricant.

While most reality television series and many other television programmes often portray excessive alcohol consumption and glamorise social drinking and alcohol's benefits (Anschutz, Van den Berg, de Graaf, & Koordeman, 2014), they often do not focus on the consequences of intoxication (Atkinson, Bellis, & Sumnall, 2013). According to Russell et al. (2014), failing to highlight the consequences of intoxication often blurs young people's perceptions of the consequences of alcohol misuse, and this has serious implications because they are highly exposed to media portrayals of alcohol (Anschutz et al., 2014).

With regard to the impact of GUS, media reports show that it influences the widespread popularity of Gulder brand and boosts the profit of NBP (Ademigbuji, 2014). This can be inferred from the following assertion made by Mr Emmanuel Agu, the company's 'Marketing Manager for the Gulder brand':

...GUS has helped grow Gulder brand awareness. I can tell you that if the returns on investment were not positive, we would not be able to sustain the programme...; the brand is very profitable (Ademigbuji, 2014).

Methods

Procedure, design and data analysis

This article was taken from a wider study that explored three objectives: the interplay between young people's media consumption and alcohol use, the role of alcohol marketing in students' drinking behaviour, and the gendering of alcohol. This particular article focuses on the first and second objectives. Following ethical approval by the Nigerian University and Brunel University London Ethics Board, 31 in-depth interviews lasting 33-90 minutes were conducted with 22 male and 9 female Nigerian undergraduate students (aged 19-23 years) between September and December 2013. The participants were recruited from nine faculties on the university campus using word-of-mouth and snowballing techniques.

The word-of-mouth approach was used to recruit the first group of participants. On campus, the researcher (the author) approached students and introduced the project to them. After establishing rapport with them, they were then asked if they drank alcohol. Those who self-identified as current alcohol users were then asked if they could consider participating in the study and sharing their experiences of alcohol consumption. Those who indicated interest were provided with an information sheet that detailed the aims of the study, the role of participants, the potential benefits and harms of participation, the methods for securing data and maintaining confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation. Recruitment difficulties hindered the inclusion of more women. Some significant barriers to the recruitment of more women were the sensitive nature of the topic and the greater stigmatisation of female drinkers, even though alcohol consumption by both young males and females is traditionally disapproved of in Nigeria. Some of these difficulties were surmounted through snowballing approach which assisted the researcher to reach hidden population. All of the interviews were conducted in English, and recorded with a digital device with the permission of participants. All but one of the participants were from the Igbo ethnic group⁴, as gaining admission to universities outside one's 'catchment area' or ethnic group is difficult in Nigeria.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and thematic analysis was undertaken (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following Silverman (2011), a manual preliminary analysis was initiated immediately after the first interview. The field notes and audio recordings were reviewed to check for accuracy and to identify additional areas to explore further in subsequent interviews. Tentative coding schemes were developed at an early stage (Braun

⁴ The Igbo ethnic group is one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. They live in the eastern part of the country where the data for this study were collected.

& Clarke, 2006) with initial extracts categorised into broad themes and subthemes. Collaborative analysis between the author and two senior academics was also adopted at this stage to ensure analytical rigour (Cornish, Gillespie, & Zittoun, 2014). This facilitated the assessment of my initial thoughts and ideas about coding and themes. These processes provided an early grasp of the data (Morse, 2012), and some of these subthemes grouped manually became the parent nodes while others were condensed (Saldaña, 2012) into different child nodes that formed the thematic coding framework when the data were imported into NVivo software.

When the 31 interviews were completed, the transcripts were read many times, and searches were made in order to identify patterns in the data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To enhance consistency and coherence, this process was repeated a number of times before coding was completed. The key themes that were identified through these processes are presented below.

Results

GUS's popularity and reasons for followership

The interviewer started by asking the participants to mention the social events or programmes they know that are sponsored by alcohol companies, and all of the 31 participants mentioned GUS. All of them noted that GUS is the most popular television series in Nigeria, and they also gave vivid descriptions of the programme:

**...Gulder [beer] sponsors Ultimate Search. They will hide a 'treasure' in a desert [forest], and 14 contestants will go and search for the treasure and overcome some challenges. Then, the winner collects millions [of naira] and possibly a car....
(Chisalun, 19years, female)**

I know GUS; it's a kind of programme that is meant for youths, and a certain amount of money is paid to anybody that wins. It's like a large sum of money...

