

The relationship between youth social media use and alcohol use: A prospective cohort study

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Introduction: Social media is now a significant part of modern daily life. Social influences from peers, through traditional forms of media such as television, radio, print, and billboard advertising, have been demonstrated to be reliably associated with initiation and maintenance of alcohol consumption in young people. However, little is known about how modern social media impacts youth substance use. This cohort study aims to explore the prospective relationship between social media use and future drinking behaviours, including alcohol consumption, age of drinking initiation, and problem drinking in a cohort of alcohol-naïve youth.

Methods: Data from 1,473 alcohol naïve youth were acquired from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC). Children from Wave 5 (aged 12-13 years) reported their social media use, alcohol consumption, and socio-demographic and psychological covariates. Children then reported their drinking behaviours, including alcohol consumption, age of drinking initiation, and problem drinking, at Wave 8 (aged 17-18 years). Multivariable linear regressions (for continuous variable outcomes) and multivariable logistic regressions (for dichotomous outcomes) were utilised for analyses.

Results: After controlling for factors known to be associated with youth alcohol use, results revealed that children who engaged in almost daily social media use at age 12 or 13 had increased odds of risky alcohol consumption (OR = 1.56, 95% CI = 1.01, 2.41, $p = .042$), a younger age of drinking onset ($\beta = -0.54$, 95% CI = -0.72, -0.36, $p < .001$), and greater problem drinking ($\beta = 0.48$, 95% CI = 0.12, 0.83, $p = .009$) than those that never used social media but not past month alcohol use.

Discussions and Conclusions: Social media use in children was found to be associated with future drinking behaviours, including increased alcohol consumption, problem drinking, and a younger age of drinking onset.

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