

Buy now: the link between alcohol advertising, online sales and rapid delivery

August 2024

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Foundation for Alcohol
Research & Education



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Key findings

Alcohol advertisements and the sale and delivery of alcohol are now inextricably linked, contributing to the significantly expanding availability of alcohol in Australia.

- While advertising content and the sale of alcohol have traditionally been separate, alcohol companies now use online advertising as a store front, with advertisements directly linking to online retail sites and apps where alcohol is sold and rapidly delivered to people's homes.
- Of the 56,000 advertisements published on Meta platforms by companies that sell alcohol over a 19-month period, the majority (83.8%) contained a button encouraging people to engage with the advertisement.
- Over a third of alcohol advertisements (39.2%) contained a button that directs people to an online platform where alcohol is sold. For example, advertisements directed people to online stores with a catalogue-style list of alcoholic products for sale, or directly to a product preview with an 'add to cart' prompt.
- These advertisements rapidly convert exposure to an alcohol advertisement online, with the sale and delivery of alcohol directly into the home, bypassing the usual protections and speed bumps in place when alcohol is sold in traditional physical premises. This is particularly concerning when it comes to an addictive and harmful product like alcohol.
- Current regulations for how alcohol is advertised and sold were developed for bricks and mortar stores and venues, with a number of jurisdictions now playing catch up and considering what changes are required to keep pace with an ever-evolving digital world.
- Reforms must ensure harm minimisation protections are not bypassed in the digital environment. Online alcohol advertising in its current form is expanding alcohol availability and expediting sales and delivery contributing to alcohol harms. Therefore, it is important that alcohol laws and regulations are modernised. Policymakers should consider implementing measures that address the ways alcohol companies advertise through digital platforms.

Background

While online technologies play an important role in our lives, it is essential that digital environments are safe and facilitate health and wellbeing. However, alcohol companies persistently target people with alcohol advertisements when they are online, with the goal of increasing their profits.

Alcohol is an addictive product which causes significant harm to communities. Each year, 10 million people in Australia are harmed by alcohol.¹ Because of alcohol, one person dies every 90 minutes and one person is hospitalised every three and a half minutes.² Alcohol-induced deaths are at the highest reported rate in Australia in 10 years,³ and deaths from alcohol-related injuries have more than doubled between 2010 and 2020.⁴ With alcohol use linked to over 200 disease and injury conditions,⁵ it is one of our nation's greatest preventive health challenges.

Digital promotion of alcohol is associated with alcohol use by young people.^{6,7} Alcohol marketing exposure increases young peoples' likelihood of starting to use alcoholic products earlier and going on to use them at higher risk levels.⁸ A recent research review shows that alcohol marketing can increase positive alcohol-related emotions and cognitions and cue alcohol cravings for people most at risk of or experiencing an alcohol problem, and for people in recovery from an alcohol use disorder it is seen to trigger a desire to drink alcohol.⁹

We previously found that alcohol companies target people with almost 40,000 alcohol advertisements in a 12-month period on Meta social media platforms alone and that alcohol retailers commonly used a 'shop now' button on their alcohol advertisements.¹⁰ This raises concern as these advertisements create a direct link between alcohol advertisements and the sale and rapid delivery of alcohol into homes which is associated with high risk alcohol use^{11,12} and harm.^{13,14}

The risks associated with rapid delivery are demonstrated in a national survey, where nearly three in four people sold alcohol with rapid delivery drank alcohol at higher risk levels on the day of delivery,¹⁵ with additional Australian research indicating that online sale and rapid delivery of alcohol into the home can extend alcohol use, where alcohol use would otherwise have ended. Research also shows that people with high-risk alcohol use are targeted with higher frequencies of alcohol advertisements for home delivery.¹⁶ It is therefore important to investigate the ways that alcohol companies are using digital platforms to integrate alcohol promotion and sale.

About this report

To investigate the extent to which alcohol advertisements on social media platforms lead people to online retail sites and apps where alcohol is sold, we analysed the landing pages that buttons on alcohol advertisements direct people to. This included investigating how buttons on alcohol advertisements vary between companies and industry sectors.