GUS creates much impact because whenever it's on, I will end up watching television... It's kind of educative and entertaining... (Genny, 23years, female)

Another female participants- 'Pretty' (20 years), recalled that she views GUS regularly and added that it is very popular, especially amongst students who are **“dying to participate”**. The popularity of GUS was also discussed by the men, who explained the reasons why the reality television programme is widely followed by them and other Nigerians:

GUS is very interesting, so that's why I watch it. The programme tends to glue so many people to the TV screen... It is a very lovely programme, and everybody – old or young tends to watch it... (Chike, 21years, male)

Another male participant also stated that he views GUS regularly because it is interesting. When he was probed to unpack what makes it interesting, he gave a number of reasons:

GUS is like an adventure; it is suspense-filled, and you have your favourite person in the house that you are supporting by sending text messages and admiring them; ...it is fun. (Fred, 22years, male)

Although GUS contestants are mainly young adults, some of the participants noted that both old and young alike follow the programme on television and SNS. While Edulim revealed that he sees GUS on Facebook, he also indicated that everyone in his family watches it on television:

Ultimate Search is very interesting; it keeps me busy, it is not something I watch alone, the family, my dad, my mum, my siblings, and everybody does. (Edulim, 23years, male)

He also revealed his readiness to compete for the prize in a future edition, stating his flair for adventure and other activities that require energy and risk-taking as his motivations.

Purchasing Gulder Beer is compulsory for Contestants

While some of the participants revealed their readiness to participate in a future GUS edition, others noted that they had either made an attempt by registering for the previous editions or had participated in the GUS reality television programme. Many also indicated that they had friends who were previous contestants or winners. With regard to the criteria for participation, a great deal of diverse views was shared. Agatha, who is eager to participate, revealed that:

Students always drink Gulder [beer] because they want to have [empty] cans any time they are doing the programme because you have to come with cans of Gulder beer [to the screening venue], and if you don't have cans you can't participate. (Agatha, 21years, male)

Similarly, the men who had registered for the GUS screening exercise revealed some insightful parts of GUS. For example, Okey (21 years) shared his experience, having made an attempt to participate: **“at first they told us that for you to participate, you have to come for an audition, and you have to buy a certain amount of Gulder beer”**. Another male participant who had passed the online screening test and was subsequently invited to the physical screening exercise stressed that buying Gulder beer was compulsory:

Actually how it is done is that you have to register online when registration starts around the end of August. When you register and pass the online screening, they will send you an email that has a referee form and the terms and conditions... So you'll complete it, and come to the venue of the screening with 'ten cans of used Gulder' [beer]. That is kind of the entrance criterion for the screening. (Dozie, 23years, male)

Additionally, Femi (22 years), who had withdrawn from the programme, noted that to participate in the physical screening exercise, **“...you have to come with 20 cans of Gulder that are not squashed...”**. On why he withdrew from the programme after passing the online screening exercise, he recalled that he was unable to buy 20 cans of Gulder beer. As

these accounts show, it can be inferred that GUS is one of the channels through which NBP sells Gulder brand in Nigeria.

Money and fame motivate GUS participants

Participating in GUS requires both physical and mental energy as well as physical fitness. It requires abandoning your job or studies for some time to be in the camp, from which you go to the forest where the treasure is hidden. However, it appears that young people clearly have a strong desire to participate, and the reasons are explained below:

...Students are actually sceptical about the future, about being comfortable in life. So whatever they can do to actualise it, it is worth it. If I can earn nine million [naira] by just registering for GUS, buying ten cans of Gulder [beer] and transporting myself to the venue of the screening, I think it's worth it. It's just that mind-set of young people who are trying to get a better future. (Dozie, 23years, male)

Similarly, Pretty (20 years), who stated that she would like to participate when the opportunity comes noted that this is: **“because I'll need the money that is involved and any other gifts [prizes]”**. When she was asked to explain what attracts students, she revealed some interesting reasons that are similar to those shared by male participants such as Favour:

It pays because after the search you'll have this huge amount of money, sometimes a car as a consolation [prize] for the winners... And also you will be on the TV. So when you come back to school, it draws influence and a crowd to you... (Pretty, 20years, female)

A winner of GUS instantly becomes a brand new car owner and also wins a very large sum of money. If you have a friend who is a contestant and he's shown on national TV..., you might be interested in participating. This is because you might

want to be famous or you might be looking at what he stands to gain materially.

Who doesn't want a car and money? (Favour, 23years, male)

Reality television series have the capacity to transform “ordinary people into celebrities” (Bratich, 2006, p.67). As Pretty's account above indicated, this also was one of Ejike's (23 years, male) perceptions of GUS: **“they take that means to make people popular...”** Other participants also buttressed the fact that fame was a key motivating factor. While Diogor (23years, male) stressed that: **“I will participate just to be known in the country and the world”**, Genny also shared a candid account that supports the fact that fame influences people to participate in GUS:

Once you go there and come out, you are automatically a celebrity... because it's not easy appearing on the television [laughs]... When they see you on the street, they will be like, 'I know this person; he went for Ultimate Search last season...' You will end up being famous... (Genny, 23years, male)

Although the participants shared diverse reasons why they want to participate in GUS, participating in GUS directly or indirectly involves buying and/or consuming Gulder beer, especially during the screening stages.

