

Have restrictions on alcohol advertising in Ireland affected awareness among adults? A comparative observational study using non-probability repeat cross-sectional surveys

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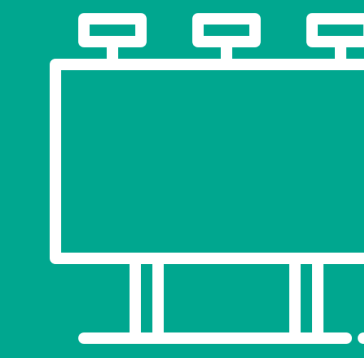
INTRODUCTION:

Under the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018, Ireland is introducing statutory restrictions on alcohol marketing.

Since the 12th November 2019, the Act has:



Banned alcohol advertising on public transport and designated stops (e.g. buses and bus stops).



Banned outdoor advertising in certain locations (e.g. within 200 meters of a school or on open spaces maintained by a local authority).



Restricted cinema advertising to only films with 18+ certification or as part of licensed premises within the cinema.

METHODS:

Online repeat cross-sectional surveys with adults (18+) in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

All participants recruited by YouGov Plc through non-probability online market research panels.

Participants self-reported past-month awareness of 13 alcohol marketing activities.

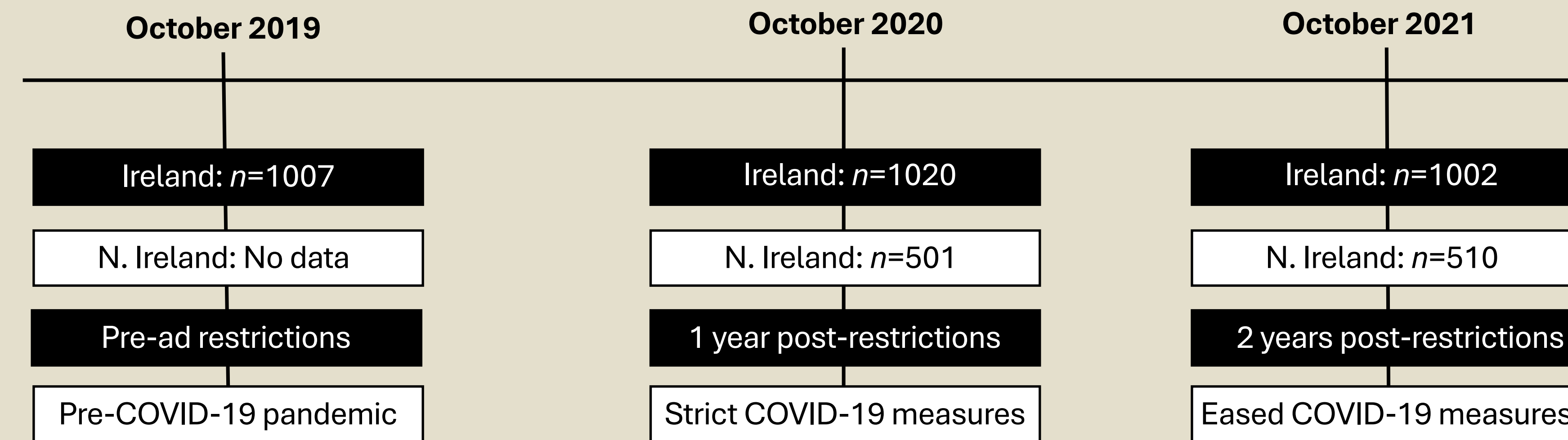


Fig. 1: Schematic summarising the sample sizes, timing relative to the advert restrictions, and degree of COVID-19 mitigation measures.

The AIMS of this study were to:

1) Monitor changes in past-month awareness of these advertising activities among adults in Ireland for up to 2-years after the restrictions had commenced.

2) Examine how changes in awareness in Ireland between 2020 and 2021 compare to Northern Ireland, where the advertising restrictions do not directly apply.

