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Article

'We're in this together': A content analysis of marketing by alcohol brands on Facebook and Instagram during the first UK Lockdown, 2020.

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Abstract

Background: The closure of on-licence premises and the restrictions placed on citizen's movements and leisure to address the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, created an unprecedented situation for the alcohol industry. With the availability and supply of alcohol being restricted, and the social context of alcohol use transformed, alcohol corporations were required to adapt their marketing materials and actions in response.

Methods: A content analysis of alcohol marketing by 18 alcohol brands on Facebook and Instagram during the first UK national lockdown (from 17th March- 4th July 2020) was conducted. Comments left by social media followers on posts advertising what could be defined as brand COVID-19 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives (i.e. monetary donations, production of hand sanitiser) were thematically analysed.

Findings: Alcohol brands quickly adapted to the changing social, economic and health context of the global pandemic. Changes to the availability and sale of alcohol were evident, with brands encouraging the stockpiling of alcohol as an essential item through predominantly online sales and delivery services. Brands also adapted to the changing social and physical context of alcohol use and intensified encouragement of home drinking. Messages of togetherness underpinned the promotion of virtual interactions, for which alcohol use was presented as a key component. Consumers were encouraged to contribute to pandemic responses by '*staying at home'*, and consuming alcohol. Importantly, COVID-19 provided a useful marketing opportunity for alcohol producers to present themselves as private partners to a primarily public sector response, through innovative CSR initiatives such as philanthropic donations to help prevent the transmission of COVID-19. An inductive thematic analysis of online comments on CSR posts found that such activities were interpreted by consumers as ethical actions, and that they reinforced positive brand image and loyalty among existing and new consumers.

Conclusion: Alcohol corporations are highly resilient in times of crises and the brands analysed were able to quickly adapt their marketing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Future research is required to examine whether these profitable strategies are maintained post pandemic.

Key words: alcohol marketing; COVID-19; corporate social responsibility; social media.

Introduction

On 11th March 2020, the World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a global pandemic (WHO, 2020). Five days later on 16th March, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson advised the UK public against unnecessary social contact and travel, and to '*steer clear'* of hospitality spaces such as cafes, pubs, bars, clubs and restaurants (UK Parliament, 2020a). On March 20th, the hospitality sector, including nightclubs, were ordered to close (UK Government, 2020). A full nationwide lockdown (e.g. school closure, non-essential business closure) followed on 23rd March, which instructed the UK population to '*stay at home'* other than for a small number of permitted reasons (e.g. to shop for '*essentials'*, daily exercise) (UK Parliament, 2020b). Hospitality remained closed until early July 2020, but retailers with off-premises alcohol licenses, including those within breweries, were given status of '*essential businesses'* and were legally permitted to remain open (BBC, 2020). Alcohol was thus defined as an 'essential item'. Since then, a number of changes have been made to the hospitality sector (e.g. closures, curfews across the four devolved administrations of the UK) (IAS, 2020), and at the time of writing (March 2021), the UK is in its third national lockdown (UK Parliament, 2021). During the first lockdown, on-site licensed venues such as pubs repurposed themselves as takeaways, yet during following lockdowns they were prohibited from doing so, despite industry lobbying (Hawkins, 2021; Polianskaya, 2020). Along with countries such as Ireland and Australia that also implemented similar measures, the closure of on-licence premises and the restrictions placed on citizens' movements, social contact and leisure in the UK, created an unprecedented situation for the alcohol industry where the availability and supply of alcohol was restricted, and the social context of alcohol use was transformed (Gibson, 2020).

In addition to the direct impact of the pandemic on population health, measures to control infection have led to concerns about the secondary impact on issues such as mental health, domestic violence, and health behaviours such as alcohol use (PHE, 2020). A number of cohort (Alcohol Change, 2020; Global Drug Survey, 2020; IAS, 2020; Jackson et al., 2020; Naughton et al., 2020) and general population surveys (Alcohol Toolkit Study, 2020; Jackson et al., 2020; Niedzwied et al., 2020; Public Health England, 2020; Public Health Scotland 2021a;b) have examined alcohol use behaviours during the pandemic, although no clear pattern has emerged. For example a study of 1555 current drinkers in the UK, conducted by Alcohol Change (2020), found that almost a third (29%) of respondents reported drinking at higher levels (more than 14 units a week), with 53% reporting mental health issues (e.g. anxiety, depression) as a main driver for increased use. However, 35% reported having

reduced their alcohol intake. This pattern has also been observed in higher risk groups. A cross-sectional telephone survey (Kim et al., 2020) of patients with alcohol use disorders in London, found that after lockdown around 20% either increased or decreased their normal alcohol consumption. Whilst not representative of the drinking patterns of the whole population, such studies provide evidence of changes in drinking behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jackson et al., (2020) conducted a cross-sectional survey (N=20,558, using Alcohol Toolkit data) representative of the English adult population, and found that lockdown was associated with increases in the prevalence of high-risk drinking but also alcohol reduction attempts by high-risk drinkers. An analysis by Public Health England (2020) as part of the Wider Impacts of COVID-19 on Health (WICH) monitoring tool (i.e. collates self-reported consumption, alcohol purchasing and higher risk drinking data), reported a rise in the proportion of higher risk drinkers, a rise in the proportion of non-drinkers and similar proportions of people reporting drinking less, than those reporting drinking more, between April to September 2020 than before the pandemic. The 18- 34 age group were more likely to report consuming less alcohol during all phases of social restrictions, with those aged 35 to 54 being more likely to report an increase.

Data on alcohol sales also show a mixed picture. HM Revenue and Customs (2020a, b) data indicate that duty receipts for beer and cider sales in the UK dropped in the period between April and July 2020 relative to the previous year, but wine and spirits increased. However, the closure of pubs and bars contributed to this fall, and a rise in stockpiling and home drinking during lockdown led to increases in supermarket sales (Eley, 2020). For example, analysis of data on alcohol purchased and brought into the home (e.g. via supermarkets), indicated an increase in sales among higher occupational groups, during the week when lockdown was announced (21st March 2021), However, an analysis of alcohol sales data by Public Health Scotland (2021b) found a 6% reduction in the total volume of pure alcohol sold per adult between March and July 2020, and concluded that increases in per adult off-trade sales (28% in Scotland and 29% in England & Wales) did not fully replace reductions in on-trade sales.

