

Alcohol industry strategies to influence the reform of the Finnish Alcohol Law

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Abstract

Aim: The aim of this study was to investigate the strategies used by the alcohol industry to influence the reform of the Alcohol Act in Finland during the preparation phase between 2016 and 2017. The study answers the following research question: what strategies were used by the alcohol industry to change the original purpose of the reform on alcohol in Finland? **Method:** Primary data were collected through 16 expert interviews with experts who had participated in the preparation of the alcohol reform in Finland, while secondary data were collected from prior literature, journal articles and Google databases. **Results:** The results identified three main political strategies used by the alcohol industry to influence the reform of the law on alcohol in Finland during the preparation phase between 2016 and 2017: “information”, under which the alcohol industry lobbied politicians in Parliament through Members of Parliament of the National Coalition Party due to the close ties between the two; “constituency building”, under which the alcohol industry formed alliances with interest groups in the grocery-retail business in Finland, to advocate for liberalisation of the law, as well as the use of social media – specifically Twitter – to lobby the public; and lastly, “policy substitution” to promote self-regulation. **Conclusions:** The results suggest that the involvement of the alcohol industry in political decision-making following Finland’s EU membership has given the industry legitimacy and new opportunities to influence alcohol policy, while limiting

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policies to protect the public from alcohol-related harms. The results may be useful to alcohol policy-makers.

Keywords

alcohol law, alcohol industry strategies, Finland, policy influence, Public Health, reform

The globalisation of the production and marketing networks of alcohol has created a small group of large alcohol corporations who are able to influence policies by lobbying in global forums such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) forums (Jernigan, 2012).

Previously, alcohol policy-making in Finland has excluded the alcohol industry. Since Finland joined the EU in 1995, the alcohol industry has been invited to the working groups that prepare alcohol legislation, and the alcohol industry has become more international and more active in lobbying to influence legislation with the aim of increasing sales (Hellman, 2012; Lauronen, Mäkelä, Salminen, & Hiilamo, 2017). The international alcohol industry's role has also become more prominent in the sale, advertising and policy-making of alcohol in Finland (Hellman, 2012). As a result, the international alcohol industry has sought a more active role in the Finnish market, which has weakened alcohol regulation and the position of the state-owned retail monopoly, Alko (Alavaikko & Österberg, 2000; Hellman, 2012). These developments have created new opportunities for the alcohol industry to influence alcohol legislation in Finland. The aim of this study was to analyse how the industry has utilised these opportunities.

In Finland, alcohol use is a contributory factor in nearly one quarter of deaths caused by accidents, and for many societal problems such as family conflicts, arrests, job instability and frequent short periods of sick leave (Österberg, 2007). According to Statistics Finland (2015), 1,400 men and 400 women died from alcohol-related diseases and alcohol poisoning in Finland in 2014. The Alcohol Act in Finland

is intended to prevent the detrimental societal, social and health effects caused by alcohol in the country (Österberg, 2007). Following Estonia's accession to membership of the EU in May 2004, the possibility of importing practically unlimited amounts of cheap alcohol for personal use was expected to become a major draw for Finnish travellers visiting Estonia, and was a key reason for which Finland felt forced to lower its taxation of alcohol by an average of 33% in March 2004 before Estonia joined the EU (see Table 1).

The unprecedented alcohol tax cut in Finland was followed by a sharp rise in consumption and alcohol-related harms (Herttua, Mäkelä, & Martikainen, 2007; Mäkelä & Österberg, 2007; Statistics Finland, 2015). Due to the increase in alcohol-related harms in Finland, researchers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) began to speak in favour of new restrictions on alcohol sales and advertising to improve public health and reduce the harms and societal problems caused by alcohol (Karlsson, 2009; Montonen, 2008). This opened up the discussion on ways of reforming the Alcohol Act in Finland with the aim of reducing alcohol harm. The preparations for a new Alcohol Act in Finland began in 2011 with the specific aim of reducing alcohol-related harm, but the government at the time did not manage to start preparations for a new alcohol law, so it was postponed to the next government (see Table 1). The political work on the comprehensive Alcohol Act reform began in February 2016, when the Minister of Social Affairs and Health, Juha Rehula, presented his preliminary proposal to the ministerial working group on promotion of health and wellbeing (Tuominen, 2017a). The proposal

Table 1. Chronology of events relating to the alcohol law reform in Finland (1995–2017).

