

COVID–19 cocktails: Push for tighter alcohol advertising restrictions on social media

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University of Queensland researchers reveal how alcohol advertisers are using social media to prey on parents and encourage drinking as a way to cope with stress during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Janni Leung from UQ's School of Psychology and National Center for Youth Substance Use Research said better policies are urgently required to support parents exposed to [alcohol](#) messaging through social media.

"It's tough to push parents to reflect on the way their children might perceive their drinking habits while the industry has been capitalizing on the current crisis," Dr. Leung said.

"Instead, we need to provide support and protect parents through these challenging times."

A recent report found on one social media account, an average of one [alcohol advertisement](#) was shown to the user every 35 seconds.

Common themes of the advertisements included "easy access to alcohol without leaving home,"

"buy more," "drink during COVID-19," and "drink to cope."

"Parents, especially mothers, have shared an influx of memes on social media about using alcohol to cope with the stress of the pandemic such as 'maybe it takes a village to raise a child, but I swear it's gonna take a vineyard to homeschool one,'" Dr. Leung said.

"These posts risk normalizing the use of alcohol as a coping strategy and promoting the false belief that alcohol is good for [mental health](#)."

Currently the regulation system for alcohol advertising in Australia doesn't prevent [social media](#) platforms being used by alcohol brands to post advertisements and engage with consumers.

"Most people believe this system is government funded, however it is actually an industry-funded, quasi-regulatory structure that is contested by consumer complaints and lacks systematic independent monitoring," Dr. Leung said.

"It is questionable how well Australia's regulatory system protects parents and other targeted populations at risk from exposure to constant encouragements to drink during these challenging times. We hope to bring awareness of this issue to parents, government, [health care professionals](#) and service providers, so changes are made to the regulation system for alcohol advertising."

The researcher's letter has been published in *The Medical Journal of Australia*.

More information: Janni Leung et al. Alcohol advertisers may be using social media to encourage parents to drink during COVID-19, *Medical Journal of Australia* (2020). DOI: [10.5694/mja2.50707](https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.50707)

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