

# AB008. Social media marketing practices by alcohol brands and drinking venues: influence on youth drinking

Rufina H. Chan, Dong Dong, Jiazhou Yu, Jean H. Kim

JC School of Public Health and Primary Care, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China

*Correspondence to:* Rufina H. Chan. JC School of Public Health and Primary Care, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China. Email: rufinachan@link.cuhk.edu.hk.

**Background:** Young adults are highly active users of social networking sites. Past studies have shown that social media use is correlated with the use of illicit drugs and tobacco. In recent years, the alcohol industry has scaled up its digital advertising expenditures on sites such as Facebook with broad-reaching campaigns to encourage youth drinking. This study examines social media marketing strategies targeting Hong Kong young adults by popular alcohol brands and drinking venues.

**Methods:** A mixed-method content analysis of 974 social media posts published by ten alcohol brands and four alcohol-serving venues on Facebook in 2011–2019. Descriptive statistics were conducted to understand the prevalence of social media alcohol marketing strategies.

**Results:** The sample contained 639 alcohol brand posts (217.0 reactions and 7.8 shares per post). The main marketing practices involved were linking products with a specific consumption time and place (40.2%) and with branded events that occurred offline, or “real-world tie-ins” (36.3%). The main theme invoked was crafting an identity (80.1%) by associating drinking with an aspirational lifestyle (25%). For venues, 335 posts were captured (16.9 reactions and 1.7 shares per post). The main practices employed were associated with time and place (60.3%) and real-world tie-ins (36.4%). The main themes were crafting an identity (85.1%) by associating drinking with a party setting

(53.4%) and celebratory events (30.4%). Over 70% of the posted comments were positive and suggestive of alcohol consumption. Of note, only 8.1% of the posts by brands and none by the venues contained messages promoting responsible consumption.

**Conclusions:** The absence of ‘responsible drinking’ messages combined with the promotion of social drinking images where binge drinking commonly occurs is likely to encourage heavy alcohol consumption in this age group. Government health authorities should consider establishing regional, evidence-based policies on alcohol social media marketing.

**Keywords:** Social media; alcohol marketing; content analysis

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## Footnote

*Conflicts of Interest:* The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

*Ethical Statement:* The authors are accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

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