COVID-19 restrictions appear therefore to have affected drinking patterns and sales in the UK in different ways. Given the influence marketing has been shown to have on alcohol-related attitudes and behaviours such as initiation and frequency of drinking (Anderson et al., 2009; Jernigan et al., 2017) and the fundamental importance of marketing to promoting products and communicating brand messages, it is important that alcohol brand marketing during the pandemic is considered. Social media marketing in particular has become an increasingly prioritised method through which alcohol producers communicate with

consumers, with the aim of encouraging sales and increasing brand salience in a highly competitive environment (Critchlow et al., 2019). Social media channels such as social network sites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) now form an important aspect of the alcohol industry's multi-platform marketing strategies (Winpenny et al. 2014). Creative strategies are used by alcohol brands to promote products, and to attract and engage consumers with content that appeals to their identity formation and real-life social interactions (Atkinson et al., 2017; Nicholls 2012; Noel et al., 2020; Carah 2014, 2015; Winpenny et al. 2014).

Prohibition of on-licenced premise drinking and restrictions on drinking outside of the home during the pandemic meant that the alcohol industry had to adapt marketing and the targeting of alcohol products, including on social media platforms. Analysis of examples (N=363) of alcohol marketing submitted by health advocates, researchers and policy experts in over 90 countries, found that alcohol companies rapidly adapted their marketing to reference health and social concerns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (Global Health Policy Unit, 2020). This included linking products with the efforts of key workers (e.g. donations to health care and the hospitality sector) and social distancing, the hosting of online live-streamed events and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives such as philanthropic donations and the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE).

CSR can be defined as business practices that allow companies to manage their economic, social and environmental impacts, as well as their relationships in areas of influence such as the marketplace, the supply chain, the community and the public policy arena (Garriga and Mele, 2004; United Nations, 2018). CSR initiatives are an important feature of how the alcohol industry promotes itself, and they are used to 'pacify' opposition to industry practices, and to steer policy development towards industry-preferred responses (Lacy-Nichols and Marten, 2021; Mialon and Cambridge, 2018; Yoon and Lam, 2013. They are underpinned by the notion that commercial enterprises can 'do well' (e.g. improve their brand image, increase profit) by 'doing good' (i.e. contribute to socially beneficial groups and causes) (Babor et al., 2018). Alcohol industry CSR initiatives include prioritisation of strategies such as the provision of alcohol information and education, which create a discourse that shifts the responsibility for alcohol harms from producers to consumers (Mialon and Cambridge, 2018; Yoon and Lam, 2015). It also includes drink driving prevention, industry involvement in research and policy, the creation of social aspects organisations such as Drink Wise in Australia and Drink Aware in the UK, voluntary codes of practice for marketing and advertising, and philanthropic actions (Mialon and Cambridge, 2018; Yoon and Lam, 2013). Philanthropic actions have two main functions; they provide a means of indirect brand marketing, whilst in some cases provide preferential access to emerging alcohol markets in low and middle-income countries (LMICs). Examples of philanthropic support by alcohol corporations include social outreach activities

such as the provision of disaster relief and sponsorships and collaborations with charities, and the sponsorship of the arts and cultural events (Yoon and Lam, 2013).

In light of the unprecedented changes brought about by COVID-19 responses, the changing nature of alcohol marketing strategies, including those that are philanthropic, during this period deserves further attention through the systematic collection and analysis of brand posts and user interactions. The paper presents findings that highlight how 18 leading alcohol brands adapted their marketing on the social media platforms Facebook and Instagram in response to the restrictions implemented during the first UK national lockdown (from 17th March to 4th July 2020). An analysis of comments left by social media followers on posts advertising what could be defined as COVID-19 CSR initiatives (i.e. PPE provision) is also presented, to shed light on how consumers interpreted such actions. It considers the extent and nature of content, user engagement and reception, and the various ways that brands adapted their marketing materials and actions in response to the changing social, economic and health context of the global pandemic.

Methods

A quantitative and qualitative content analysis of marketing posts on the social media platforms Facebook and Instagram, and user interaction with such posts, for 18 alcohol brands (see supplementary table) between 16th March (when the UK population were advised to avoid public drinking spaces) and 4th July (when venues in England were permitted to re-open) 2020 was conducted. This equated to content posted over a 15-week period and included a total of 894 posts. The sample was taken from a dataset collected as part of a larger study exploring gendered alcohol marketing (ESRC grant ES/T007443/1). The larger study included analysis of posts by the same brands over a longer time period (18 months from 1st January 2019). The study focused on social media marketing as alcohol brands have invested heavily in these platforms to promote their products, due to the unique commercial advantages they affords such as encouraging user interaction, the co-creation of content and the viral spreading of marketing content to extend its reach (Carah and Brodmerkel, 2021; Critchlow et al,. 2019). Moreover, relative to more traditional forms of marketing such as advertisements aired on TV, radio, and in public spaces (i.e. billboards), social media allows for the rapid creation, adaption and sharing of content (Nichols, 2012). This ability to quickly adapt content on the platform was crucial in allowing brands to rapidly respond to the changing social context of alcohol drinking as a result of COVID-19 restrictions.

Brands were selected based on an unpublished convenience survey of alcohol brand preferences among people living in one area of the North West of England (N=196); YouGov (2020) data on the most popular brands among the UK population; and the total number of Facebook and Instagram followers for these popular brands. Different beverage categories (e.g. beer, wine, spirits, cider) were included. Data on social media (Ofcom, 2020) use and the number of followers for each brand's social media profiles informed the selection of platforms. Brands had fewer Twitter followers and due to time restrictions, only Facebook and Instagram were selected. Identical content that was posted on both platforms were merged and included in the sample as one unit of analysis, with interaction data (i.e. number of 'Likes', 'Shares', and comments) for the post recorded separately for each platforms.