Year	Month	Event
1995	January	Finland's Alcohol Act and 13 Decrees issued under the Act came into effect following European Union (EU) membership.
2004	March	Finland lowered its taxation of alcohol by an average of 33% before Estonia joined the EU in May 2004, due to the ability of Finnish visitors to Estonia to import practically unlimited amounts of cheap alcohol.
2011	May	Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen's National Coalition Party (NCP) government of June 2011 to June 2014 planned to fully reform the alcohol law but did not complete the process. Twelve ministers of 19 came from the NCP and the Social Democratic Party (SDP), while the Left Alliance, the Green League, the Swedish People's Party (RKP) and the Christian Democrats shared seven ministerial portfolios.
2014	June	Prime Minister Alexander Stubb's (NCP) government of June 2014 to May 2015. The suspension was noted in the government plan so Stubb's government never had plans to reform the law suspended the process. The NCP had six ministers in the Cabinet. The Green League and the Swedish People's Party had two ministers each and the Christian Democrats had one.
2015	May	Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's Centre Party (CP) government from May 2015 to the present began with an agenda to reform the alcohol law. At the beginning of his tenure, there were a total of 14 ministers in Sipilä's cabinet: six ministers from the CP and four each from the NCP and the Finns Party (later Blue Alternative Party).
2016	February	Political work on the comprehensive Alcohol Act reform began when the Minister of Social Affairs and Health, Juha Rehula, presented his preliminary proposal to the ministerial working group on promotion of health and wellbeing.
2016	May	Parliamentary groups of the government parties discussed the preliminary proposal and key policies regarding the reform were outlined.
2016	November	The ministerial working group on promotion of health and wellbeing discussed the draft government proposal on the Alcohol Act before the proposal was circulated for comment to all the relevant stakeholders.
2017	January	End of comments on the preliminary proposal from all the relevant stakeholders.
2017	March	A summary of comments on the comprehensive reform of the Alcohol Act was completed.
2017	April	Preparation of the new Alcohol Act.
2017	June	Breakthrough in the alcohol law reform by which the newly reconstituted government agreed to ease restrictions on the sale of alcohol in Finland. It had taken more than two years for MPs to reach agreement on the proposed changes to the Alcohol Act. The most divisive part of the debate had centred on a plan to allow grocery shops to sell drinks with up to 5.5% alcohol content. MPs from the CP opposed the sale of such beverages in grocery shops. However, other members of the governing coalition largely backed the measure (Vaalisto, 2017).
2017	September	The government proposal on a new Alcohol Act was submitted to Parliament by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health for deliberation by MPs.
2017	October	MPs were split fifty-fifty on whether or not a new alcohol law should be passed that would raise the maximum allowed alcohol content of beverages sold in grocery shops to 5.5%, and extend the opening hours of the Finnish alcohol monopoly Alko, among other things.
2017	December	The new Alcohol Act was adopted by Parliament.
2017	December	The President of the Republic approved the new Alcohol Act.

was finalised in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (MSAH) and was submitted to Parliament in September 2017. The most liberal change was to increase the alcoholic content permissible for drinks for sale in grocery stores from 4.7% to 5.5% (Tuominen, 2017b), which meant that the state-owned retail monopoly, Alko, would lose its monopoly on selling drinks of strength 4.7–5.5% (Tuominen, 2017c).

Comparing the proposed alcohol law submitted to Parliament in September 2017 with the original intention of the reform, which was meant to restrict sales (Tuominen, 2017a), it is obvious that the focus was shifted from restricting sales in order to prevent the negative effects of alcohol in Finland, to liberalisation of the alcohol law. Since the alcohol industry was involved in policy-making in Finland (Alavaikko & Österberg, 2000), the aim of this study was to investigate the strategies used by the alcohol industry to influence the reform of the law on alcohol in Finland. This study concentrates on the alcohol industry though there are other actors with interests, for example public health groups. The focus of this study is on the ways in which the alcohol industry intervened to lobby in the process of policy-making and in shaping the final version of the proposal to match the industry's preferences. The study utilised primary data from interviews and secondary data from prior literature, journal articles, and Google databases. The study answers the following research question: what strategies were used by the alcohol industry to change the original purpose of the reform on alcohol in Finland?