GUS's power to influence drinking behaviours

A striking part of the data is that both the male and female participants identified that the reason why GUS is sponsored is to sell Gulder beer. Chike (21years, male) for instance, noted that **“...of course, it is Gulder beer [that the company is marketing]. So every little chance they get, they will bring in their advert”**. Another participant also shared a similar account:

The truth is that brewers know what they want; it is part of advertising their products... The money they give to the winner in the Ultimate Search is small compared to what they will gain at the end of the event... So it's all just part of the

marketing strategy, apart from the entertainment they give us, the viewers. It's all part of trying to sell more. (Boniface, 21years, male)

The participants noted that while viewing GUS could influence television viewers' drinking behaviours because Gulder beer advertisement is aired several times during each show, their perceptions also show that participating or knowing someone who had participated in GUS could influence the friends of the contestants to drink Gulder beer:

There is a girl called [name of girl] in this hostel... She participated in the Ultimate Search and came out as the first or second runner-up. When she came back to school, she went out with her group [girlfriends], and they went to the bar and asked for Gulder instead of their normal brand [ready-to-drink]. We were there, so we saw them. So it affected her..., and her friends drank Gulder, and as they were drinking, they raised the bottles and started screaming. So they tend to feel this connection with the energy that comes with GUS... (Chike, 21years, male)

As Chike's account shows that these females "asked for Gulder [beer] instead of their 'normal' brand", this reveals his perception of how GUS influences alcohol consumption even among females, who ordinarily do not drink beer in Nigeria due to traditional beliefs (Dumbili, 2015c).

A former GUS contestant also said that he prefers Gulder beer. When he was asked to shed light on why he preferred Gulder brand, he said:

I just like the drink. 'It befits my status'. As I said, I had gone [participated] for the GUS competition, and ever since then I just got attached to the drink. (Dozie, 23years, male)

Interviewer: Okay, you also said that it befits your status. Can you say a little more about this?

Just like the advert says: 'it is for champions'; that is it. I am aspiring to be a champion. It's a message about champions, where adventurous men go to the

**forest and come out with cash... Mainly it is for champions; that's why I drink it.
(Dozie, 23years, male)**

Similarly, Agatha's perception of GUS series indicates that it can influence people to drink Gulder beer even if that is just on a temporary basis:

Agatha: ...Ultimate Search can make someone drink because... before you can participate, you have to get '10 cans' of Gulder [beer], and you can't just get these cans of beer if you don't drink them. So it will make you drink Gulder [beer] and in the process, you may love the taste and you might see yourself drinking Gulder beer [after the event]. (Agatha, 21years, female)

Another female participant also gave other reasons why GUS may influence people's drinking behaviour:

...For you to win a prize in GUS [promotion], you have to drink, and if you drink, you'll open the 'crown cork' [where prizes are concealed]. They want people to win and that means they have to drink...; the prize motivates people to drink Gulder beer. (Chisalum, 19years, female)

From these accounts, it is clear that young people crave participation in GUS due to the promise of cash and the quest for fame. Although these are unrealistic fantasies propagated to sell Gulder brand, the desire to participate appears to be what the sponsor of this television series is cashing in on to recruit millions of young people and other viewers, who must buy Gulder beer in order to participate in GUS.

Discussion

This study contributes to the sparse literature on the sponsorship of events and how it influences alcohol consumption in Nigeria. The findings show that alcohol companies not

only employ sophisticated advertising and promotional strategies to reach their target groups (Dumbili, 2014b), but they also use the sponsorship of youth-oriented reality television series to market their products in Nigeria. Evidence shows that the endorsement of social drinking and other positive references to alcohol (Russell et al., 2009; Blair et al. 2005), or the portrayals of excessive drinking (Anschutz et al., 2014) is common in reality television series, and this facilitates the receptiveness, popularity and acceptability of the brands that are portrayed among viewers. In this current study, the data revealed that the knowledge of, and followership of GUS were not only popular on this campus, but GUS was also viewed among the out-of-school populations.

On the reasons why GUS is popular, it was found that the programme is sophisticatedly produced to engage audiences who are given the opportunity to vote for/against the contestants of their choice. That GUS reality television show is produced to provoke interactivity lends credence to Bratich's (2006) assertion that reality television series are often packaged to stimulate interactivity, by encouraging viewers to participate via chats, SMS, etc.

