

Alcohol advertisers may be using social media to encourage parents to drink during COVID-19

TO THE EDITOR: Australia's social distancing policies to contain the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), have had social consequences. Social distancing and school disruptions have increased parental responsibilities. There has also been an increased opportunity

for parents to use alcohol to cope with increased stress.¹

Parents, especially mothers, have taken to social media to share "memes" about needing a drink to survive staying at home (Box). These posts are mostly shared with the aim of creating an online environment for peer support and stress relief, but they risk normalising the use of alcohol as a coping strategy and promoting the false belief that alcohol is good for mental health.² Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant that may relieve stress in the short term, but regular drinking increases psychological distress and the risk of alcohol-related harm.³

quasi-regulatory system that is activated by consumer complaints and lacks systematic independent monitoring.⁷ Further, regulations do not prevent certain social media platforms from being used by alcohol brands to post advertisements and engage with consumers.⁸

In light of the alcohol industry's opportunistic advertising through social media, 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.

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Examples of parental drinking-related memes during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) lockdown



A review of recent advertising complaints indicated that some alcohol advertisers have been quick to capitalise on COVID-19.⁴ An investigation of a social media account found an average of one alcohol advertisement every 35 seconds, with themes of easy access without leaving home (58%), buy more (35%), drink during COVID-19 (24%), and drink to cope (16%).⁵ Australia has a regulation system for alcohol advertising, which most people mistakenly believe is government-funded.⁶ It is in fact an industry-funded

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