Methodology

The data presented in this report was collected from the Meta Ad Library (which includes advertising for Facebook, Instagram, Messenger and the Audience network) using computational methods described elsewhere.¹⁷ Data was collected from 21 October 2021 to 2 June 2023 (inclusive).

A list of alcohol producers, retailers and venues was developed to identify alcohol-related advertising. In this study, advertisements from companies that sell alcohol were considered alcohol advertisements. This list originally included 351 alcohol advertisers and between 8 March 2023 and 17 April 2023 was expanded on a rolling basis to include a total of 1,123 alcohol advertisers. Therefore, the data in this report is likely an under-representation of the total number of alcohol advertisements on Meta platforms.

A total of 56,579 advertisements and their available metadata were collected from advertisers over the data collection period. Alcohol advertisements were analysed for the use of buttons, the button text (e.g., “buy now”, “learn more”, or “book now”) and the landing page linked to the advertisement through the button.

Landing pages linked to alcohol advertisements through buttons were analysed and categorised based on whether they directly linked to alcohol sale. An advertisement directly linked to alcohol sale was defined as an instance where a button links to a webpage or app that by design steers people toward being sold alcohol.

Figures in the report reflect distinct advertisements published, meaning advertisements are defined by their unique ID number and only counted once when they are first published in the Meta Ad Library even if distributed across multiple platforms. This report does not include measures such as reach, spend, or click-through rates as this information is not currently made available by Meta.

Table 1: Data collection

Data source	Meta Ad Library
Collection dates	21 October 2021 to 2 June 2023 (inclusive)
Advertisers tracked across market categories	1,123 total advertisers <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 546 producers• 50 retailers• 527 venues
Total alcohol ads collected	56,579

Results

How many alcohol advertisements directly link to alcohol sale?

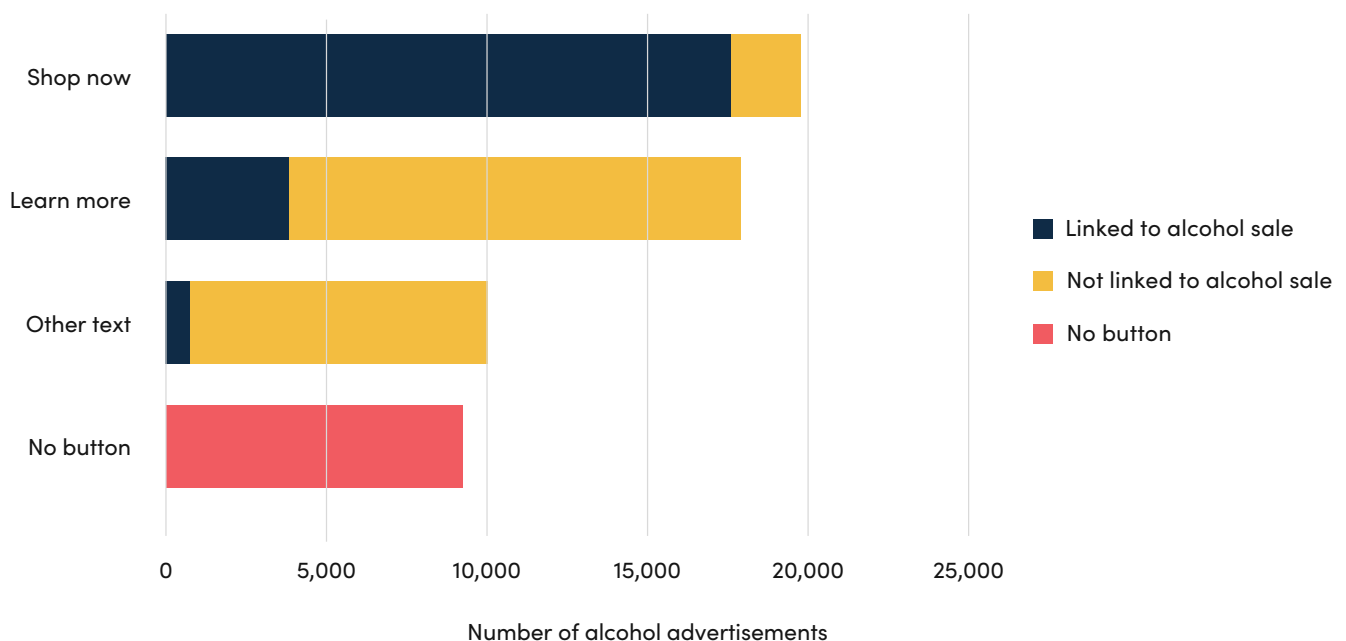
» Key takeaway: There is now a fundamental link between alcohol advertisements on social media and the online sale and delivery of alcohol.