The study focussed upon social media posts by alcohol brands, as opposed to paid advertisements. Consumers view brand posts on their social media feed, as a result of either following brand social media profiles, or via the sharing of brand content by their online friends. Brand posts encourage consumers to interact with posted content, through shares, likes and comments. Paid adverts (e.g. 'pop ups') are those that appear on a social media users' feed as a result of brands paying platforms for advertising space with the aim of targeting specific demographics of potential consumers. An analysis of text and visual posts on each of the selected brand's Facebook and Instagram profiles was conducted. Data was extracted using the data-scraping tool Crowdtangle, which scrapes all textual (i.e. text), visual (e.g. photographs, videos), interaction data (e.g. number of likes, comments) and live links for posts on social media pages and groups in Microsoft Excel format. Each individual post (N=894) acted as the unit of analysis. Data were archived, cleaned and analysed using a coding frame incorporating a combination of pre-determined (based on previous research, e.g. Atkinson et al., 2017; Nicholls, 2012) and newly identified codes unique to marketing during the pandemic (Boyatzis, 1998; Krippendorff, 1980). The coding frame was incorporated into an Excel sheet alongside the cleaned data, with a description of each code in an additional sheet for reference. Each post was viewed using the scraped live links, and each code applied (indicating yes or no). When news codes were identified, they were included, along with a description, into the Excel sheets. Each newly created code was then applied to posts coded before its identification and those posts yet to be coded, to ensure that all posts were assessed against each code. Codes applied from previous research included the context of use (e.g. home drinking, venue drinking), the availability of alcohol (e.g. supermarkets), drink recipes and engagement marketing techniques. Codes that were newly identified as a response to the pandemic included promoting 'togetherness' in the context of the pandemic, delivery services, virtual drinking and the production of hand sanitiser. Codes were then collapsed to generate overarching themes, for example, the codes 'hand sanitiser', 'COVID-19 donations', and

'encouraging social distancing' were collapsed to generate the theme 'Combating the pandemic and corporate social responsibility'. The codes 'Online sales' and 'Delivery services' were collapsed to generate the theme 'Availability and Supply', and the codes 'Home drinking' and 'Virtual drinking and events' were collapsed to generate the theme 'Adapting to contextual changes in drinking'. Collapsed codes representing each theme were quantified to assess the extent to which they were represented within the sample, and the qualitative text for each code exported into NVivo where notes were taken on the underlying meanings of the text, and representative examples that could be drawn on when presenting themes identified.

To capture additional CSR activities related to COVID-19 we also checked the website of each brand and the corresponding alcohol corporation, and cross-referenced with our sample to establish which brands did, and which brands did not, use such initiatives as a marketing opportunity. We were also interested in how potential consumers responded to COVID-related CSR activities such as the production and distribution of hand sanitiser and donations to address COVID-19 related concerns such as support for the hospitality sector and donations to organisations providing PPE to front line workers. An inductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) of all public comments (N=3908) left on brand COVID-19 related CSR posts (comments were left on 47 of the 66 CSR posts) was conducted by AMA, and discussed with BM and HS. We followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) methodology, which involved downloading and exporting the comments into NVivo, closely reading the scraped comments and systematically generating codes to gain insight into how potential consumers responded to CSR actions. Broad themes were generated consisting of various codes. For example, the theme 'Supportive of CSR' consisted of 'Thanking and congratulating' brands for their efforts, interpreting brands' efforts as a much needed 'Good news story', labelling brands as 'Heroes', and regarding brands as putting 'Community before profit' .

Findings

A total of 894 individual posts on Facebook (n=672) and Instagram (n=448) were posted by the 18 alcohol brands between 17th March and 4th July 2020. The number of posts during this period ranged from 7 (*Smirnoff*) to 291 (*Brew Dog*). Of these, 78% (n=693) were posts specific to lockdown, in that they were classed as being developed in response to the restrictions brought about by the pandemic. Large numbers of followers were interacting with brand content during this period, with 1,225,032 'likes' across the two platforms (Facebook 605,887; Instagram 619,145), 101,941 comments (Facebook, 79,139; Instagram, 22,802) and 21,442,001 video views (Facebook, 217,057,45; Instagram, 273,625,6). Levels of engagement with brand posts varied, with between 3 (e.g. *Echo Falls*) and 24,117 (*Jack Daniels*) likes for Facebook posts (mean 950), and between 1 (e.g. *WKD*, *Freixenet*) and 15013 (*Brew Dog*) for Instagram posts (mean 1521). Similarly, the number of comments

ranged between 1 (e.g. *Absolut Vodka*, *Brew Dog*) and 16, 904 (*Jack Daniel's*) on Facebook and between 1 (e.g. *Echo Falls*, *Friexenet)* and 3858 (*Brew Dog*) on Instagram (mean 68). All brands posted lockdown specific posts, and posts with the most interactions (i.e. likes) tended to be those related to lockdown (see Supplementary Table S1). A number of established marketing strategies (Atkinson et al., 2017) were used to promote products, including competitions (8%, n=67), encouraging engagement (e.g. "tag, comment, share") (12%, n=105), weather/seasonal associations (12%, n=108), drink recipes (17%, n=149), food associations (18%, n=156), time of day (21%, n=183) and day of week marketing (i.e. associating drinking with specific days and times) (27%, n=244) and real-world tie ins such as the sponsorship of music events (39%, n=348). The analysis found various examples of how brands adapted their marketing in the context of COVID-19 restrictions. These are discussed below using representative examples under three headings; *availability and supply*, *adapting marketing to contextual changes in alcohol consumption*, *combating the pandemic and corporate social responsibility.*

Supplementary table 1: Summary of brand lockdown specific posts.