Method

The theoretical framework of this study is that the terms of alcohol debate can be understood through an analysis of the interest groups with the greatest stakes and influence over the role of the product. More than anything else alcohol debate is an interplay between two opposing groups, namely the alcohol industry, which seeks to exploit alcohol markets, and public health activists. Neither of the groups is

disinterested, acting only on the basis of, for example, politically neutral science. While acknowledging the role of health activists, this study focuses on the role of the alcohol industry. We utilise the neo-pluralistic perspective on research on organised interests, which emphasises the importance of contingency and context when studying how different types of interest groups behave and underlines interest groups (Lowery & Gray, 2004).

We adopted a case study design, acknowledging that the boundaries between alcohol industry lobbying and real-life contexts are not evident, and where multiple sources of evidence are required (Yin, 1984). The data collected for this study were divided into primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through interviews with experts who had participated in the preparation of the alcohol reform between 2016 and 2017, namely politicians, researchers, a civil servant, representatives from the alcohol industry interest groups, and health groups active in alcohol policy-making (see Table 2). A total of 16 interviews were conducted with informants who had first-hand knowledge of the process. The interviews were conducted face to face (Carter, 2016) with each interviewee individually. The interviewees were selected through purposive sampling (Emmel, 2013). All the interviewees were selected on the grounds that as experts, they had first-hand knowledge of the alcohol industry's influence on the overall reform of the law on alcohol in Finland. The researchers were selected for interviews due to their expertise and track records in alcohol policy research. All the politician interviewees were Members of Parliament (MPs) from the three biggest political parties represented in the Finnish Parliament, namely the Centre Party (CP), the National Coalition Party (NCP) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP). Only MPs from these political parties were interviewed because MPs from the other political parties either declined the invitation to be interviewed or did not respond.

Table 2. Distribution of influence by experts in the overall reform of the law on alcohol in Finland between 2016 and 2017.

Level of governance	Finland	EU
Parliamentary groups	Finnish Parliament and exchange across political parties: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Centre Party (CP) – National Coalition Party (NCP) – Social Democratic Party (SDP) – Finns Party (later Blue Alternative Party) 	European Parliament / European Commission
Trade associations and interest groups	– Finnish Federation of the Brewing and Soft Drinks Industry (Panimoliitto) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Finnish Grocery Trade Association – Finnish Food and Drink Industries' Federation – Finnish Hospitality Association 	Brewers of Europe
Lobby groups	– Finnish Federation of the Brewing and Soft Drinks Industry (Panimoliitto) plus interest groups	n/a
Civil society associations	– Finnish Association for Substance Abuse Prevention – Finnish Association for Mental Health	European Alcohol Policy Alliance (Eurocare)
National agencies	– National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health	
Researchers	– National Institute for Health and Welfare – University of Helsinki	n/a

The researcher interviewees were from the Finnish National Institute for Health and Welfare, and from the University of Helsinki, Finland. The lone civil servant interviewee was from the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Meanwhile, the interviewees representing the alcohol industry interest groups were from the Finnish Food and Drink Industries Federation, the Finnish Grocery Trade Association and the Finnish Hospitality Association. The interviewees from health groups were from the Finnish Association for Mental Health and the Finnish Association for Substance Abuse Prevention. The interviews were conducted at the work premises of the interviewees and were recorded on a disc recorder for transcription and subsequent analysis. All the interviewees were contacted via email by the researcher requesting an interview. A date, place and time for the interview was agreed between the two parties. Most of the interview questions were open-ended for detailed elaboration of the responses. The interviews were conducted from April 2017 to July 2017. The transcribed interview data consisted of 56 pages.

Meanwhile, secondary data were collected for this study from prior literature, journal articles, news items and Google databases.

In the context of case study design, the data for this study were analysed qualitatively using content analysis. We approached the interview data with a constructivist/interpretative perspective where we assumed that the informants, despite not being neutral actors, conveyed relevant and truthful information concerning the reform. Content analysis was used to classify or code the data into a number of categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). In the framework of analysis, alcohol industry political activity was divided into strategies and individual “tactics” (the methods by which a corporation attempts to exert influence) and “frames” containing individual “arguments” (the reasons given by a corporation as to why they oppose one idea or support another). The data were coded under the five categories put forward by Savell, Fooks, and Gilmore (2016) of political strategies used by the alcohol industry to lobby

Table 3. Strategies and tactics used by the alcohol industry to change the original purpose of the reform.