Of the total alcohol advertisements captured (n=56,579), the majority (83.8%) contained a button and over a third (39.2%) directly linked to alcohol sale through the button. On average, this equates to over 1,100 alcohol advertisements per month that directly linked to alcohol sale through a button.

Read another way, of advertisements with a button (n=47,416), almost half (46.7%) directly linked people to alcohol sale.

The most common button labels used by alcohol advertisers are 'Shop Now' and 'Learn More'. For alcohol advertisements with a 'shop now' button, almost nine in 10 (89.4%) directly linked people to alcohol sale. Almost a quarter (21.5%) of advertisements using the 'learn more' button directly linked to alcohol sale. Other button types were less used and collectively were less likely to link to alcohol sale (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Alcohol advertisements with a button, by presence of direct link to alcohol sale



What do alcohol advertisements linking to alcohol sale look like?

Alcohol advertisements using a button directly link people to alcohol sale in a range of ways. In some cases, people are led to alcohol sale within one or two clicks. Examples of how alcohol was sold included through direct 'add to cart' features, subscription orders, and offers for prizes or special deals that required the purchase of an alcoholic product to enter. Alcohol producers don't necessarily always link to their own webstores, in many cases their advertisements link to alcohol retailer websites.

Advertisements linking people to alcohol sale could initially lead people to a range of different landing pages. Common landing pages included:

- Catalogue-style pages listing alcoholic products, with products accompanied by buttons prompting people to 'add' a product to a virtual check out cart. These landing pages often include additional promotions, for example the promotion of discounted alcoholic products.
- A page detailing a specific alcoholic product, accompanied by an 'add' to cart button. These pages can also include additional promotions.
- A page prompting the installation of an alcohol company app that sells and delivers alcohol.

The examples provided below demonstrate several alcohol advertisements and their corresponding landing pages.

It was common for landing pages to seek personal information such as age and location on first visit to the landing page, which would be remembered (i.e., via browser cookies) for subsequent visits to a website and used to target webpage content based on this information (e.g., through localised delivery/promotions).

Advertisements classed as not directly linked to alcohol sale included those with landing pages containing everything from directions to venues, tickets to events that are not inherently related to alcohol, venue and retailer information, find-a-store locations, and other general promotional materials that don't include direct sales.

Examples

EXAMPLE: CATALOGUE-STYLE LANDING PAGE

BWS
Sponsored

COCKTAILS IN A CAN. THE BEST THING SINCE COCKTAILS IN A GLASS.

REFRESHINGLY
BWS

[Shop Now](#)

89 views
"raises pinky finger to drink" yep, we fancy everywhere now. Hit up BWS for more cutting edge cocktails.
View all 14 comments

Beer Wine Spirits Premix Specials The Drop

Set Your Store Find your local BWS

TRY \$4 FOR
When you link your Everyday Rewards Card. 16% apply.

Pick Up In store, ASAP for free | Delivery Get your drinks delivered ASAP | App Download our App today | Shop In Store Over 1300 stores Australia wide

OUR DEALS ARE KINDA A BIG DEAL.
The best BWS bargains, all in the one place.