Brand	Drinks category	Company	Number of posts	Number of lockdown specific posts	Number of usual posts	Post with most interactions
Brew Dog (UK profiles)	Beer	Brew Dog	291	240 (83%)	51	*The people have spoken. So, we decided to actually do it. Now available to order as pre-sale from our online shop…All profits will go to funding our production of free sanitiser for the NHS & Health Care charities.* [New COVID-related philanthropic limited edition product]
Jägermeister (UK and global profiles)	Digestif	Mast-Jagermeister	112	90 (80%)	22	*CALLING ALL BARTENDERS: Our #MeisterHunter Competition is back for 2020 and ready for your cocktail creations... Think you've got what it takes to win the big cash prizes? Follow @meisterhunter to get the low-down.* [Virtual cocktail competition during lockdown]
Jack Daniel's (Global profiles)	Spirit (Whiskey)	Brown-Forman	97	61 (63%)	36	*New Jack Cans are here! Enjoy perfectly mixed Jack cocktails made with real Jack Daniel's, ready to go.* [New product release during lockdown]
Barefoot Wine and Bubbly (UK and Global profile)	Wine	E & J Gallo Winery	64	53 (83%)	11	*Even in tough times, we continue to #MarchOnward. That's why we're so proud to announce our new Pride Packaging. Our delicious Bubbly Brut Rose now comes in four unique designs along with a partnership to support Free Mom Hugs. Proceeds of our Pride products from The Barrel Room will go to Free Mom Hugs to be used for COVID-19 relief efforts.*

						(Valid through June 30, 2020 in CA, valid through December 31, 2020 for all other states, additional exclusions apply). Purchase here: barefoot.wine/TheBarrelRoom
Stella Artois (Global profiles)	Beer	Interbrew International B.V.	53	43 (82%)	10	*Even when we can't be with each other… we find a way to be together. So pick up the phone, raise a glass — whatever it is you're drinking — and share a moment with those who matter most. #StellaDigitalCheers Stella Artois worked with composer/musician Benny Reid and lyricist GTO to create the song for the spot, "You Don't Have to Worry." The brand was thrilled to support these talented artists who had to cancel their tour due to COVID-19.* [Post encouraging alcohol use as a form of social connectedness during lockdown]
Bombay Sapphire (UK profiles)	Spirits (Gin)	Bacardi Limited	31	17 (55%)	14	*Bombay Bramble is Ripe for Discovery…. our bold new gin bursting with 100% natural flavour of freshly harvested blackberries and raspberries. Who wants to try it?* 😊 [New product launch during lockdown]
Kopparberg (UK and Global profiles)	Cider	Koppaberg Brewery	48	33 (69%)	15	*Today isn't the only thing that's lighter. Allow us to reintroduce our Passionfruit Cider, now lighter and lower in calories.* [New product release during lockdown]
Freixenet (UK profiles)	Wine	Henkell & Co. Sektkellerei	35	26 (74%)	9	*BIG news: We know that it's a strange and stressful time at the moment. However, we've been busy behind the scenes creating a BRAND NEW RANGE of wines, which will be perfect for making a night in as special as a night out. So, we are very excited to launch our first Italian Still Wine range to add to our much loved Prosecco and Italian Sparkling Rosé! They come in stunning cut glass bottles that make the perfect table centrepieces. Here are some of our favourite pairings.* [New product launch during lockdown]

Bacardi (Global profiles)	Spirit (Rum)	Bacardi Limited	34	28 (82%)	6	*When life gives us limes, we make #BACARDI Mojitos ☺#DoWhatMovesYou #RaiseYourSpirits* [Post providing recipe suggestions for home drinking]
WKD (UK profiles)	Ready mixed drink	Beverage Brands	33	29 (88%)	4	*Let's face it…not all of us have the perfect set up for working from home in isolation. Sometimes we just have to make do with what we've got. Tell us about your home office set up – there might be a prize in it for the ones that make us laugh the most. #Stayathome #WKDside* [Engagement marketing post encouraging followers to share content related to home working during lockdown]
Guinness (Global profiles)	Beer	Diageo	19	13 (68%)	6	*You may have seen this Guinness Poster that wasn't a Guinness Poster? Well, we love it. Stay at home.* [Poster which instructs people to stay at home with Guinness logo]
Bailey's Irish Cream (UK and Global profiles)	Liquor	Diageo	13	8 (62%)	5	*Brunchin' at home will never be the same again *inserts Baileys iced coffee emoji* ☼ Head to our website for the sweetest iced coffee recipe (Link in bio)* [Post suggesting consumption of product with food in home context]
Blossom Hill (UK profiles)	Wine	Diageo - Treasury Wine Estates	13	12 (92%)	1	*Hey Blossoms! It's week 2! Win a beautiful bunch of flowers and refreshing bottle of Blossom Hill Gin Fizz Rhubarb for you and a friend with our Friendship Fridays giveaway this summer! Simply post a photo to your Instagram feed of you and the friend you want to spoil, and tell us the story behind the photo. Make sure your post is public and that you tag @BlossomHill and #TogetherLetsBlossom in your message. We'll even be hosting online flower arranging workshops each Friday with @Arena_Flowers so winners and their besties can make the most of their prizes, so what's stopping you?! Get involved and Together Let's Blossom!* [Post promoting engagement, social connectedness and brand hosted virtual event during lockdown]
Absolut (UK and Global profiles)	Spirit (Vodka)	Pernod Ricard	12	11 (92%)	1	*Remake a classic at home with our recipe for Absolut on the Beach! #linkinbio #absolut #cocktails #absolutonthebeach* [Post providing recipe suggestions for home drinking]

Lambrini (UK profiles)	Perry	Halewood International	11	10 (91%)	1	*Staying in has never looked so good ☺ Stock up on your favorite lockdown tipple, available from @drinksupermarket 🐰* [Post promoting the stock piling of alcohol during lockdown]
Gordon's Gin (UK profiles)	Spirits (Gin)	Diageo	11	8 (73%)	3	*Introducing NEW Gordon's Sicilian Lemon 🍋🍸 Staying in with a cheeky Gordon's & Tonic just got even zestier ☺ #ShallWe? #GordonsSicilianLemon #ciaosunshine?* [New product release during lockdown]
Echo Falls (UK profile)	Wine	Carlyle Group	10	9 (90%)	1	*There is some serious s**t going on right now. It may all seem super overwhelming but honestly it's ok to not be ok. Look out for your friends and family but don't forget yourself. So, if you fancy a glass of wine, or a G&T, please always do so responsibly. Stay safe love team EF x* [Post promoting self-care during lockdown]
Smirnoff (UK and Global profiles)	Spirit (Vodka)	Diageo	7	1 (14%)	6	*Notoriously Infamous?* [Image of Smirnoff vodka bottle]

Availability and supply *(29%, n=256)*

In response to the UK Government imposing lockdown measures, which restricted the onsite availability and consumption of alcohol (e.g. pubs), alcohol corporations faced unprecedented challenges. Although alcohol products were regarded as essential items and remained available to purchase from supermarkets and off licences, the public were encouraged to limit their use of such public spaces, thus reducing opportunities to purchase alcohol as part of usual day-to-day activities. As reduced physical availability of alcohol reduces the total volume of alcohol consumed, corporations faced the risk of reduced sales. Our data found evidence that brands quickly adapted to this restricted sales context, and encouraged alcohol sales through a number of alternative strategies.

