

Effectiveness of regulatory policies on online/digital/internet - mediated alcohol marketing

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- Since the past decade, we are continuously witnessing the **gain of popularity of various online platforms or social networking/image sharing sites.**
- **Alcohol advertisers have shifted their focus to digital media,** which provide the alcohol industry the ability to advertise content by a multitude of contemporary marketing approaches.
- Marketing through these new media channels can be **targeted at specific audiences, virally spread between users,** and accessed in almost any context (e.g., via smartphones), and can actively **recruit users into the marketing process.**
 - Users are actively engaged with alcohol brands' content through **“liking” and commenting on ads or pictures, sharing, retweeting, following** other users or by conversing with them on brand web pages, or by **posting** their own branded images.

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- Social networking sites serve as a **public forum in which young people actively value, identify with and make use of alcohol marketing messages**, therefore it is in an alcohol brand's interest to build its values and identity by establishing positive and desirable associations with their social media followers.
- This **type of marketing communication increasingly blurs the lines** not only **between entertainment and commercial messages**, but also between personal communication and commercial messages.
- To our knowledge, this is **the first systematic review** to identify studies **examining the impact and effectiveness of existing regulatory frameworks of digital alcohol advertising** practices, notably on social networking/image sharing sites and video hosting platforms.

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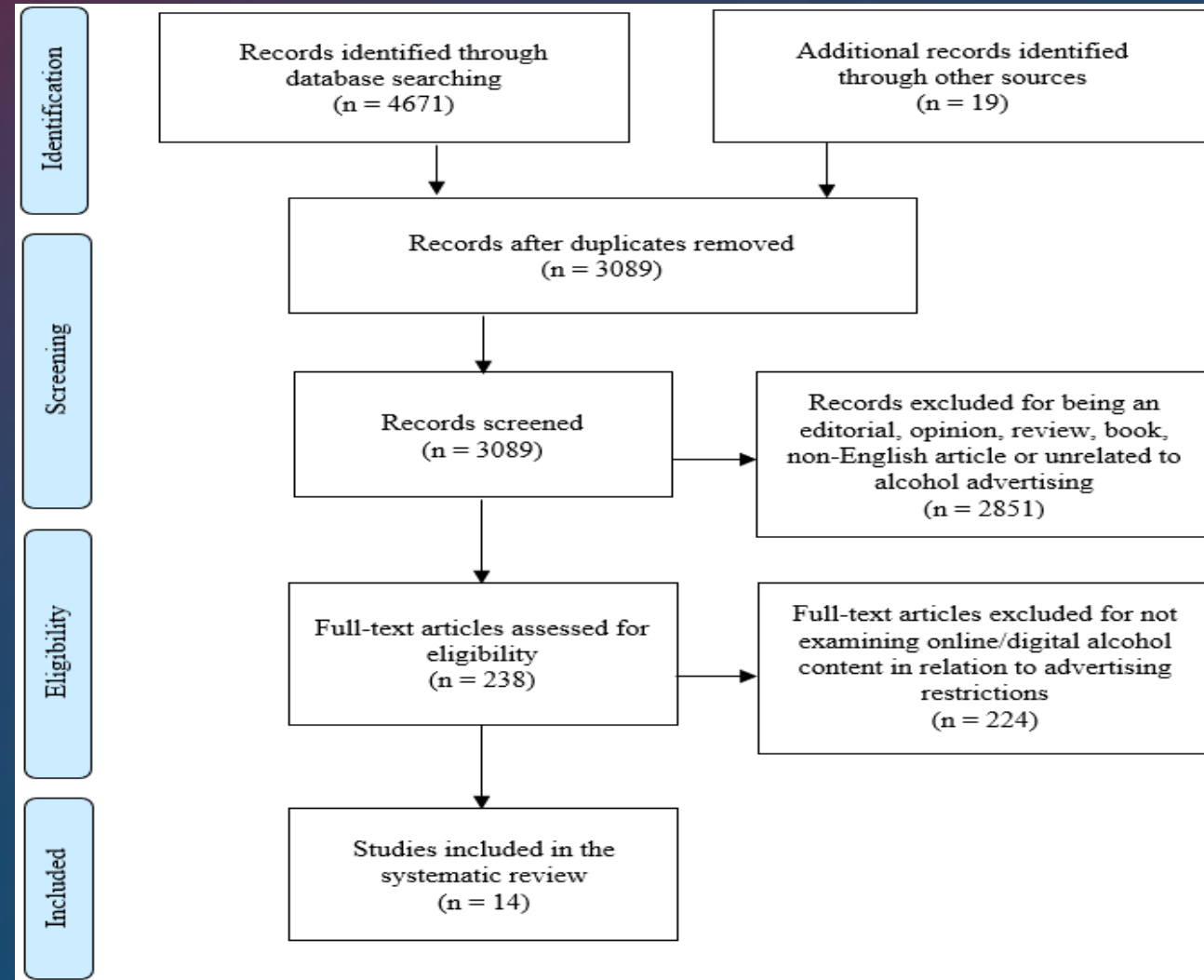
- We conducted a systematic search through **three peer-reviewed journal databases** (WoS, PubMed, Scopus).
- The following Boolean **search string of keywords** was used to identify potentially eligible articles: (marketing OR promot* OR advert*) AND (digital OR online OR internet) AND (alcohol*) AND (regulat* OR monitor* OR polic* OR supervis* OR enforc* OR restrict*).
- Studies were included if **published in English, after 2004**, and assessed **statutory regulation or voluntary industry codes**, enacted by an EU or nation's governmental agency or private entity, and with the intent to restrict digital alcohol advertising.
- In addition, we conducted a manual search of grey literature:
 - On the web addresses of peer-reviewed journals (Alcohol, Alcohol and Alcoholism, Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, and Addiction, ...)
 - On various international, governmental, or independent research organizations' websites (e.g., World Health Organization, European Commission's Public Health Portal, European Alcohol Policy Alliance, European Centre for Monitoring Alcohol Marketing).