Try Me For \$4

<p>Brookvale Union Vodka Red Hot Soda Can 330ml \$8.70</p> <p>ADD TO CART</p>	<p>Vodka Cruiser Coconut Passionfruit Cucumber Can 375ml \$8.70</p> <p>FIND ME NEARBY</p>	<p>Hard Solo Can 375ml \$8.70</p> <p>ADD TO CART</p>	<p>Kirin Hyokoku Lemon Can 330ml \$8.70</p> <p>ADD TO CART</p>	<p>James Squire Lower Sugar Single Beer Can 330ml \$6.50</p> <p>ADD TO CART</p>
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Liquorland
Sponsored

30% OFF ALL LIQUOR INCLUDING

-196 Double Lemon & Vodka Can 330ml 10pk

WHEN YOU ORDER ON

Uber Eats

[Shop Now](#)

89 views
What's not to love about 30% off liquor! Land your weekend when you shop via the Uber Eats App.
View all 14 comments

Uber Eats

Search in Liquorland Express (World Square)

Liquorland
10-30 min

Best sellers

<p>\$33.00 Asahi Super Dry Cans 6x500ml</p>	<p>\$5.00 Schweppes Soda Water 1.1L</p>	<p>\$55.00 Hard Solo Can 10x375ml</p>	<p>\$26.00 Hahn Super Dry Can 8x375ml</p>	<p>\$45.00 Clearskin Vodka 700ml</p>
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Trending products

<p>\$5.00 Bar Master Spirit Pourer</p>	<p>\$30.00 Crawley's Agave Syrup Bottle 750ml</p>	<p>\$24.00 Vodka Cruiser Sugar Free Strawberry Watermelon Bottle 4x275ml</p>	<p>\$48.00 Bailey's Pavlova 700ml</p>	<p>\$20.00 Pure Blonde Cider & Soda Can 4x300ml</p>
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RESULTS

EXAMPLE: PRODUCT DETAILS ADD TO CART PAGE

The image shows a mobile application interface. On the left is a sponsored advertisement for 'JIMMY BRINGS' featuring 'SUMMER SAVERS' and 'SUNTORY -196 DOUBLE GRAPE Shochu, Vodka & Soda'. The ad includes a 'GET JIMMY' button and app store links. On the right is a screenshot of the app's shopping cart page. A product details overlay is open for 'Suntory -196 Double Grape', showing a 'Special Ends 03/01' banner, a description of the product, and an 'ADD 4 PACK - \$25.00' button. The background shows a grid of other products like Smirnoff and various Double Grape flavors.

EXAMPLE: INSTALLATION OF ALCOHOL RETAIL APP

The image shows a mobile application advertisement for 'BWS' on the Google Play store. The ad features a woman using a smartphone. The app page displays the 'BWS' logo, 'Endeavour Group' affiliation, a 3.7 star rating, 2.74K reviews, and 500K+ downloads. It includes an 'Install' button and a carousel of app features: 'REAL TIME TRACKING', 'PAY YOUR WAY', 'PICK UP IN 30 MINUTES', 'APPLY DEALS', 'SCAN & DISCOVER', and 'COLLECT EVERYDAY REWARD POINTS'. The 'App support' section lists 'Woolworths', 'Everyday Rewards', and 'MyMaccas's'. The bottom of the page mentions 'BWS ON DEMAND DELIVERY AND REAL-TIME TRACKING'.

Advertisements and landing pages visually shown are examples to demonstrate how advertisements can directly link to alcohol sale through various design patterns. Some screen captures of landing pages have been taken post-data collection and therefore promotions depicted are reflective of the time point at which they were captured.

Who directly links advertisements to alcohol sale the most?

