

## **EXPOSURE TO ALCOHOL IN DIGITAL MEDIA: WHY IT MATTERS AND WHAT CAN BE DONE**

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### **Aim:**

*To bring together a panel of early career researchers and senior experts from public health, psychology and law to demonstrate mechanisms behind alcohol exposure effects, present latest evidence on how prevalent alcohol and alcohol marketing is in digital media and discuss with the audience ongoing challenges in the monitoring and regulation of alcohol marketing in digital media.*

### **Chair:**

*Prof Emmanuel Kuntsche, Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia*

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### **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

*The chair and all presenters do not have any conflict of interests.*

## **PRESENTATION 1: ALCOHOL EXPOSURE LEADS TO ALCOHOL USE VIA EXPECTANCIES, NORMS, COGNITIVE BIASES, AND IMITATION: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Presenting Author:**

*Emmanuel Kuntsche*

### **Introduction:**

*Alcohol is omnipresent in both physical and digital environments. We present a conceptual framework that outlines four mechanisms of how alcohol exposure leads to alcohol consumption.*

### **Method:**

*Narrative literature review of established theories (Dual Process Model, Social Learning Theory, Addiction Learning Theory, etc.) and empirical evidence.*

### **Key Findings:**

*The first and the second mechanism concern positive alcohol expectancies and injunctive and descriptive norms, which are usually acquired in childhood through social learning and are important drivers of alcohol initiation usually occurring in (early) adolescence. As drinking experience is progressing, conscious decisions are more and more transformed into automatic reactions. Attentional and approach bias and imitation (the third and fourth mechanism) are usually acquired through instrumental conditioning and incentive sensitization. Positive rewards associated with past drinking can create a vicious cycle of increased biases and automatic tendencies leading to even more drinking.*

### **Discussions and Conclusions:**

*In terms of public health, this framework is important because it outlines the different pathways in which alcohol exposure (of any kind) is linked to initiation and increase in consumption that eventually leads to adverse consequences for individuals and the society.*

## **PRESENTATION 2: USING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO DETERMINE HOW MUCH ALCOHOL INFLUENCERS FROM AUSTRALIA POST ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

### **Presenting Author:**

*Benjamin Riordan*

### **Introduction:**

*Alcohol-related social media posts are common, and alcohol is typically depicted positively (i.e., as glamorous or fun). Exposure to these positive alcohol-related posts can influence our attitudes and norms about alcohol and lead to future use. Popular accounts (i.e., celebrities or influencers) with a lot of followers, may be particularly influential for developing attitudes around alcohol. To date, it has been difficult to determine how common alcohol posts are on social media sites. Therefore, we aimed to use our deep learning algorithm to measure the prevalence and sentiment of alcohol posts from the top Australian Instagram influencers and the prevalence of influencer marketing.*

### **Method:**

*We identified the top 1000 influencers in Australia and used a meta-sponsored platform to collect every post they had ever written. We then used our deep learning algorithm to analyse the post description to identify references to alcohol and hand-coded the post's sentiment (e.g., positive, negative, neutral) and whether the post included marketing.*

### **Key Findings:**

*We collected 1.05 million posts and just under 2% (n=19,201) of the posts referenced alcohol and most posts were positive (e.g., alcohol was referenced or depicted as fun/relaxing/enjoyable). A number of posts also included alcohol advertising and the sponsorship was often not mentioned in the post description.*

### **Discussion and Conclusions:**

*Alcohol is extremely common among Australian influencers and was predominantly depicted as extremely positive. A clear aim for policy may be influencer marketing, as these posts do not look like advertising and sponsorship was often not disclosed.*

## **PRESENTATION 3: ATTENDING TO THE DISTINCTIVE FORMS AND FEATURES OF ALCOHOL MARKETING IN THE DIGITAL ERA**

### **Presenting Author:**

*Dan Anderson-Luxford*

### **Introduction:**

*With the advent of digital technologies, such as social media and complex data analytics, there are now a myriad of new strategies and actors involved in alcohol promotion. This review aims to identify emerging trends in digital alcohol marketing and the implications that they pose for regulation and policy.*

