



LESS ALCOHOL WEBINAR SERIES

DIGITAL MARKETING OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES: WHAT HAS CHANGED?

09 DECEMBER 2021 – 12:00–13:30 CET

Why is this webinar needed?

The more individuals are exposed to alcohol marketing, the more likely they drink (1). Exposure to alcohol marketing increases acceptability on drinking alcohol, age of onset and drinking behaviour, including binge drinking (2,3). There is also evidence that the effects of marketing may be more significant in heavy drinkers (4,5). The exposure and overexposure of youth to alcohol marketing increases their chances to experience harm (1,6). A recent study has described the causality of this relation (7).

Digital platforms¹ quickly became a powerful marketing tool for alcoholic beverages, in part to avoid regulations of traditional marketing (8). Through constant and systematic data collection, digital platforms elicit consumer

preferences, attitudes and behaviours. These ecosystems² identify and pursue vulnerable consumers or transform users into vulnerable targets (8–11).

Unlike television commercials or billboards, digital marketing is not bounded by time or space (9). It seeks to engage with and encourage consumers to internalize brands and express perspectives on their behalf. During the COVID-19 pandemic, digital marketing also opened the door to a quick expansion of e-commerce of alcoholic beverages by delivering directly at home (12).

Banning and restricting alcohol advertising is a cost-effective intervention for reducing the consumption of alcohol recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) (13). In 2018, most

¹ A digital platform is an environment in which a piece of software is executed. Examples of digital platforms are: Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn; StackOverflow, Quora and Yahoo; Media sharing platforms like YouTube, Spotify, and Vimeo; Service-oriented platforms like Uber, Airbnb and GrubHub (<https://www.bmc.com/blogs/digital-platforms/>).

² A digital ecosystem is a group of interconnected information technology resources that can function as a unit. (<https://searchcio.techtarget.com/definition/digital-ecosystem>).

countries had regulations for alcohol marketing in traditional media but 48% had no regulation for the Internet, 47% did not have regulation for social media and only a few countries had a complete ban on alcohol advertising (14). One country has recently established a governmental committee to approve all digital alcohol marketing, including social media (15). Some countries have established advertising codes and standards administered by independent authorities and monitor breaches (16).

Marketing of unhealthy commodities has been increasingly at the centre of WHO's work (17–22). The WHO–UNICEF–Lancet Commission has acknowledged the exposition of children to exploitative marketing of unhealthy commodities, including alcohol, as “an important threat to children's health and futures” (23).

In 2021, WHO will launch a “technical report on the harmful use of alcohol related to cross-border alcohol marketing, advertising and promotional activities, including those targeting youth and adolescents”³ (17). A WHO European region dedicated report is also forthcoming⁴.

What do we aim to achieve?

The rapid expansion of digital marketing of unhealthy commodities poses new challenges for its regulation and enforcement to be at pace. This webinar will feature digital marketing transformations, discuss the options to tackle this evolving phenomenon and outline possible next steps.

Who should participate?

The target audience includes policymakers, government officials and civil servants, civil society groups, media, and researchers interested in this topic.

Participation in this event is by invitation. If you have not received one, you can still register; your application will be considered.

The event is co-organized by the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe; the Less Alcohol Unit of the Department of Health Promotion and the Alcohol, Drugs and Addictive Behaviours Unit of the Department of Mental Health and Substance Use, both at the World Health Organization headquarters.

For more information, contact us:

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Less Alcohol Unit – Department of Health Promotion

³ Forthcoming on 7 December 2021. Website:

<https://www.who.int/teams/health-promotion/reduce-the-harmful-use-of-alcohol>

⁴ Forthcoming on 8 December 2021. Website:

<https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/disease-prevention/alcohol-use/publications>

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