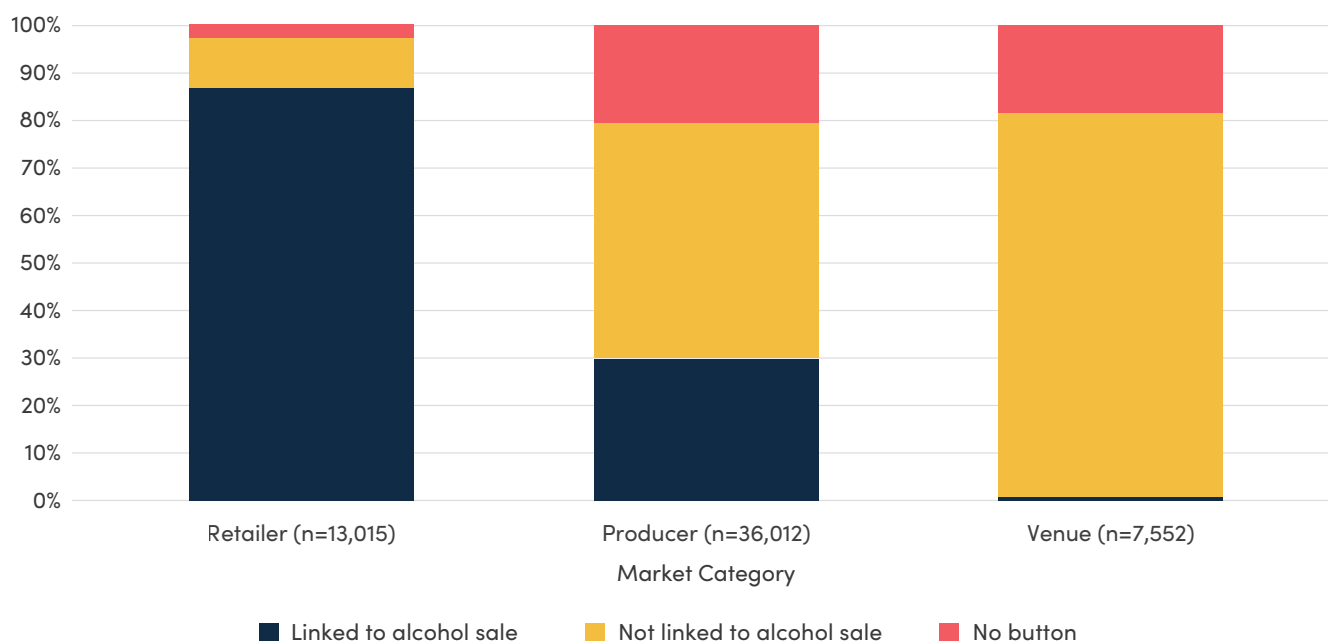
» Key takeaway: Due to their different business models, it is unsurprising that alcohol retailers, including those that sell alcohol through rapid delivery, were more likely than producers or venues to use advertisements containing a button that links to alcohol sale. This highlights the fundamental link between alcohol advertisements on social media and the online sale and delivery of alcohol, with the line between advertising and retail now blurred.

Almost all (97.7%) advertisements by alcohol retailers contained a button and 87.3% of these directly link to alcohol sale.

Almost four in five (79.3%) alcohol producer advertisements contained a button, with 29.9% directly linking to alcohol sale.

While 81.6% of venue advertisements used a button, less than 1% (0.61%) of advertisements by venues used a button directly linking to alcohol sale (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Percentage of alcohol advertisements with a button directly linking to alcohol sale, by market category

