



Initiative

STUDY ON PARTIAL ALCOHOL POINT-OF-SALE DISPLAY BAN

– SUMMARY –

ALCOHOL VISIBILITY BEFORE AND AFTER
THE ENFORCEMENT OF PARTIAL DISPLAY BAN IN RETAIL SHOPS
ON JUNE 1ST, 2019



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The full study is currently available in Estonian language:

https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/alkoholi_nahtavuse_uuring_lopparuanne_2019_2.pdf

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Summary: Study on partial alcohol point-of-sale display ban

Reducing the visibility of alcoholic beverages is an important policy measure to reduce alcohol consumption and associated health damage. On June 1, 2019, an amendment to the Alcohol Act came into effect in Estonia, which restricted the visibility of alcohol in stores. Display restrictions require alcoholic beverages to be placed separately from other goods in the store. Alcoholic beverages may no longer be placed in such a way that the customer inevitably comes into contact with them in the store. Also, the display of alcoholic beverages should not be prominently visible from the rest of the sales area unless it is not reasonably practicable given the size of the sales space. In addition, the visibility of alcoholic beverages outside the point-of-sale (POS) must be limited.

Thus, the aim of the policy is to reduce the unavoidable exposure to alcohol of the most vulnerable target groups: children and adolescents, and individuals with alcohol dependence (who want to stop or limit their alcohol consumption). Furthermore, limiting the visibility of alcohol will reduce alcohol perception, thereby reducing impulse purchases of alcohol in long term.

Previous studies on alcohol visibility in stores and its impact on customer purchasing behavior in Estonia are lacking. The purpose of this study was to map the changes of limiting alcohol visibility through preliminary and follow-up study, and assess the impact of these changes on: a) stores - how the implementation of the amendment has affected the work organization and turnover of the store, and b) customers - how their alcohol perception has changed and what is the impact on their alcohol purchasing behavior.

Before and after the amendment of the Alcohol Act came into force, following surveys providing both quantitative and qualitative input were conducted to assess changes and their impact: in-store surveys (before and after, n=64 stores), in-depth interviews with store managers (after, n=15), surveys of customers (before and after, n=325 customers), and eye-tracking of customers (before and after, n=60 eye-tracking tests). The combination of these four different, yet complementary approaches best served the purpose of the study by covering the objective and subjective perspectives of both the shop and the customer. In addition, a literature review was compiled.

The study on partial alcohol POS display ban confirmed that limiting the visibility of alcohol is primarily a long-term supportive measure to reduce the consumption of alcohol by children and adolescents, and to limit or stop the unavoidable exposure to alcohol. However, short-term effects of visibility and perceptibility on impulse purchases of alcohol were also identified.

When the amendment of the Alcohol Act came into force, alcohol was placed less prominently in stores. The lower alcohol visibility led to a decrease in the number of impulse purchases, which was identified by this study two and a half months later. More specifically:

- In order to limit the visibility of alcohol, 39% of the stores in question had carried out major and more visible reorganizations, including a more compact storage of alcohol and a separation of alcohol areas from other sales areas, either with shelves or partitions. As a result of the changes, the display area for alcohol decreased by 15%.
- The partial POS display ban resulted in a decrease in the estimated visibility of alcohol in stores by 15% and the conscious perception of alcohol by customers by 20%. While 65% of the customers consciously noticed alcohol before the changes, only 52% of the customers noticed it afterwards.
- Eye-tracking tests confirmed that alcohol was perceived 1.5 times more (including unconscious perception) compared to conscious recall, and this ratio did not change. At the same time, there was a significant drop in unconscious attention to alcohol, with 48% fewer fixations on alcohol and a 29% reduction in the duration of alcohol viewing.
- In the background of a reduction in conscious and unconscious attention due to limited visibility, the proportion of impulse buyers of alcohol decreased two-fold (before the policy, 5% of customers made spontaneous alcohol purchases; after the policy was implemented, it dropped to 2%).

This study confirmed that store size is an important factor in the visibility and perception of alcoholic beverages by customers, which in turn has an effect on short-term impulse purchases. Alcohol visibility and perception had decreased predominantly in the environments that favored impulse purchases, such as large stores. More specifically:

- The larger the store size, the more compact the placement of alcoholic beverages, thereby being less visible and less noticeable to customers making their standard purchases (both before and after the policy). Thus, even before the amendment came into force, it was valid that the larger the store, the greater the likelihood of shopping without necessarily being exposed to alcoholic beverages.

- After the policy was implemented, the visibility of alcohol decreased, particularly in large and medium-sized shops. As a result, the attention paid to alcohol by customers decreased, especially in large, but also medium-sized shops. Alcohol was less visible, there were fewer people passing through the separate area of alcohol, conscious alcohol perception and alcohol viewing time were reduced, and there were fewer impulse purchases.
- The smaller the area of the store, the more dispersed the alcoholic beverages were, and there were fewer shopping routes bypassing alcohol. In short, alcohol was much more visible in smaller shops and much more noticeable for customers, both before and after the amendment. After the amendment, minor reorganizations in small shops, have not changed the overall alcohol visibility and attention paid to alcohol.
- Despite the different visibility of alcohol in small and large shops, the percentage of alcohol buyers was similar in all observed shops. Most alcohol purchases were pre-planned in the same way before and after the amendment of the Act. Buyers who plan their purchases ahead were not affected by the visibility of alcohol in the shop; also, shops have not seen any drop in sales (however, it should be added that there was a decrease in excise duty on alcohol during the same period).
- For impulse buyers, noticing alcohol is the first step towards the purchase, regardless of the size of the shop. Therefore, such customers are significantly more influenced at the POS. Consequently, reducing the visibility and noticeability, as well as the attractiveness (i.e., sales promotion) of alcoholic beverages will have a greater impact for impulse buyers than for customers who plan their purchases ahead. The number of alcohol impulse buyers decreased two-fold after the amendment of the Act.