Firstly, brands intensified the promotion of delivery services (9%, n=77). Whilst supermarket sales continued to be promoted, only 13 posts (2%) focused on this route. When availability via physical supermarkets was encouraged, it was either presented alongside online sales (e.g. '*Available exclusively at Tesco. Buy in store and online* now', *Gordon's Gin*) or part of exclusive collaborations with retailers (e.g. '*pick yours up at #Tesco now! Perfect for those little 'me' moments at* home', Blossom Hill; '*Only at Tesco*', J*ack* Daniel's). Instead, and in many instances, online sales (8%, n=72), and delivery services (9%, n=77) were promoted as the main route of alcohol availability, with some brands *(Brew Dog, Jägermeister)* providing free delivery, thus preventing additional charges that may have acted as a barrier to sales. For example, *Jägermeister* offered '*FREE DELIVERY when you spend £16 with us',* and *Brew Dog* presented free delivery as a public service when posting '⍰ *PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT⍰ Get free shipping on all UK orders from our online shop #FreeShipping'.* Moreover, delivery services were presented as a safe means of supply by maintaining social distancing, with orders being delivered '*straight to your door!*' and deliveries providing an opportunity to '*get your fresh beer fix without leaving the* house' (*Brew Dog*). Online sales and deliveries were further incentivised through promotions and discounts, such as free samples and collaborations with local food-delivery companies such as *Deliveroo* which offered discounted takeaways when purchasing alcohol products (*Jägermeister*)*.* This included discounts for key workers when ordering online, and free branded hand sanitizer, with online deliveries *(Brew Dog, s*ee theme*, Corporate social responsibility and philanthropy).*

Brands such as *Brew Dog* continued to operate as takeaway services through 'click and collect' options via newly developed apps (i.e. *Hop Drop* app). This allowed customers to purchase alcohol from their onsite premises via a drive through service, which was presented as a safe option by providing a means of collecting orders using contactless payments and

'*without leaving your car'.* The corporation acknowledged the need to change '*the way in which we serve and sell beer*', and reassured consumers that they were '*working all hours in these uncertain times to support our crew, our Equity Punks* [share holders] *and our customers'.* Not only were click and collect services presented as a safe means of obtaining alcohol, but they were framed as brands being dedicated to the needs of customers and maintaining the welfare of the public and staff. Again, this positioned the brand as delivering a public service, providing essential goods and 'doing good' in unprecedented circumstances. Use of the click and collect services was further encouraged by providing customers with a 30% discount, thus providing products at a reduced cost. With alcohol being classed as an essential good, journeys to collect orders from on-site premises were permitted, and did not break lockdown restrictions that prohibited individuals from making non-essential journeys. However, most brands do not operate their own premises, which meant purchase opportunities were encouraged.

Secondly, various alcohol brands announced the availability of new and limited edition products during the lockdown period (9%, n=84). Whilst this included non or low alcoholic drinks (1%, n=5, *Brew Dog, Freixenet*), a wide range of alcoholic products were released (*Echo Falls, Freixenet, Jägermeister, Brew Dog, Blossom Hill, Barefoot, WKD, Gordon's Gin, Bombay Sapphire, Stella Artois, Jack Daniels, Absolut Vodka*), with some being framed as providing a release from the stresses brought about by the pandemic. For example, *Freixenet* announced their new wine range by stating '*BIG news: We know that it's a strange and stressful time at the moment. However, we've been busy behind the scenes creating a BRAND NEW RANGE of wines, which will be perfect for making a night in as special as a night out'.* Others released products related to the pandemic. For example *Jägermeister* released a limited edition bottle as part of their '*campaign to donate an extra €1Million to support nightlife venues and artists*' during the pandemic, and *Brew Dog* held a customer poll which allowed online followers to vote for a number of lockdown themed products which reflected public interest in a senior Government advisor who was believed to have broken travel restrictions ('*Inspired by recent events we're thinking of making a new beer. But what should we call it*?' (see, *Combating the pandemic and corporate social responsibility).*

Thirdly, we found evidence that some companies (e.g. *Brew Dog, Jägermeister, Lambrini*) encouraged the public to stockpile alcohol (2% n=15) in an attempt to make up for the loss in sales as a result of the closure of onsite point of sales. For example, *Lambrini* reassured potential consumers that '*Lockdown doesn't mean you can't have a 'Brini weekend'*', encouraging consumers to '*Stock up on Always Original, available at @drinksupermarket*'. *Brew Dog* also encouraged stockpiling with a tone of reassurance, informing their followers that '*rest assured, we're reviewing our options to keep our bars open as takeaway only over the coming days. In the meantime, you can still stock up on beer online'.* This language of

reassurance positioned brands as providing a public service and reinforced the notion of alcohol as an essential item during the pandemic.

Adapting marketing to contextual changes in drinking *(46%, n=410)*

COVID-19 restrictions led to changes in the physical and social context of drinking, with the consumption of alcohol being legally constrained to the home and immediate neighbourhood during the lockdown period, and in the company of those residing in consumers' immediate household or identified support bubble. As a result, brands adapted their marketing to encourage the use of alcohol in this context, moving away from promoting the consumption of their products in public spaces.