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- After exporting the initial article list, an **eligibility assessment** of the gathered studies was performed independently in a standardized manner **by at least three researchers**.
 - Those reviewed the titles and abstracts of each article to determine if it met the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the **subsequent full-text assessment**.
- In order **to reduce bias of chosen articles**, increase reliability and transparency, and improve the communication of the findings, a systematic review process was selected by using the **2009 PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) statement reporting approach**.
 - We used the **Covidence®** online primary screening and data extraction tool as a platform to conduct the majority of our systematic review.

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PRISMA Flow Diagram



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Quality Assessment of Included Studies (adopted from Hawker et al.)

Studies	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Score (out of 36)
Mart et al. (2009)	3	3	4	4* ¹	3	1* ²	4	4	4	30
Atkinson et al. (2011)	4	4	4	4* ¹	3	3* ²	4	4	4	35
Gordon (2011)	4	4	4	4* ¹	3	1* ²	4	4	4	34
Brodmerkel & Carah (2013)	3	4	3	3* ¹	3	1* ²	4	3	4	28
Jones et al. (2014)	3	4	4	4* ¹	3	1* ²	4	4	4	31
Winpenney et al. (2014)	4	4	4	4* ¹	3	3* ²	4	4	4	34
Barry et al. (2014)	4	4	4	4* ¹	3	1* ²	4	4	3	31
Atkinson et al. (2014)	4	4	3	4* ¹	3	1* ²	3	4	4	30
Barry et al. (2015)	4	4	4	4* ¹	3	1* ²	4	4	4	32
Noel & Babor (2017)	4	4	4	4* ¹	4	4* ²	4	3	4	35
Kauppila et al. (2019)	4	4	4	4* ¹	3	3* ²	4	4	4	35
Paradis et al. (2020)	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	36
Barry et al. (2020)	4	4	4	4* ¹	3	1* ²	4	4	4	32
Pierce et al. (2021)	4	4	4	4* ¹	3	1* ²	4	4	4	32

- Criteria:
1. Abstract and title
 2. Introduction and aims
 3. Method and data
 4. Sampling
 5. Data analysis
 6. Ethics and bias
 7. Findings/results
 8. Transferability/generalizability
 9. Implications and usefulness

- Rating Index:
- 4 points = Good
 - 3 points = Fair
 - 2 points = Poor
 - 1 point = Very Poor

Notes: The quality appraisal was conducted independently by two reviewers and the total score represents the average of the two scores, where applicable. *¹ denotes a study which analysed various datasets in lieu of directly assessing human participants, necessitating an adaptive scoring. In such cases a *² denotes ethics research approval considerations as not having been assessed.