Strategy	Tactics
Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Direct lobbying of politicians in Parliament through members of the NCP working groups (Parliament, Ministry of Health) – Revolving door – Commissioned or disseminated research - shaping the evidence base – Economic benefits for the government (e.g., more job creation in the service sector and tax revenue)
Constituency building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Forming alliances with interest groups in the grocery chain and with sports federations – Media advocacy (social media including Twitter, press releases, public information campaigns, participation on public debates on TV) – International partners (The Brewers of Europe)
Policy substitution, development and implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Promoting alternative policies – Promoting self-regulation
Legal	n/a
Regulatory redundancy	n/a

against marketing restrictions, namely: (1) “information” (providing or misrepresenting evidence); (2) “constituency building” (forming alliances with other sectors, organisations, or the public to give the impression of greater support for the industry’s position); (3) “policy substitution, development and implementation” (proposing, supporting or helping to implement alternative policies); (4) “legal” (using the legal system) and “financial incentive or disincentive” (offering direct or indirect monetary incentives or threatening financial withdrawal); and (5) regulatory redundancy (industry adheres to self-regulation). This framework of codification was developed in an earlier systematic review of tobacco industry political activity by Savell, Gilmore, and Fooks (2014) on alcohol industry political activity, based partly on the article by Hillman and Hitt (1999) on corporate political strategy formulation. The coding categories (strategies and tactics) were amended and developed into the framework for the data analysis of this study. In this study “strategies” refers to the direction and scope of the alcohol industry’s long-term goals (to increase sales and profits), while “tactics” refers to the means by which a strategy is carried out.

The informants in this study are anonymous. In order to protect the identity of the informants while reporting our results, we will not disclose which categories a particular informant belongs to for reasons of research ethics.

Results

Our results identified three main political strategies used by the alcohol industry federation (in Finnish: Panimoliitto), to change the original purpose of the reform on alcohol in Finland, based on the five categories of Savell et al. (2016); political strategies used by the alcohol industry to lobby against marketing restrictions as follows: “information”, under which the alcohol industry directly lobbied politicians in Parliament through MPs of the NCP, due to the close ties between the two; “constituency building”, under which the alcohol industry formed alliances with interest groups in the grocery–retail business in Finland to advocate for liberalisation of the law and used social media, specifically Twitter, to lobby the public; and lastly, “policy substitution” to promote self-regulation (see Table 3). The breakdown of the analysis is given below.

Information

Our results from the interview data indicate that a variety of information tactics were used by the alcohol industry federation (Panimoliitto) to change the original purpose of the reform from restrictions to liberalisation. Respondents were unanimous in stating that Panimoliitto had direct contact with politicians in Parliament to change the original purpose of the reform through MPs of the NCP, due to the close ties between Panimoliitto and the NCP. Respondents said the direct contact involved appointments and working-group meetings in Parliament. Respondents also said that among the political parties in the Parliament, the NCP was in favour of liberalising the entire alcohol law, while the CP and the SDP were not. The Finns Party (later Blue Alternative Party) was also in favour of liberalising the law. According to some respondents, through the direct contact that Panimoliitto had with politicians in Parliament, they were able to influence the process of policy-making to change the original purpose of the reform as several of the political parties also had the same interest to liberalise the alcohol law which they thought had too many restrictions and needed to be modernised. In this regard, the change in the original purpose of the reform was also influenced by coinciding interests between Panimoliitto and some political parties in Parliament.

Respondents indicated that in Finland, there is a long tradition of the chief executive officer (CEO) of Panimoliitto coming from the NCP. Respondents said due to the close ties between the NCP and Panimoliitto, the three last CEOs of Panimoliitto have been employees of the NCP. A respondent said for example that “people who lobby for Panimoliitto in Finland know each other because some of the MPs of the NCP have worked with Panimoliitto and vice-versa”. This is often referred to as the “revolving door”, which is when government officials leave office to become lobbyists and vice versa (Miller & Harkins, 2013; Tim & Herschel, 2012). Currently, there is no

legislation in Finland to prevent the “revolving door” practice, though regulating it has been discussed (Blom, 2018; Lauronen et al., 2017).

