

Recruiting the Next Generation of Drinkers: Alcohol Industry Portrayal of Generation Z in Australia

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Introduction: Generation Z or Gen Z refers to the cohort born between 1997 and 2012 (current age range approximately 13 years to 28 years). As the youngest cohort approaching or within the legal alcohol purchasing age of 18 years in Australia, Gen Z is a key focus of prevention efforts and industry marketing alike. Understanding how industry seeks to engage with and appeal to younger people is critical to ensure effective public health policies and interventions are in place.

Approach: This project examines the content of over n=130 articles in Australian alcohol industry trade publications (2024-current) to discern i) the portrayal of Gen Z and younger people and ii) priorities or strategies articulated by the industry to recruit and retain this cohort.

Key Findings: Findings indicate that the industry views Gen Z and younger people as an important market segment, with each examined publication issue containing at least one article that focusses on their alcohol use preferences or referring to strategies to recruit and retain younger drinkers. The cohort is positioned as requiring innovative products which cater to both 'sessionable' (lower ABV products with appealing flavours) and 'high octane' (higher ABV products with convenient packaging) occasions. The presence of virtue signalling and targeted marketing approaches to this cohort are evident in narratives across all included publications.

Discussions and Conclusions: This innovative study adds to the evidence of emerging trends of alcohol marketing and product development focused on the youngest and future alcohol users. Whilst evidence shows that younger Australians are drinking less than previous generations, targeting new, younger drinkers is a common and intentional aim of the alcohol industry.

Implications on policy: Findings will inform advocacy activities to counter industry tactics to recruit and retain younger users.

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