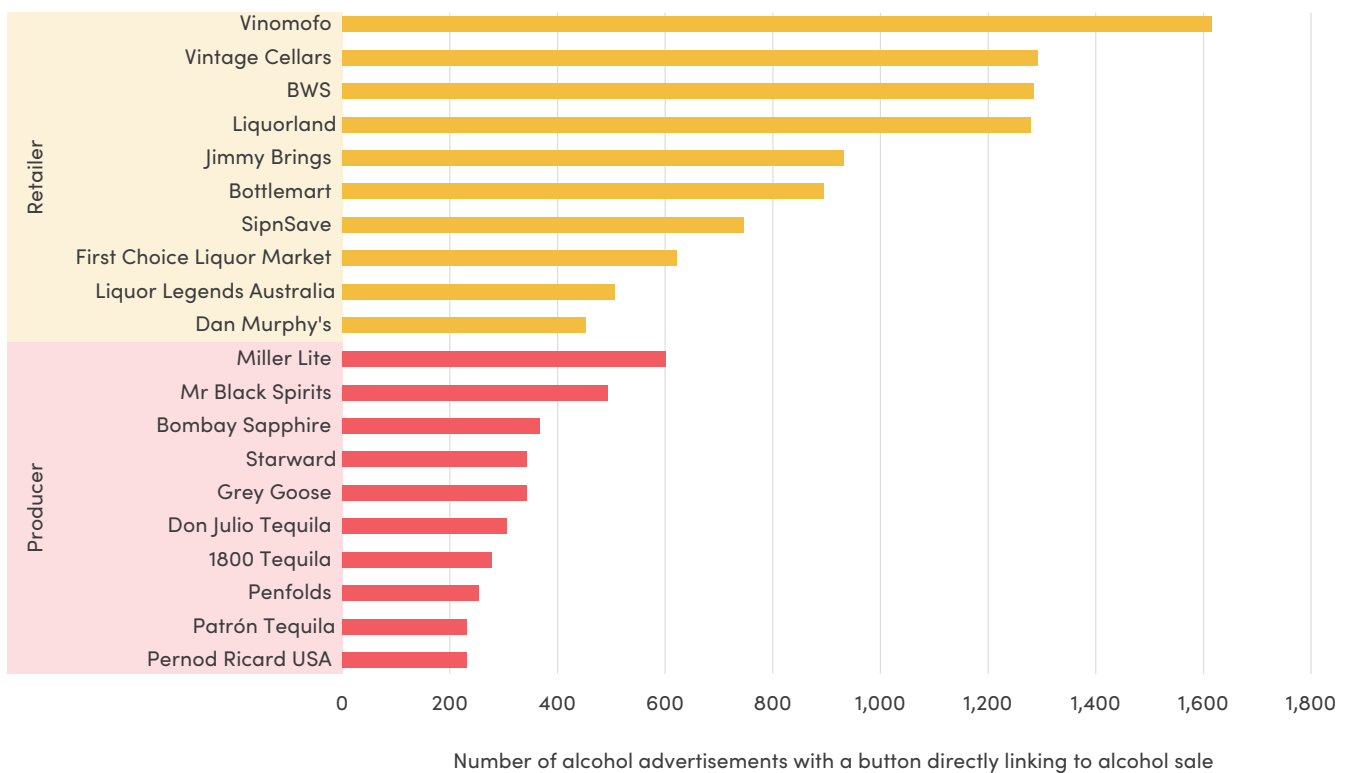


Companies directly linking advertisements to alcohol sale the most

Of all alcohol advertisers, Vinomofo (n=1,617), Vintage Cellars (n=1,291), and BWS (n=1,290) published the highest number of alcohol advertisements with a button directly linking to alcohol sale over the study period (Figure 3). The 10 alcohol retailers publishing the most alcohol sale linked advertisements were in total responsible for 9,651 advertisements over the study period – equivalent to almost 500 advertisements per month. They disseminated 43.5% of the total number of alcohol sale linked advertisements, while comprising only 0.7% of the total number of alcohol advertisers in this study.

Notably, nine of these 10 retailers (the exception being Vinomofo) can sell alcohol through rapid delivery (defined as less than two hours between order and delivery). These nine companies collectively disseminated 8,034 alcohol advertisements with a button directly linking to alcohol sale. While these nine companies comprise only 0.8% of the total number of alcohol advertisers in the study, they were responsible for 36.3% of the total number of alcohol advertisements with a button directly linking to alcohol sale.

Figure 3: Number of alcohol advertisements with a button directly linking to alcohol sale by advertiser, separated by market category



Ownership of companies directly linking advertisements to alcohol sale the most

- » Key takeaway: Alcohol advertisements on social media platforms are a virtual shop front for online alcohol stores – including those owned by large retailers and multinational corporations. The widespread use of this tactic by companies, including those with significant resources, to sell harmful, addictive products should raise strong red flags. It creates and compounds a digital environment for harm where people have fewer protections between seeing an advertisement and being sold alcohol.

Producers disseminating the highest number of alcohol advertisements directly linking to alcohol sale through buttons are predominantly owned by multinational companies, for example Bacardi Limited (n=952), Diageo (n=809), and Molson Coors (n=601; Table 2). Collectively, the 10 producers that most used these alcohol sales linked advertisements disseminated 32% (n=3,479) of the total number of alcohol sales linked advertisements by producers.