Respondents unanimously said Panimoliitto also had strong connections with MPs of some other political parties in Parliament who were in favour of liberalising the alcohol law in Finland, such as the Finns Party (later Blue Alternative Party) (Vaalisto, 2017). The alcohol industry’s involvement has been key to the formation of partnerships with politicians on alcohol-policy issues since Finland joined the EU in 1995 and the alcohol industry became involved in policy-making through invitations to the working groups that prepare alcohol legislation in Finland at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and in Parliament (Hellman, 2012; Lauronen et al., 2017). Governments have been forced to take the alcohol industry’s perspectives into account because, besides the public health interest, economic interest is also politically important (Adams, Buetow, & Rossen, 2010; Miller, De Groot, McKenzie, & Droste, 2011).

Respondents also reported that Panimoliitto had used commissioned or disseminated research reports to change the original purpose of the reform of alcohol legislation in Finland. These research reports were sometimes used by Panimoliitto and support groups to discredit public health research results, claiming that public health authorities had an agenda to maintain the state-owned alcohol monopoly system, Alko, in Finland. For instance, the results indicate that the alcohol industry interest groups, such as the Finnish Food and Drink Industries Federation, Finnish Grocery Trade Association and the Finnish Hospitality Association, used commissioned research results and citations to influence public opinion by saying, for example, that it was time for Finland to adopt European drinking culture and that Finland does not need too many regulations because only 10% of people drink too much and in the wrong way. Panimoliitto often argued that the people who drink too much are the problem and that they need to be put into rehabilitation so that

they can come out and drink responsibly. By so doing, the interest groups and the alcohol industry populate the evidence base with non-peer-reviewed research which, among other things, tends to highlight the health benefits of alcohol while omitting evidence of its negative health and social effects (Hiilamo, 2003; Savell et al., 2016). Respondents said that Panimoliitto sometimes used academics to speak for their interests directly or indirectly whenever it found research results counterproductive to its business interests. Commissioned or disseminated research reports have also been used by the tobacco industry in Finland and other countries. For example, similar studies have been carried out on the tobacco industry by Hiilamo (2003) and Savell et al. (2016).

One other tactic that respondents said Panimoliitto used was to argue that liberalising the law would create more jobs and generate more tax revenue for the government. Panimoliitto argued that liberalising the alcohol law in Finland would discourage Finns from buying alcohol from other countries such as Estonia. Respondents said, for example, that the state-owned retail monopoly, Alko, sells eight million litres of strong beer per year in Finland, but consumers bring 36 million litres into Finland from abroad. Many Finns buy alcohol from abroad because of the great difference between domestic prices of alcohol and those available on the cruise ships to Estonia and between Helsinki and Stockholm. Panimoliitto argued that because Finland had by far the heaviest taxes on alcohol in the EU, and Finland's beer tax was many times that of Estonia's, that every increase in Finnish alcohol taxation fuelled the volume of alcohol imported via cross-border trade into Finland (Panimoliitto, 2017).

Respondents said that Panimoliitto had been lobbying for many years to liberalise the alcohol law in Finland, to make it easier for grocery shops to sell stronger alcoholic drinks. The change was not sudden because discussions to change the law had been going on since 2011, during the government of Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen. The lobbying by the alcohol industry

has always been for their economic interests (Alavaikko & Österberg, 2000).

Constituency building

Constituency building has often been linked to indirect lobbying by the alcohol industry (Savell et al., 2016). Our results indicate that Panimoliitto used constituency building as a strategy by forming alliances with interest groups in the grocery–retail business in Finland. Through these alliances, they were able to argue against public-health measures and to advocate for liberalisation of the law. Alliances influence policies by making public opinion appear to be on the lobbyists' side (Savell et al., 2016). In addition to alliances with interest groups in the grocery–retail business in Finland, the alcohol industry has alliances with sports federations such as the Finnish Ice Hockey Federation, as sports sponsorship by the alcohol industry is a venerable tradition in Western countries (Collins & Vamplew, 2002). The cooperation between the Finnish Ice Hockey Federation and the alcohol industry was beneficial for both parties through advertising, as sports and business intersect in brewing industry sponsorship. At the EU level, the EU Football Federation Association of European Professional Football Leagues (EPFL) and the European Sponsorship Association (ESA) are supported by the alcohol industry with commercial interests as their target.