Reality television programmes not only stimulate interactivity or reciprocal relationships, but they are strategically and purposely produced in ways that provoke “affects and emotional responses” to what is portrayed (Oksanen, 2014, p. 139). Reality shows also tap into people’s sense of aspiration – their desire to improve and achieve. With GUS, alcohol consumption is becoming entwined in this sense of aspiration. Indeed, the participants ‘identified’ that GUS is entertaining or thrilling, and often glue them to television screen. Although youths follow GUS because of entertainment, the findings show that viewers are not only faced with multiple scenes of product placement of Gulder beer on the branded television environment, but they also see direct Gulder beer advertisements throughout each episode. This is why Hudson & Hudson's (2006 p.492) noted that product placement, in which brands are increasingly “embedded into storylines” of television programmes, and other entertainment channels are some of the marketing strategies employed by companies that produce controversial products.

A striking part of this finding is the way in which the participants identified that although GUS is entertaining, the programme was created to promote and sell Gulder

brand. Because GUS viewers see many forms of Gulder beer portrayals (direct and indirect adverts) while viewing television, this may influence their drinking behaviours, especially because advertising models and those who anchor GUS reality television series are popular Nigerian celebrities (Gulder Ultimate Search, 2015b). Additionally, GUS raffle draws and prize-giving events are also hosted by celebrities. For example, some of the celebrities who hosted and entertained audiences at the prize-giving day of the 2014 GUS season were 'Don Jazzy' and 'Dr Sid' (popular Nigerian singers (Daily Mail, 2014)), Yaw (a comedian), Bob Manuel (a Nollywood actor), etc., and the event was televised and uploaded to SNS (Gulder Nigeria, 2015). Because young people often imitate the drinking behaviours of "television characters...as a guide to what are 'normal' drinking practices" (Atkinson, Bellis, & Sumnall, 2013, p.91-92), those who are exposed to Gulder beer portrayals on this reality television show may be influenced to consume the brand.

Another significant result of this study is the way in which presenting 'empty cans' of Gulder beer served as a criterion for participating in GUS. While the desire to gain fame, cash and cars encourages youths to participate, it was found that actual participation demands that the potential participant must pass certain screening exercises. The findings show that potential participants must come to the screening venue with many empty cans of Gulder beer. Although the participants differed on the numbers of empty 'cans' of Gulder beer that are required for the screening, this arguably is because they did not attend the screening exercise in the same year or at the same venue. Furthermore, as the monetary and other material prizes change annually (Njoku, 2014), it appears that the criteria for participation change and become stricter.

Evidence shows that the sponsorship of events relies on self-regulation because the previous and present governments have not regulated event sponsorship in Nigeria through policies (WHO, 2014). As such, NBP who sponsors GUS engages in practices that contravene international standards and endanger public health. Because youths are desperate to participate, arguably due to the high level of youth unemployment and poverty in Nigeria, NBP employs unrealistic promises to sell drinks to the Nigerian populace.

Another key finding of this study revealed another way through which GUS influences people's drinking behaviours. It was identified that GUS has a promotional aspect in the form of the 'Fan-Based Edition' and 'Ultimate Chase', in which individuals can win

prizes such as cash and cars. Amongst the audiences who want to participate in these promotional activities, their drinking behaviours may be influenced because winning the Fan-Based or 'Ultimate Chase' prizes requires the purchase of Gulder beer in order to uncover the winning codes that are concealed under the 'crown corks' (Njoku, 2013).

The findings also show that GUS not only influences men's drinking behaviours, but it appears to influence the consumption of Gulder beer amongst women. In Nigeria, alcohol consumption is gendered. While men drink beer, women drink flavoured, ready-to-t-drink beverages (Dumbili, 2015c). Despite the fact that some young Nigerian women are now deviating from this patriarchal practice, women who consume beer are discriminated against (Dumbili, 2015c). Even the Marketing Manager of NBP made a statement that confirmed this: "Gulder [beer] is a masculine brand... This is a beer that is built on the platform of masculinity" (Abone, 2015). As the finding shows, GUS influences the female relatives and friends of GUS contestants to consume Gulder brand.

Conclusion

This study has some limitations. First, it is exploratory in nature; as such, caution should be applied when drawing conclusions based on the findings. Second, it did not elicit data from many female participants due to the recruitment problems discussed above. Additionally, it relied on data elicited from one university and one region. Because Nigeria is a multi-ethnic country, similar studies are required in other regions of the country, especially because GUS moves from one state to another annually. Despite these limitations, the study has revealed the extent to which event sponsorship contributes to young people's alcohol consumption in Nigeria. Because Nigeria lacks written national alcohol control policies to regulate the sponsorship of events and sales promotion (WHO, 2014), there is an urgent need to formulate and implement effective alcohol control policies in the country. The WHO 10-point policy thrust (WHO, 2010) that specifies evidence-based strategies that can be used to control alcohol marketing, reduce availability and prevent harmful consumption should be adopted in Nigeria. This will help to monitor and regulate the activities of alcohol companies and promote public health. It is also imperative that any attempts to develop effective

public health policies or campaigns take the saturated media landscapes into consideration, and public health strategies are linked to media literacy programmes.

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