Table 2: The ten alcohol producers with highest number of alcohol advertisements with a button directly linking to alcohol sale, by company ownership

ALCOHOL PRODUCERS	
Miller Lite (Molson Coors)	601
Mr Black Spirits (Diageo)	498
Bombay Sapphire (Bacardi Limited)	370
Grey Goose (Bacardi Limited)	343
Starward	343
Don Julio Tequila (Diageo)	311
1800 Tequila (Beckle SAB de CV)	281
Penfolds (Treasury Wine Estates)	256
Patrón Tequila (Bacardi Limited)	239
Pernod Ricard USA (Pernod Ricard)	237

Bacardi Limited

Diageo

Other

Examples

ADVERTISEMENT DIRECTLY LINKING TO ALCOHOL SALE	LANDING PAGE
<p>Mr Black Spirits Sponsored</p> <p>— NOW AVAILABLE AT — LIQUORLAND VINTAGE CELLARS +500 MORE</p> <p>BUY IT NOW</p> <p>MR-BLACK ESPRESSO MARTINI — 8% — ALC. VOL 200ML</p> <p>Learn More ></p> <p>89 views Another conversation about Cryptocurrency? Shake it up with our new Espresso Martini, now available at Liquorland, Vintage Cellars + 500 independent bottle shops! View all 14 comments</p>	<p>MR-BLACK - COFFEE LIQUOR -</p> <p>MR BLACK ESPRESSO MARTINI 4X200ML 8% AS\$35.00</p> <p>A SILKY BLEND OF MR BLACK, VODKA AND COLD BREW COFFEE</p> <p>CHILL GET 'EM COLD SHAKE HARD FOR 5 SECONDS OPEN SLOWLY POUR INTO A GLASS</p> <p>8% 4 X 200ML</p> <p>HOW MANY WOULD YOU LIKE? <input type="text" value="1"/> <input type="text" value="2"/> <input type="text" value="3"/> ADD TO CART</p> <p>FIND A RETAILER NEAR YOU</p>

The 10 alcohol retailers that disseminated the highest number of alcohol advertisements directly linking to alcohol sale are predominantly owned by larger holding companies, including Coles Group Limited (n=3,197), Endeavour Group Limited (n=2,680), and Liquor Marketing Group Ltd (n=1,646) (Table 3). Collectively, the 10 retailers disseminated 84.94% (n=9,651) of the total number of alcohol sales linked advertisements by retailers.

Table 3: The ten alcohol retailers with highest number of alcohol advertisements with a button directly linking to alcohol sale, by company ownership

RETAILERS	
Vinomofu (Vinomofu (Australia) Pty Ltd)	1,617
Vintage Cellars (Coles Group Limited)	1,291
BWS (Endeavour Group Limited)	1,290
Liquorland (Coles Group Limited)	1,283
Jimmy Brings (Endeavour Group Limited)	936
Bottlemart (Liquor Marketing Group Ltd)	896
SipnSave (Liquor Marketing Group Ltd)	750
First Choice Liquor Market (Coles Group Limited)	623
Liquor Legends Australia (Hotel & Tourism Management Pty Ltd)	511
Dan Murphy's (Endeavour Group Limited)	454

Endeavour Group Limited
Coles Group Limited
Liquor Marketing Group Ltd
Other

Examples

ADVERTISEMENT DIRECTLY LINKING TO ALCOHOL SALE

ADVERTISING COPY:

\$3 PREMIXES WITH MY DAN'S

EXCLUSIVE OFFERS

Shop Now

89 views
Want to try something new? Try these \$3 bottles and cans
View all 14 comments

LANDING PAGE

LANDING PAGE COPY:

Got a taste for something, new? For mere pocket change, you can dabble in a new delight tonight. We're talking \$3 for new premixes that you'll 100% want to mix things up with. There's always quality time for your beloved classics, just add an enticing little number on the side to spice things up. Taste a different range for pocket change with \$3 bottles and cans at Dan's. This offer is exclusive to My Dan's Members and in store only, so be sure to join now and head to your local Dan's to try something new tonight. T&C's apply.
Find your nearest store

TASTE THE LATEST

Price Range	Product	Member Offer	Non-Member
Under \$10	Vodka Cruiser Double Raspberry 6.8% Can 375mL	\$24.50 per pack of 4	\$29.99 pack (4)
\$10 to \$25	Vodka Cruiser Double Quava 6.8% Can 375mL	\$24.50 per pack of 4	\$29.99 pack (4)
\$25 to \$50	Vodka Cruiser Double Lemon Lime 6.8% 375mL Cans	\$24.50 per pack of 4	\$29.99 pack (4)
\$50 to \$100	Brookvale Union Vodka Passionfruit Can 330ml	\$28 per pack of 6	\$36.99 pack (6)

