"Cheers (drink to that)": An exploration of alcohol content in Top 100 Billboards songs from 1959 to 2020

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Introduction: Exposure to alcohol content in media, including advertising, film, TV and music has been associated with increased alcohol consumption. However, few studies have examined the characteristics of alcohol-related content in music. The aim of the present study is to investigate trends in the characteristics and features of alcohol-related content in the Top 100 Billboard songs from 1959 to 2020.

Methods: The lyrics from 6,110 Top 100 Billboard songs from 1959 to 2020 were scraped using the Genius API. Then, using a list of 673 alcohol-related keywords (e.g., "bar"), references to alcohol were coded by annotators as "alcohol-related", "non-alcohol related" or "unsure". From this, counts of the number of alcohol words per song were calculated and merged with data from Spotify's API. To investigate predictors of alcohol-related content in the Top 100 Billboard songs regression models were conducted to test the influence of a song's "danceability", "valence", "energy" and "tempo" on the number of alcohol references in a song (Model 1) and on whether a song contained an alcohol reference (Model 2).

Results: Overall, there was a significant increase in the prevalence of references to alcohol in Top 100 Billboard songs from 1959 to 2020. The number of alcohol references in songs was positively associated with significantly higher danceability and energy scores, and a more positive valence.

Discussions and Conclusions: This study demonstrates that there are significant qualitative differences in the musical features of alcohol-related music which may provide insight into additional, unexplored mechanisms that can influence drinking behaviour.

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