Promoting home drinking

The home context of drinking was referred to and encouraged by brands in 22% (n=198). Home drinking, or '*staying in*' was redefined as '*the new going out*' (e.g. *Brew Dog*), and brands framed the home as a positive context for drinking by suggesting that consumption enhanced home based activities, for example, stating that staying home '*never looked so good*' alongside images of alcohol products (*e.g. Brew Dog, Lambrini*). Providing suggestions for lockdown entertainment was common, with various activities (e.g. home brewing, art based activities, bingo, cooking, baking with products, brand podcasts) were suggested to alleviate lockdown boredom and online fatigue (*Trust us it's a LOT more fun than a Zoom quiz*', WKD), and to promote alcohol use. For example, *Brew Dog* listed a number of activities, (i.e. *gardening, cooking, doing a jigsaw, having a shower, FaceTiming parents, staring at the wall*) and asked '*What do all the following home-based activities have in common?*'- They are all much MUCH better with beer 🍺'. WKD even provided examples of drinking games that could be enjoyed within the home (e.g. spin the bottle) and *Barefoot* informed followers who were '*running out of ideas*' for entertainment, that they had '*all the hints and tips you need to host a virtual games night this weekend. So pour a glass of Barefoot and prepare to show your fun side!*'. *Kopparberg* promoted drinking as an alternative to lockdown viral fads such as '*Bored of making banana bread? Try your hand at this cocktail instead...*', and similarly, *Jägermeister* framed recipe suggestions as a way for followers to '*shake up*' their lockdown routines.

Recipe suggestions are commonly provided by alcohol corporations to promote products on social media, and this intensified during lockdown with most brands providing cocktails that were pitched as being easily made within the home and mixing drinks as an entertaining lockdown activity in itself. For example, *Jägermeister* asked whether their

followers were '*Missing the bar*?' and provided recipes, informing them to '*Get making yours at home*' and to '*Try some #JagerCocktails at home to liven up your weekend'.* Similarly, *Jack Daniel's* provided recipes that they assured would allow their consumers to '*Get the flavour of going out with the ease of staying in with Jack Honey and Ginger Beer',* and *Gordon's* Gin provided instructions on how to '*easily make our Gin & Tonic Twist ☞ at home'.* Food suggestions such as recipes and food and alcohol pairing were also intensified. For example, *Bailey's* provided home baking recipes, and *Freixenet* posted '*If you're looking to try something new, we have the perfect churros recipe! They also taste fantastic paired with a bottle of our Cava'* (*see Virtual interactions and events below*). With eating out in hospitality being prohibited, takeaways were also encouraged ('*Friday night wouldn't be Friday night without a pizza takeaway 🍕 and a glass of Barefoot!* 🍷') and collaborations with delivery services such as *Deliveroo* (e.g. *Jägermeister*, *WKD*) provided discounts and competition prizes ('*Lucky for you, we've got some more Deliveroo vouchers to #WIN…"WKD and Deliveroo get in ma belly!")* to encourage customers to consume alcohol whilst eating. *Freixenet* provided tips on how to '*to bring the atmosphere of your favourite restaurant into your own abode'*, stating that '*date night'* '*wouldn't be a romantic evening without some fizz*! [sparkling wine]'.

Brands also attempted to redefine the home as a party context. This is evident in how *Bacardi* suggested their followers should turn their living rooms into dance floors (*If it's a floor, it's still a dancefloor. When the world stops moving, you don't have to. #DoWhatMovesYou Bacardi'*), and how brands (*All dressed up with nowhere to go... (Jägermeister); Anyone else dressing up to go to the kitchen this weekend? 💃 (Barcardi*)) promoted getting '*dressed up'* at home to encourage home drinking. In contrast, the relaxed context of home drinking was also promoted, particularly by female targeted brands, who made an association between dressing down in '*comfies*' (Echo Falls), '*trackies'*, '*sweatpants*' (*Barefoot*) and '*yoga pants*' (*Barefoot*) and alcohol use. For example, *Echo Falls* posted '*Feet up, comfies on, glasses ready*! 🍷' and brands provided suggestions for lockdown entertainment that could accompany this type of drinking, for example, providing '*box set*' (Barefoot), '*movie*' (Freixenet), and '*Netflix*' (WKD) suggestions to accompany drinking.

A shift to home working was also drawn upon to promote the consumption of alcohol products through associations with after work drinks, and to encourage their followers to share content. For example, *Barefoot* posted '*Wondering how to turn your WFH outfit into a happy hour outfit? Just add WINE 🍷 While you're enjoying wine, share a photo (in-feed) to enter for a chance to win a food delivery on us!'.* Similarly *WKD,* asked followers to '*Tell us about your home office set up – there might be a prize in it for the ones that make us laugh the most'* and

Brew Dog posted '*It's official: Every day is now Bring Your Dog To Work Day 🐶 Tag us in your WFH pics for a shot at winning some treats for your pup. #WoofingFromHome'. Bonus point if photos include beer'*. Engagement strategies such as these are common techniques that are used by brands on social media to encourage users to interact (e.g. like, share, tag friends) with brand content and extend audience reach. These strategies continued during lockdown but were adapted in accordance with the shift in the social context of drinking to home drinking. For example, brands asked questions about lockdown experiences ('*describe for us a typical social distancing stay-at-home day to us using only emojis. Go... #WKDside'*) and requested photographs of lockdown drinking *(1 DAY LEFT! ✦ Share a photo (in-feed) of your virtual cheers with your friends to enter for a chance to win a food delivery on us! ☐ Tag @barefootwine & use #CheerstoyouSweepstakes).*

Alcohol use was also positioned as a way of coping (4%, n=31) with being confined to the home. Brand marketers suggested followers celebrated their '*little wins'* and '*victories'* (i.e. achievements) to '*lift our spirits'* during lockdown by drinking products (*Barefoot, Freixenet).* For example*, Bacardi* posted *'When life gives us limes, we make #BACARDI Mojitos'* using the hashtag *'RaiseYourSpirits'.* Others promoted *'self-care' (Freixenet)* and *'mindfulness' (Brew Dog),* including *Echo Falls,* and associated self-care with alcohol use and normalised drinking as a coping mechanism when posting *'There is some serious s**t going on right now. It may all seem super overwhelming but honestly it's ok to not be ok. Look out for your friends and family but don't forget yourself. So, if you fancy a glass of wine, or a G&T, please always do so responsibly. Stay safe love team EF x'. Barefoot* also provided recipes as a solution for those who were *'Feeling stir crazy?'* as a result of lockdown.

