

# **Digital marketing of alcoholic beverages** what has changed?

**Snapshot series on alcohol control policies and practice**

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## **Brief at- a-glance**

## **The problem**

The more individuals are exposed to alcohol marketing, the more likely they are to consume alcohol. Exposure to alcohol marketing increases the acceptability of drinking alcohol, an earlier age of onset and drinking behaviours, including heavy episodic drinking. Digital platforms quickly became a powerful marketing tool for alcoholic beverages, in line with a broader shift from traditional to digital marketing contexts. Through constant and systematic data collection, digital platforms gather information on individuals. Data are then used to target individual users and look-alike audiences and influence consumers' preferences, attitudes, and behaviours. The digital ecosystem exposes individuals to alcohol advertising, identifies and pursues individuals who are most likely to purchase and consume alcohol, often those most at risk of developing alcohol use disorders, and transforms users into vulnerable targets.

## **The evidence**

The digital world has opened up opportunities for marketing companies to position increasingly covert and ephemeral advertising. These new techniques present challenges for policy- and decision-makers concerned to regulate and enforce digital marketing for reducing risks of harm. These new advertisements target individual consumers based on their data, allowing marketers to optimize their strategies. One of the challenges to overcome in regulating the digital marketing of alcohol is that digital spaces operate

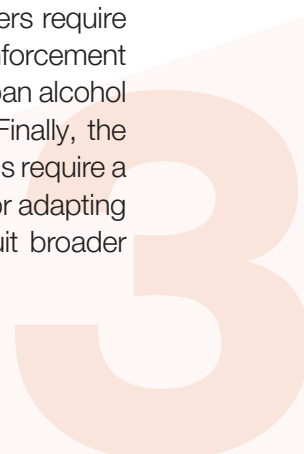
beyond country borders. Innovation in regulation is needed to keep pace with the constantly evolving digital marketplace.

## **The know-how**

Examples from several countries show the diversity of responses to digital marketing efforts. Many are partial in their scope and unlikely to have much impact. Some countries have included digital media in a comprehensive ban on alcohol marketing. The experience from Norway suggests that comprehensive bans, if adequately enforced, do have the potential to reduce sales of alcohol. The experiences from Lithuania and the Russian Federation show the importance of surveillance and enforcement and the need for its extension to all types of marketing.

## **The next steps**

The next steps for researchers and research institutions include cross-disciplinary collaboration to identify emerging trends and respond to gaps in the evidence and engage in knowledge-translation approaches to increase the uptake of research findings. The next steps for government policy- and decision-makers require the development of regulation and enforcement mechanisms to control and restrict or ban alcohol marketing, including in digital media. Finally, the next steps for international organizations require a global and comprehensive approach for adapting existing tools to new contexts and suit broader populations.



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## Related resources

[Webinar recording](#) | [Event description](#) | [Programme](#)

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## About the series

This Snapshot is part of a series of briefs tackling critical issues related to the determinants driving the acceptability, availability and affordability of alcohol consumption and how it affects people and their communities. The series aims to facilitate evidence and experience-informed conversations on the topics explored. Each brief is the result of a global, multistakeholder conversation convened by the Less Alcohol Unit, part of the WHO Department of Health Promotion. The topics of the series emerged in response to blind spots in the current policy conversations. The approach and length of the Snapshots do not fully describe the complexities of each topic nor do the illustrative country experiences. The series is a conversation-starter rather than normative guidance. Relevant WHO resources are provided to explore the subject in more depth.

The series is intended for a wide audience, including people working in public health and local and national alcohol policy, policy-makers, government officials, researchers, civil society groups, consumer associations, the mass

media and people new to alcohol research or practice.

### **What is a health promotion approach to reducing alcohol consumption?**

Drinking has multidimensional connotations. Robust and growing evidence demonstrates that cultural, social and religious norms influence alcohol consumption – acceptability, ease of purchase (availability) and price (affordability). Addressing this multidimensional causality chain requires a portfolio of health promotion interventions to moderate the determinants driving alcohol consumption and, in turn, enable populations to increase control over and improve their health to realize their full potential.

### **How are the briefs developed?**

The briefs result from a review of the recent literature on the topic, insights from leading experts, consultation with selected countries and discussions that took place during webinars

## Determinants driving the consumption of alcohol

	Acceptability	Availability	Affordability
			
Public health objectives	Protect consumers	Promote healthier settings	Build resilient societies
	Raising awareness, e.g. labelling	Mediating licensing, e.g. outlet density and location, online sales	Increasing prices, excise taxes and moderating other fiscal measures, reducing and ending financial incentives and subsidies
Health promotion interventions	Banning or comprehensively restricting alcohol marketing, advertising, sponsorships and promotion	Promoting healthy settings and pro-health environment, e.g. schools, stadiums	Tackling unrecorded alcohol
	Addressing commercial determinants and conflict of interests		

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convened to create a platform to match evidence, practice and policies. Each webinar, attended by more than 100 participants, took place over 1.5 hours in English, Russian and Spanish. Between 8 and 10 speakers were invited to participate in each webinar, engaging global experts, officials from governments, academia, civil society and other United Nations agencies. Participants also engaged in the webinar by posting questions, sharing experiences and resources. The snapshot has been reviewed by the respective speakers – the contributors to each brief – to confirm the completeness and accuracy of the synthesis prepared.

## Interested in other topics?

Visit the *Less Alcohol webpage* for other briefs in this series and forthcoming webinars. During 2021, topics including alcohol consumption and socioeconomic inequalities, unrecorded alcohol, conflicts of interest, labelling, digital marketing and per capita alcohol consumption have been explored. If you have a suggestion for a topic that has yet to be explored, contact our team at [lessalcohol@who.int](mailto:lessalcohol@who.int).

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