The inclusion of data from Northern Ireland in 2020 and 2021 provided an opportunity to estimate the impact of Ireland's advertising restrictions versus changes in consumer behaviour and marketing activity resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

KEY RESULTS FOR THE RESTRICTED ADVERTISING ACTIVITIES:

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Table 1: Per cent (%) who reported any awareness of alcohol advertising on public transport in the past month

	Ireland			Northern Ireland	
	2019	2020	2021	2020	2021
	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	53.2	46.4	40.0	21.7	26.7
No	29.2	38.5	38.9	56.5	47.3
Not sure	17.6	15.1	21.2	21.9	26.1

Across the three waves in Ireland, the odds of reporting no past-month awareness of public transport advertising (vs. yes) increased both 1-year ($OR_{Adj}=1.48$, 95% CI: 1.21, 1.82) and 2-years ($OR_{Adj}=1.88$, 95% CI: 1.53, 2.32) after the restrictions had commenced.

Across the two waves with data from both Ireland and Northern Ireland, an interaction between wave and jurisdiction indicated that the trends in reporting no past-month awareness of public transport advertising differed between Ireland and Northern Ireland ($p<0.001$).

Specifically, as COVID-19 mitigation measures eased between 2020 and 2021, thus creating more opportunities for exposure:

The odds of reporting no past-month awareness (vs. yes) increased in Ireland ($OR_{Adj}=1.28$, 95% CI: 1.05, 1.57)...

...but the odds of reporting no past-month awareness (vs. yes) decreased in Northern Ireland ($OR_{Adj}=0.63$, 95% CI: 0.46, 0.86).

CINEMA

Table 2: Per cent (%) who reported any awareness of alcohol advertising at the cinema in the past month

	Ireland			Northern Ireland	
	2019	2020	2021	2020	2021
	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	28.8	22.1	19.6	9.9	13.6
No	48.7	60.0	58.0	71.6	61.0
Not sure	22.5	17.9	22.4	18.5	25.4

Across the three waves in Ireland, the odds of reporting no past-month awareness of cinema advertising (vs. yes) increased both 1-year ($OR_{Adj}=1.60$, 95% CI: 1.29, 1.98) and 2-years ($OR_{Adj}=1.83$, 95% CI: 1.46, 2.29) after the restrictions had commenced.

Across the two waves with data from both Ireland and Northern Ireland, an interaction between wave and jurisdiction indicated that the trends in reporting no past-month awareness of cinema advertising differed between Ireland and Northern Ireland ($p=0.002$).

Specifically, as COVID-19 mitigation measures eased between 2020 and 2021, thus creating more opportunities for exposure:

The odds of reporting no past-month awareness (vs. yes) were unchanged in Ireland ($OR_{Adj}=1.16$, 95% CI: 0.92, 1.46)...

...but the odds of reporting no past-month awareness (vs. yes) decreased in Northern Ireland ($OR_{Adj}=0.55$, 95% CI: 0.36, 0.83).

OUTDOOR

Table 3: Per cent (%) who reported any awareness of alcohol advertising on posters or billboards in the past month

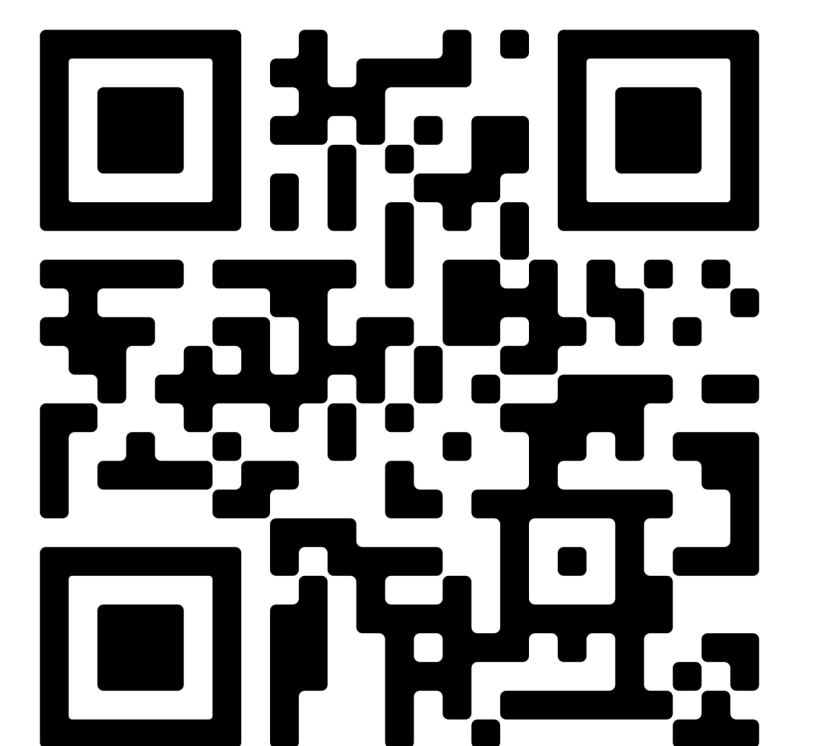
	Ireland			Northern Ireland	
	2019	2020	2021	2020	2021
	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	67.1	59.5	59.7	45.9	51.1
No	20.0	26.5	23.9	35.0	26.4
Not sure	13.0	14.0	16.3	19.2	22.6