Respondents unanimously said Panimoliitto used social media, specifically Twitter, to lobby the public and give the impression of greater support for the industry's position. Panimoliitto had 4034 followers and 17,500 tweets as of 27 April 2018; they created their account in December 2010. Respondents said Panimoliitto has a number of support groups with common interests on Twitter who often retweet their tweets, and who are in favour of abolishing the Finnish alcohol monopoly because, to them, this represents the freedom for Finns to drink alcohol as much as they want. The followers see restrictions as old-fashioned and paternalistic.

Respondents said Panimoliitto tweets regularly to lobby the public by saying drinking is normal and that it is a minority of the Finnish population who abuse alcohol because they have an addiction problem. For that reason, the majority should not be restricted from drinking. Panimoliitto also advocates that Finns should be free to decide themselves when they want to buy alcohol, where and how much alcohol they want to buy as part of being “Europeans” (cf. Ugland, 2002). Panimoliitto often argue that Finland should become like the rest of “Europe” in its drinking habits because the alcohol industry in Finland has been pan-European since Finland became a member of the EU. The pan-European association called Brewers of Europe supports national federations in EU member countries and they influence alcohol policy-making in EU member countries through the national federations (Munro, 2004).

In order to give the public the impression of greater support for the industry’s position, Panimoliitto advocates that Finns should be free to buy alcohol in grocery shops and that restrictions should be abolished because Finland is not a nanny state in which the state should control the drinking habit of Finns. They argue that individuals should consume alcohol responsibly. The alcohol industry frequently attempts to shift the blame for alcohol misuse to the consumer and away from their products and marketing strategies (Jernigan, 2012). The focus on a small number of alcohol misusers provides the industry with a frame that has the potential to invalidate the focus on health policy. A respondent said the alcohol industry often argues that since the damage done by alcohol is caused by a small group of deviants, we should deal with them using education and treatment, and not through regulations that punish the “innocent majority”.

Respondents said the alcohol industry also lobbied through the media using press releases and public information campaigns on Facebook, and by participating in public debates on TV to shape the news and public agenda. For example, the alcohol industry creates

narratives such as, if it becomes easy for people to get 5.5% alcohol from grocery shops, the people who start drinking more will be the 5–15% who are already heavy drinkers. To them, this will not affect the rest of the population. This kind of narrative, according to the respondents, can undermine the social and health facts about the harms caused by alcohol in Finland. The harms caused by alcohol in Finland include deaths from alcohol-related diseases and alcohol poisoning (Statistics Finland, 2015).

Policy substitution

Policy substitution is used by the alcohol industry to prevent the implementation of formal marketing regulations, and is a strategy that has been documented globally (Giesbrecht, 2000; Hope, 2006; Jernigan, 2012). Respondents said that Panimoliitto often promotes alternative policies by saying that 90% of Finns must not be restricted from drinking alcohol because of the 10% who drink too much. They propose that the law should be liberalised to give Finns the freedom to drink as much alcohol as they want. This argument is used to promote self-regulatory policies. Panimoliitto also proposes that people should be educated to drink responsibly through education programmes.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to identify the strategies used by the alcohol industry to influence the overall reform of the law on alcohol in Finland during the preparation phase between 2016 and 2017. The results indicate that the main strategies used by the Finnish Federation of the Brewing and Soft Drinks Industry (Panimoliitto) to change the original purpose of the reform from restricting sales in order to prevent the negative effects of alcohol in Finland, to liberalisation of the alcohol law were: “information”, “constituency building”, and lastly, “policy substitution”. The results demonstrate that Panimoliitto has lobbying power and clearly influences policy-making. The results also indicate that

Panimoliitto argues against marketing regulation by promoting self-regulation, and by focusing on individual responsibility. Arguments relating to industry responsibility are often reinforced through corporate social responsibility activities. Thus, the alcohol industry engages in corporate political activities to create a favourable regulatory environment in which to operate by using strategies such as lobbying, shaping the evidence base and promoting self-regulatory policies (Jernigan, 2012). Our research shows that in public debate, the alcohol industry tries to convey its arguments through citing evidence-based research.