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Characteristics of Included Studies

Author(s), Location & Study Design	Types of digital media and regulation analysed
Mart et al. (2009) [34] USA Cross-sectional	Social networking site (Facebook) <u>Industry self-regulation</u>
Atkinson et al. (2011) [44] UK Mixed method	Social networking sites (YouTube, MySpace, Bebo, Facebook), Website pages <u>Industry self-regulation</u>
Gordon (2011) [42] UK Cross-sectional	Website pages of alcohol companies/brands <u>Industry self-regulation</u>
Brodmerkel & Carah (2013) [35] Australia Cross-sectional	Social networking site (Facebook) <u>Industry self-regulation</u>
Jones et al. (2014) [24] Australia Cross-sectional	Website pages of alcohol companies/brands <u>Industry self-regulation</u>
Winpenny et al. (2014) [37] UK Cross-sectional	Social networking sites (YouTube, Facebook) <u>Industry self-regulation</u>
Barry et al. (2014) [36] USA Cross-sectional	Social networking site (YouTube) <u>Industry self-regulation</u>

Author(s), Location & Study Design	Types of digital media and regulation analysed
Atkinson et al. (2014) [38] UK Mixed method	Social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter) <u>Industry self-regulation</u>
Barry et al. (2015) [39] USA Cross-sectional	Social networking sites (Instagram, Twitter) <u>Industry self-regulation</u>
Noel & Babor (2017) [40] USA Cross-sectional	Social networking site (Facebook) <u>Industry self-regulation</u>
Kauppila et al. (2019) [26] Finland Comparative audit	Social networking sites (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) <u>Statutory regulation</u> <u>Industry self-regulation</u>
Paradis et al. (2020) [41] Canada Cross-sectional	Social networking site (Facebook) <u>Statutory regulation</u> <u>Industry self-regulation</u>
Barry et al. (2020) [39] USA Cross-sectional	Website pages of alcohol companies/brands <u>Industry self-regulation</u>
Pierce et al. (2021) [31] USA Cross-sectional	Social networking sites (Facebook, Instagram) <u>Industry self-regulation</u>

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Results:

- All but one study included in our review, originated from English spoken countries and **only one from non-English spoken country, Finland (a single study, conducted within the EU region).**
- Ten studies assessed alcohol advertising content on online video/sharing **hosting platforms or social networking**/image sharing sites, whereas three studies examined the content on solely the alcohol **companies'/brands' official websites**, and one study assessed both types of digital media.
- **Only two studies analyzed the effectiveness of statutory regulations** governing digital alcohol advertising (Finland and Canada), the rest of the twelve studies having primarily assessed the effectiveness of industry's voluntary codes of practice.

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Major conclusions:

- Our findings indicate that **alcohol advertisements on social media and websites continue to be accessible by children and under-aged adolescents.**
- **Age-affirmation systems remain largely ineffective** at preventing under-aged access.
- Alcohol content remains widespread on these platforms and increasingly **innovative strategies are being applied** to reach targeted audiences.
- Current research also illustrates
 - **a lack of developed effective statutory regulation** of digital alcohol advertising,
 - cases of **industry's voluntary codes of practice violations** by the alcohol industry,
 - and utilization of **grey-area approaches to bypass existing restrictions.**

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Implications for Policy:

- There is a **limited information** about the effectiveness of regulatory policies on online/digital/internet - mediated alcohol marketing.
- Both past and current regulatory **policies have proven themselves to be ineffective in protecting** adolescents, young adults, adults, and vulnerable groups from digital alcohol advertising practices.
- A multitude of **challenges** regarding digital alcohol advertising restrictions remain to be solved by **policy makers** (user-generated branding, digital sponsorships, augmented reality, blogs and vlogs, sweepstakes and drinking games, etc.)
- Regulators also need to address, **how brands use cultural life** and people's identities for social media activity and promotions.
- Digital advertising regulation should ideally be supported and accompanied by effective systems of **monitoring and enforcement**.

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Implications for Research:

- Major **gaps in knowledge remain** in this research field with regards to assessing digital advertising legislation of EU member-states, as well as other world countries.
- Research needs to also expand and employ **longitudinal and experimental designs** in order to clearly make **evidence-based assertions about causal impacts of legislative changes**.
- Considering the rise of social media influencers and known inconsistencies regarding alcohol sponsorships transparency in recent years as well as their ability to promote or undermine products, future research should also explore how **collaborations with influencers** is utilized by the alcohol industry.

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