Across the three waves in Ireland, the odds of reporting no past-month awareness of outdoor advertising (vs. yes) increased 1-year ($OR_{Adj}=1.48$, 95% CI: 1.19, 1.84) and 2-years ($OR_{Adj}=1.41$, 95% CI: 1.13, 1.76) after the restrictions had commenced.

Across the two waves with data from both Ireland and Northern Ireland, the absence of an interaction between wave and jurisdiction indicated that the trends in reporting no past-month awareness of outdoor advertising did not differ between Ireland and Northern Ireland ($p=0.07$).

Scan the QR code to read open access paper covering:

- Full methods.
- All analyses.
- Unrestricted marketing activities.
- Detailed interpretation.



DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS:

Ireland's Public Health (Alcohol) Act has reduced past-month awareness of alcohol advertising on public transport and at the cinema. For both advertising activities:

- The odds of reporting no past-month awareness were higher 1 and 2 years after the advertising restrictions commenced in Ireland, including once COVID-19 mitigation measures had eased.
- In 2021 versus 2020, the odds of reporting no past-month awareness were higher in Ireland than Northern Ireland, despite the easing of pandemic mitigation measures increasing opportunities for advertising exposure in both jurisdictions.

Despite this, 2 years after the restrictions had commenced, two-fifths of adults in Ireland still recalled seeing advertising on public transport and one-fifth recalled seeing cinema advertising:

- This continued recall is likely driven, in part, by the limitations of self-reported survey data.
- Continued awareness is also congruent to debates in Ireland about the use of brand-sharing where alcohol advertising is no longer permitted, such as promoting zero-alcohol products.

The odds of reporting no past-month awareness of outdoor advertising (posters/billboards) were higher 1 and 2 years after the restrictions had commenced in Ireland. However:

- Trends did not significantly differ between Ireland and Northern Ireland as pandemic mitigation measures eased. As such, this study cannot determine to what extent the awareness decreases observed in Ireland are attributable to the advertising restrictions versus other extraneous factors.
- Three-fifths of adults in Ireland still recalled seeing alcohol being advertised through posters and billboards 2 years after the advertising restrictions had commenced.
- The restrictions on outdoor advertising are not as extensive as the ban on public transport advertising and restrictions for cinema advertising, which may partly explain the limited effect.

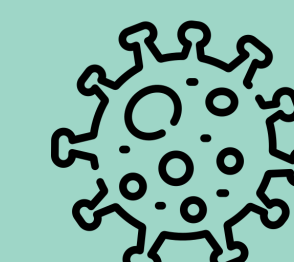
KEY LIMITATIONS:



Samples are from non-probability online market research panels, which limits generalisability.



Self-reported data may contain recall or response errors.



There may be other unmeasured confounders on consumer and marketing behaviour, particularly linked to the pandemic.



Only looked at changes in any past-month awareness, but not frequency, due to the pandemic.

Declaration of competing interests:

- NC was on the board of director at Alcohol Focus Scotland between 2017 and 2022.
- NC and KGM were part of Alcohol Focus Scotland's expert network on alcohol marketing between 2020 and 2022.
- NF is a member of the Public Health Alcohol Research Group (PHARG), appointed by the Minister for Health to advise on monitoring and evaluating the Public Health (Alcohol) Act.
- The University of Stirling has received funding for consultancy work undertaken by NF and NC for both PHARG and the Institute of Public Health on alcohol and other topics.

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