In line with Savell et al. (2016), gaining access to political decision-makers by providing information is an important alcohol industry strategy to influence policy. The use of social media, specifically Twitter, emerged in this study as a new strategy to influence policy through shaping the evidentiary content of policy debates (McGarity & Wagner, 2012). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram are used in the development of alcohol marketing (Atkinson, Ross-Houle, Begley, & Sumnall, 2016). Globally, the alcohol industry's involvement in policy-making is not new, and there has been an increase in the industry's efforts to lobby in order to influence policies and to be seen as a key partner in alcohol policy-making (Yoon & Lam, 2013). A growing body of literature points to the role of vested interests as a barrier to the implementation of public health policies aiming to reduce alcohol-related harm and to the ability of governments to pursue public interest policies such as alcohol regulation. Corporate political activity by the alcohol industry is commonly used to influence policy and regulation in ways favourable to the industry, since the industry is heavily involved in planning of public health policy (Martino, Miller, Coomber, Hancock, & Kypri, 2017). Research suggests that such partnerships advance the interests of the industry rather than public health because the industry merely promotes policies that fail to reduce alcohol sales. Five frames have been identified in which the

alcohol industry claimed that increased regulation: (1) is unnecessary, (2) is not backed up by sufficient evidence, (3) will lead to unintended negative consequences, and (4) faces legal barriers to implementation, underpinned by the view that (5) the industry consists of socially responsible companies working toward reducing harmful drinking (Martino et al., 2017).

In Finland, like in other Nordic countries Iceland, Sweden and Norway, with the exceptional role of the state in the regulation of alcohol consumption, alcohol policy is often presented as unique because of its strong emphasis on public-health protection, and the exceptional role of the state in the regulation of alcohol consumption (Alavaikko, 2002).

Our results conflict with this image. The case of passing a new alcohol law in Finland demonstrates that the alcohol industry has lobbying power and clearly influences policy-making. Panimoliitto as an economic actor was able to influence the process of policy-making to change the original purpose of the reform as the NCP and The Blue Alternative Party (former Finns Party), had ideological convictions to liberalise the alcohol law. Similarly, an earlier study in Finland by Lauronen et al. (2017), found that the alcohol industry successfully used information and constituency building to oppose bans on image advertising. These results add to the evidence of alcohol industry corporate political activities designed to shape policy (McGarity & Wagner, 2012).

We conclude that the involvement of the alcohol industry in policy-making in Finland, may represent a key barrier to the development of effective alcohol policies. The industry's political activity is varied and the industry's opposition to marketing regulation centres on claims that the industry is responsible and that self-regulation is effective.

Strengths and limitations

The main strength of this study is that it provides a broad overview of the alcohol industry's tactics and arguments. Its attempt to categorise

the industry's strategies/tactics and arguments suggests that the findings may be applicable across different contexts, such as in the tobacco industry. This study has a number of limitations: first, we did not have access to internal alcohol-industry documents which may have shed light on other strategies identified by Savell et al. (2016), including targeting political decision-makers indirectly through constituent support. Second, we were not able to assess the effectiveness of lobbying strategies, as the political process to pass the new law was postponed and the final decision was taken after we had collected our interview data. Third, the identification of tactics and arguments, and the contexts in which they are used, is dependent upon the interview and secondary data. Fourth, despite triangulating our interview data with document data and news, we were not able to check the validity of all the factual statements of our informants.

Implications for policy, practice and research

This study has identified strategies and tactics as well as arguments used by the alcohol industry between 2016 and 2017 to change the original purpose of the alcohol law reform in Finland from restrictions on alcohol marketing to liberalisation of the law. Therefore, this study may be useful to policy-makers who wish to understand how the alcohol industry may try to influence the process of policy-making. Policy-makers may use the results of this study to prepare effective counter-strategies against the alcohol industry. This study has also further developed the framework for classifying corporate political activity outlined in Savell et al. (2016) and shown the policy and scholarly value of applying them to other industries, such as the tobacco industry.

Future research could apply these frameworks to other industries such as the tobacco industry or to other policy areas. Future research could also assess the effectiveness of the lobbying strategies used by the alcohol industry to influence policy.


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