Virtual drinking and events

The most common form of entertainment encouraged by brands during lockdown was virtual events and interaction (28%, n=246). Most brands (e.g. *Barefoot, Bombay Sapphire*) promoted virtual (i.e. videocall) interactions with friends, such as quizzes and bingo, and asked followers to upload images of their '*virtual cheers'* and '*virtual happy hours'. Jägermeister* provided followers with a branded '*Zoom background'* to accompany such interactions. These promotions were underpinned by messages which highlighted the importance of *'staying connected' (e.g. Barefoot, Bombay Sapphire) and 'togetherness' (4%, n=34)* with alcohol use being presented as a key component of such interactions and relationships. Friendship is a common marketing message used by brands to encourage group drinking in a number of social contexts, including both within the home and nightlife venues. Brands continued to draw

on the importance of friendship (10%, n=91), as well as the importance of family and love ones, to encourage virtual interaction involving alcohol use. For example, *Barefoot* posted *'Staying connected is key! SHARE this digital 'Save the Date' with your friends and family and stay in touch! 🍷 ",* and *Stella Artois* encouraged virtual drinking when posting '*Even when we can't be with each other we find a way to be together. So pick up the phone, raise a glass — whatever it is you're drinking — and share a moment with those who matter most. #StellaDigitalCheers'.*

The use of livestreaming (i.e. live video broadcasts) was also accelerated and brands hosted virtual events that provided opportunities for customers to consume their products with a wider social circle than those within their home. This included a range of innovative virtual events such as online bars and pubs (e.g. *Brew Dog, Bacardi*), cocktail making sessions (*Bacardi*), online quizzes and bingo (e.g. *Brew Dog, Gordon's, WKD*), wine and beer tasting and pairing (e.g. *Brew Dog; Freixenet)*, beer courses (Brew Dog), live streamed music events (*Brew Dog, Jack Daniels*; *Jägermeister*), 'cook alongs' (e.g. *Brew Dog, Stella Artois*), virtual brewery tours (e.g. Guiness, Jack Daniel's), and art (e.g. *Brew Dog, Absolut Vodka*) and flower arranging sessions (*Blossom Hill*). With the exception of one event, an '*alcohol-free zone'* as part of *Brew Dog's Online Bar* series which provided food pairing suggestions for non-alcoholic products and '*self-isolation tips'* from the Sober Girl Society (an online community for women who abstain from alcohol), all suggestions of lockdown entertainment and virtual events and interactions revolved around alcohol use.

Combating the pandemic and corporate social responsibility (12%, n=106)

Companies rapidly adapted their marketing to reference the health and social concerns associated with COVID-19, in a way that presented them as ethical and socially responsible organisations. This included encouraging consumers to abide by transmission suppression activities and CSR activities such as the provision of hand sanitiser.

Prompting transmission suppression activities

Brands appealed to their followers to adhere to pandemic transmission suppression activities (7%, n=61) such as encouraging staying at home and social distancing in an effort to '*stay safe'* and '*save lives'*. Such promotions were underpinned by messages of '*community spirit'* and '*togetherness'* with brands being presented as a force of good within local communities

by providing '*help*' for a range of causes and encouraging others to do the same. For example, *Jägermeister* posted that *'the best way to come together is by staying apart. Jägermeister is proud to join the #StayHome movement, uniting our entire industry to encourage everyone to stay home where possible to help slow the spread of COVID-19. Together, we can save lives. #AloneTogether #BeTheMeister'.* Abiding by lockdown restrictions was also associated with alcohol use. For example, *Echo Falls* encouraged the use of face masks, alongside *'a glass of something new!', Barefoot* informed followers that *'for now we sip and social distance'* and *Brew Dog* instructed consumers '*HOW TO ENJOY A SUNNY WEEKEND: Step 1. Grab a beer. Step 2. Stay at home'. WKD* even encouraged participation in 'Clap for Key Workers', a Government recognised gesture of appreciation for key workers ('*After we've applauded the NHS 8pm tonight!*'), as a pre activity to their online Bingo (drinking) event. The opening of hospitality venues such as pubs and clubs on 4th July 2020, nicknamed '*Super Saturday*' (*WKD*) by popular media, was also anticipated, with some brands encouraging followers to attend venues in a socially distanced manner (e.g. *WKD, Brew Dog, Bacardi).* For example, WKD, offered *'a quick reminder to show what 2 metres of social distancing looks like'* by providing the measurement in the number of WKD bottles. *Bacardi* developed a '*Sociable Distancing Snap Lens'* to encourage nightlife venue attendance, which when activated measured user distance from others and informed them to stand back to maintain a one-metre distance*.*

Corporate responsibility responses

Alcohol companies also initiated corporate responsibility responses to the pandemic to support local communities and enhance brand reputation. A common tactic was advertising philanthropic donations to a range of COVID-19 related initiatives (7%, n=66), such as the provision of hand sanitiser to address (perceived) shortages in the health and social care system (2%, n=14). For example, *Barcardi* posted how they had '*shifted some of our production across the globe to help make more than 1.1 million litres of hand sanitizer for the local communities we call home 🌍♥ #BACARDI #RaiseYourSpirit'. Brew Dog (We have now made & donated almost 200,000 bottles of hand sanitiser to NHS hospitals & health care charities)* and *Bombay Sapphire (Standing Together: Our distillery at Laverstoke Mill in Hampshire will begin the production of hand sanitiser, to be donated to doctor's, chemists and care homes to support the local community at this challenging time')* also advertised their efforts in producing hand sanitiser for a range of key health care services. In line with their self-crafted image as a 'protest' brand, *Brew Dog* informed followers of their response to the political debate around the provision of free school meals to UK pupils during the pandemic, posting '*we're using our trucks & drivers to do free home deliveries of school lunches to those in isolation in our local community. Stay safe. Be kind'.*

Posts also attempted to associate brands with the work of key workers through donations to a range of international causes, including donating to organisations providing PPE (*Jägermeister*) and donating the profits of limited edition beers to COVID-19 related initiatives (*'All profits from sales of our special NHS Heroes 12 pack of Punk IPA will be donated to the @helpnhsheroes charity. Available now via our online shop', Brew Dog).* For example, *Barefoot* donated proceeds from a limited-edition Pride product to support the COVID-19 relief efforts of *'Free Mom Hugs',* a charity providing support to LGBT+ youth. Brands such as *Jack Daniel's (Sweet Relief Musicians Covid-19 fund), Jägermeister (#SavetheNight)* and *Stella Artois (*Help Main Street!*)* also contributed monetary donations and hosted online events to encourage public donations to organisations providing support to those working in the hospitality and music industries, which underpin brands core interests.