Discussion

There is now a fundamental link between alcohol advertisements on social media and the online sale and delivery of alcohol

Alcohol companies target people with large amounts of alcohol advertising directly linking to alcohol sale through social media. During the study period, we observed 56,579 distinct alcohol advertisements on Meta platforms. Of this total, over a third of alcohol advertisements contained a button that directly links people to alcohol sale. In this way, alcohol advertisements and sale are now intrinsically linked.

The line between alcohol advertising and sale is now blurred

Traditionally, much of the alcohol advertisements people were exposed to were in mediums such as television, in print, or on billboards – in other words, advertising was distinctly separate from the location in which alcohol was sold. However, alcohol advertisements on social media platforms have now become a virtual shop front for online alcohol stores – including those owned by large retailers and multinational corporations – thus blurring the line between advertising exposure and alcohol retail. The widespread use of this tactic to sell harmful, addictive product should raise strong red flags. This is because it creates and compounds a digital environment for harm where people in the community, particularly people most at risk of harm from alcohol products, now have fewer protections in place between seeing an alcohol advertisement, and being sold and delivered alcohol.

Social media platforms are significantly expanding alcohol availability

The use of alcohol advertisements to sell and deliver alcohol into the home rapidly is a particular concern, and this study shows this use is prevalent. For example, nine alcohol retail companies that sell alcohol via rapid delivery were responsible for 36.3% of all collected alcohol advertisements with a button directly linking to alcohol sale. This further demonstrates the role social media alcohol advertisements now play in expanding the availability of alcohol,¹⁸ and in increasing the risk of alcohol harm. Research has shown that when people are sold alcohol that is rapidly delivered into their home, they are more likely to drink at higher risk levels on the day of rapid alcohol delivery.¹⁹ Research also shows that alcohol sold online and rapidly delivered into the home results in higher alcohol use, where people would have stopped drinking alcohol if not for the rapid delivery.^{20,21}

Current regulation of alcohol marketing is not fit for purpose in the digital environment

Alcohol advertisements are no longer static. People are now exposed to interactive, dynamic advertisements that directly connect them with alcohol sale online. Contrastingly, current regulations were developed for brick-and-mortar businesses, and fail to address the concerns unique to digital practices. A distinct concerning feature of this marketing is that alcohol companies directly link these advertisements to alcohol sale, meaning that these digital advertisements are now the store front for online alcohol stores, and should therefore be regulated as such.

This issue is particularly relevant to the many jurisdictions in Australia, including the Australian Capital Territory,²² and Queensland,²³ that are currently considering reforms to online alcohol sales and delivery. As part of these reforms, jurisdictions should consider the role of alcohol sale linked advertisements in expanding alcohol availability and the subsequent harms.

Conclusion

Everyone in the community deserves the right to safely use digital platforms.

Yet alcohol companies extensively target people with alcohol advertisements on social media that link directly to platforms that sell and deliver alcohol into homes, including through rapid alcohol delivery.

Large alcohol retailers and multinational corporations are responsible for much of this social media advertising, which has become a virtual store front for alcohol sale without the same protections in place that exist in physical stores. This risks the health and wellbeing of people in Australia, as alcohol is an addictive and harmful product that causes substantial harm to our communities.

Online environments must implement government-led standards that enable good health and wellbeing by providing a safer online engagement. Policymakers should therefore consider the ways alcohol companies advertise through digital platforms when developing approaches to addressing alcohol harms.

Citation information

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Funding: This research is part of the Young Australians and the Promotion of Alcohol on Social Media project and supported by an Australian Research Council Linkage Project (grant number: LP190101051). Technical assistance was provided by members of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision Making and Society.

Suggested citation: Hayden, L., Brownbill, A., Angus, D., Carah, N., Tan, X.Y., Hawker, K., Dobson, A., Robards, B. (2024). Buy now: the link between alcohol advertising, online sales and rapid delivery. Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education: Canberra.

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