### **Method:**

*A narrative review was undertaken to identify recent developments in digital alcohol marketing, including strategies used to promote alcohol, their efficacy, and key actors involved.*

### **Key Findings:**

*A range of emerging trends were identified, including (i) increased investment in “in-house” marketing and data analytics by the alcohol industry, (ii) the increasing use of coordinated digital strategies to entice consumer engagement (e.g., hashtag campaigns), (iii) increasing investment in influencer marketing and (iv) the adoption of new tracking technologies for targeted alcohol marketing and consumer surveillance. These trends are also responsive to differences in the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies – for instance, influencer marketing generally results in higher sales than other approaches.*

### **Discussion and Conclusions:**

*In a digital age, the scope and complexity of alcohol marketing has increased tremendously, posing substantial challenges for legislators and regulators. The trends towards “in-house” marketing and data analytics, in part, can be understood as a response to changing data protection requirements which have made targeted marketing – via third-party tracking – more difficult.*

### **Implications for Practice or Policy:**

*Examining the persuasive potential of digital marketing strategies demonstrates that different techniques pose differential risks in terms of alcohol use and related harms. This is something that both public health researchers and policy makers should consider.*

## **PRESENTATION 4: REGULATING DIGITAL MARKETING OF ALCOHOL TO REDUCE EXPOSURE**

### **Presenting Author:**

*Paula O'Brien*

### **Introduction:**

*Regulating the digital marketing of alcohol is a complex project. There is public and government concern about digital marketing, including of alcohol, but few countries have acted to control digital marketing. How can regulation deal with the dark, fast-changing, targeted, user-generated nature of digital marketing? Are the traditional approaches to regulating marketing useful for dealing with digital marketing? Are there other more effective options?*

### **Method:**

*This paper involves legal and social science desk research.*

### **Key Findings:**

*Options for regulating digital marketing go beyond a comprehensive ban and include: partial restrictions on some forms of digital marketing; partial restrictions on marketing to particular groups, especially children; counter-advertising requirements; taxation; privacy law requirements for the collection and use of data; and transparency.*

### **Discussion and Conclusions:**

*There is no doubt that a ban on alcohol digital marketing would be the most effective intervention for controlling digital marketing. No other single intervention would be as effective. But bans are unlikely in most countries where there is concern about government over-reach and freedom of speech. In this context, there are a range of interventions that could be brought together to address the problem of digital marketing. Priority could be given to addressing influencer marketing. User-generated content will remain a regulatory challenge.*

### **Implications for Policy and Practice:**

*The paper presents multiple options that could be used to guide government policy in Australia, weighing the evidence and other arguments for and against the various options.*

**Discussion Section:**

*We are interested in engaging with the audience to discuss the dark, targeted marketing in online environments, and the barriers to government regulation, such as the lack of evidence on youth exposure to, and engagement with, alcohol marketing and the lack of an efficient system for ongoing monitoring. We will also discuss with the audience regulatory approaches available at the national level to address these challenges, building on areas such as alcohol marketing legislation, data protection and privacy regulation, and consumer law. At the international level, we also consider the role of multilateral partnerships (e.g., the European Union), international organisations (e.g., the World Health Organisation), and civil society in facilitating effective digital alcohol marketing regulation. Another point of discussion will be that regulating digital marketing requires what is called a 'regulatory network approach'. This involves moving beyond the idea of a single statute or regulatory fix and seeing how a myriad of regulatory interventions can weave together to address the problems associated with digital marketing. Options for better controlling digital marketing include redeploying existing statutes and regulatory capacity to better effect, as well as amending and adding new regulation. It also involves looking to a range of regulatory targets along the adtech supply chain, and not just the alcohol producers. Furthermore, it can involve a range of regulatory actors, including government, regulators (e.g., consumer, corporate, media, privacy, online safety) and civil society whose efforts network together to address the issues at hand. Finally, there are interesting questions about how digital technologies can be turned back on the marketing and used as a regulatory force against the problem behaviour.*