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Department of Organizational Communication

MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY

Keep it local or keep it out? An examination of local alcohol option laws in Murray”

John Spinda, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor



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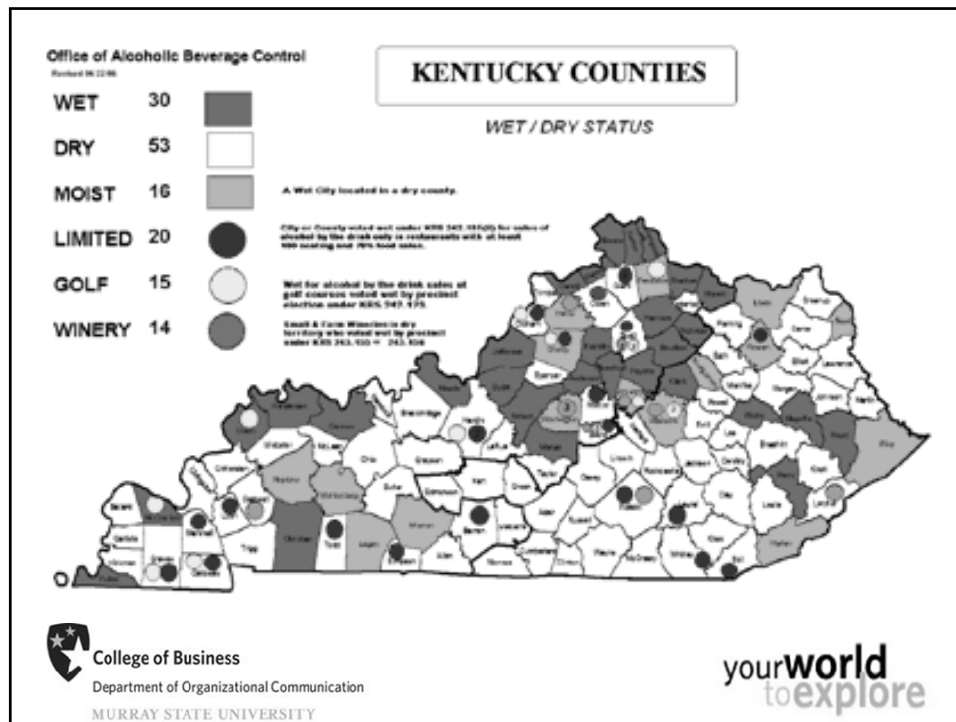
Background

- According to the KY Dept of Alcoholic Beverage Control (2010):
 - 46 KY Counties remain “dry” = no alcohol sales
 - 33 KY Counties are “wet” = no alcohol restrictions
 - 41 KY Counties are “moist” = allow by the glass purchases or allow alcohol production facilities to sell alcohol on site



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Background

- Formerly a dry community, the City of Murray adopted a *moist* policy in 2000, permitting by-the-glass purchases of alcohol at approved locations.
 - Restaurants that maintain 70% of sales as food
 - Alcohol cannot be served on Sunday
 - Drinks cannot be served after midnight

Background

- In the Fall of 2009, two competing campaigns were launched in Murray
 - “Keep it Local” sought to expand alcohol availability
 - “Keep it Out of Murray” sought to maintain current laws or eliminate all alcohol sales
 - The Keep it Local campaign collected 1,422 signatures, but too many were invalid because of non-resident status (i.e., City of Murray) and a special election did not occur

Keep it Local Campaign

- The **“Keep it Local”** campaign was created to gather the necessary amount of petition signatures to put packaged alcohol sales to a special election
 - Argued that residents were traveling to other areas to purchase alcohol and also spending money while there
 - Argued packaged alcohol sales would not increase problems and would keep this spending local

Keep it Out of Murray Campaign

- Conversely, the **“Keep it Out of Murray” campaign** was a counter-movement that opposed packaged alcohol sales
 - Argued that packaged alcohol sales brought increased crime and abuse problems into communities
 - Also gathered signatures to potentially reverse Murray’s moist policy, reverting to dry status

Climate of Controversy

- In addition to the local controversy in Murray concerning packaged alcohol sales, a neighboring county (Trigg Co.) had a wet/dry status vote in the fall of 2009
- News stories in the area detailed the severe friction between churches and members that signed the petition in Trigg County.
- Church members were threatened with excommunication

Spiral of Silence

- The **Spiral of Silence Theory** has been employed to explore communication about controversial, morally loaded topics
- The Spiral of Silence argues that most humans have an innate fear of social isolation and will not communicate viewpoints in public that they feel will be met with opposition
- Conversely, when perceiving support from others, humans will communicate opinions

The study

- This study applied the spiral of silence to the debate over local alcohol option laws
- Residents were contacted via random phone dialing ($N = 38$), and were debriefed if requested
 - Age ($M = 61.05$, $SD = 18.22$), 26 Female, 12 Male
- Small sample size = short lived issue

Results

- 53% supported keep it local, 39% supported keep it out of Murray, 8% unsure
- Perception differed = 52% believed Murray residents supported Keep it Out of Murray, while 48% believed residents supported Keep it Local
- Small *silent majority* effect
- 58% believed Keep it Local would gain support in the future

Results

- Correlational data indicated that Keep it Local supporters:
 - Were younger
 - Did not attend to local news media (e.g., TV, newspaper, online news, radio news)
 - Had a negative fear of social isolation
 - Had high response efficacy (i.e., believed alcohol sales would have minimal negative impact on Murray)

Results

- Correlational data indicated that Keep it Local supporters:
 - Placed less importance on belonging to local church
 - Had high future opinion congruency (i.e., believed others would support their point of view in the future)

Results

- Correlational data indicated that Keep it Out of Murray supporters:
 - Were older
 - Felt church belonging was important
 - Had high issue salience (i.e., felt the issue was very important for the area)
 - Had high current and future opinion congruency (i.e., believed their point of view was currently shared by others and would be in the future)

Results

- Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to determine which variables were most important in predicting opinion expression
- Keep it Local:
 - Low importance of church belonging and high response efficacy
- Keep it Out of Murray:
 - High importance of church belonging, low communication apprehension, high issue salience, high opinion congruency with other church members



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Conclusions

- Does social isolation in “dry” counties lead to an increase in “border drinking”?
- Keep it Local supporters fit the description of *Hard Core* and *Avant Garde* supporters (per Spiral of Silence)
- Reference groups play an important role in opinion expression
- Possible two-step flow of communication
- Spiral of silence can be used in local issues



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