While these examples of CSR helped support local communities during the challenges faced by the pandemic, they also help build legitimacy and brand identity, and as such serve a dual function in protecting brands core economic interests in the long term. We were interested in whether brands incorporated CSR COVID-19 responses in social media marketing during our data collection period, and so cross-referenced information on CSR from industry websites with our sample of Facebook and Instagram posts. Whilst a number of brands (*Brew Dog, Jägermeister, Barefoot, Stella Artois, Bacardi*) did use their COVID-19 responses as a marketing opportunity, many did not (*Baileys, Absolut, Smirnoff, Gordon's, WKD*). This suggests that not all alcohol corporations used COVID-19 CSR to influence consumer perceptions and sales.

Audience responses to COVID-19 CSR posts

We also aimed to gain insight into how COVID-19 related CSR initiatives were received by brand followers on Facebook and Instagram, and analysed comments left in response pandemic-related CSR posts. Our analysis found that these initiatives were overwhelmingly received positively by potential consumers who were supportive of these actions, and there was evidence that they reaffirmed brand loyalty and encouraged brand consumption. A number of themes were identified and are presented with representative examples in Table 1. Support for CSR included followers taking the time to thank brands for their contributions to combating the pandemic, particularly the production of hand sanitiser which was regarded as an act of '*kindness*' and '*goodwill*' by providing support for local communities. Brand COVID-19 related actions were also welcomed by followers as a much needed good news story ('*These are the kind of news we need, well done!, Bacardi's* donations to the hospitality sector). Brands such as *Brew Dog,* which are humanised through the regular involvement of the company's owners

within brand marketing, were even given hero status (*Not all heroes wear capes* 🦸), and their actions highly valued by followers who regarded their CSR responses as '*saving lives'*. The production of hand sanitiser by *Brew Dog* in particular was interpreted as a form of community spirit *(Fantastic, brilliant community spirit guys!* 😊*)* and as an example of the brands putting community before profit (*Not profiteering in a time of crisis.*🙏*)* and filling perceived shortages in Government provision (S*hame the government couldn't step up like this ...well done guys* 💙🤞). We also found examples where followers addressed brands as community members, with a discourse of 'personification' present across the themes. For example, *Bacardi* was addressed as '*The hero we all need right now'.*

CSR actions clearly reaffirmed a positive brand image and consumer loyalty, with followers referring to themselves '*proud*' consumers (e.g. *Bacardi, Jack Daniel's*), and expressing a commitment to continue to purchase the brand (*From now on i will drink only Bacardi rums*). CSR efforts also led to the recruitment of new consumers, with some comments expressing a willingness to purchase brands for the first time as an outcome of their COVID-19 actions (*Brilliant job. Will be buying your beer to try once this is over, Brew Dog*). There was also evidence of more immediate purchasing and consumption as a result of viewing brand CSR pandemic posts, particularly for products for which profits were being donated to COVID-19 related causes. Many followers shared how they had ordered products online and consumed products 'to do their bit', and there were many of examples of followers 'tagging' their online friends to encourage them to do the same. The lasting positive impression that brand's efforts to address the pandemic were also acknowledged by some, for example, followers posted how '*people won't forget who stepped up* 👏 '(*Brew Dog*) and encouraged others to '*support this business when we are through with the* virus' (*Brew Dog*). Positive praise for brand efforts and comments documenting consumer purchasing also led to brands responding to thank customers for their support and purchases, and to thank followers who identified as key workers (*Thank you so much for all you are doing right now on the front lines.* 🙏 *Stay safe and healthy, Barefoot).* Such interactions contributed to the personification of brands, whilst adding an element of personalisation to their relationships with consumers and reaffirming their association with combating the pandemic.

There were few examples of followers criticising brand CSR responses to COVID-19. We found only three comments that criticised CSR posts as a form of marketing; one suggested *Jägermeister's* support for the hospitality industry was merely a response to other brands providing similar support; one expressed a dislike of *Brew Dog* labelling hand sanitiser with the brand's logo which was felt to be '*tacky*'; and one expressed concern that alcohol brands such as *Stella Artois* (defined by the follower as '*wife beater'*) were promoting alcohol use during the

pandemic despite evidence that alcohol use may lead to an increase in interpersonal violence against women during lockdown. Whilst generally brand production of hand sanitiser were met with praise, *Brew Dog* received criticism for what followers perceived to be a lack of social distancing in their video posts of hand sanitiser production, with some viewing this as counterproductive to their efforts to combat the pandemic. *Brew Dog's* posts advertising a limited-edition philanthropic beer, which humorously criticised the actions of a senior and influential Government advisor who was reported to have broken lockdown restrictions, also generated negative comments and appeared to divide followers. Whilst many comments expressed their support, and the brand's website crashed due to the volume of traffic attempting to purchase the product, others expressed their annoyance towards what was perceived as political commentary and reported that they would be boycotting the brand in future. For example, some customers commented that the owners *'should have stuck to brewing and left politics alone'.* Thus, when CSR responses were felt to represent a particular political view, in *Brew Dog's* case a '*lefty*' position, they potentially jeopardised brand loyalty among customers who held differing views. Whilst the brand's political commentary may seem counterproductive, this was one of many historical examples of the brand using provocative marketing to generate public discussion, which in turn would draw attention to their products, whilst reinforcing brand loyalty among customers who align themselves with the brands politics.

Table 1: Thematic analysis of comments on brand CSR COVID-19 actions.

Theme	Example quotes
Support for CSR	
Brand thanked and congratulated on their efforts to address the pandemic	*Thank you for helping those that serve your wine!* (*Barefoo*t funds to support hospitality personal and their families) *Well done Bacardi we need more people like you* (*Bacardi* hand sanitiser production) *This just goes beyond awesome. Thank you!!* (*Bombay sapphire* hand sanitiser production) *That's great news, what a lovely gesture of goodwill and kindness keep up the good work you guys (*(*Brew Dog's* production of hand sanitiser*)*
Good news story	▨you are so creative in your thinking of how to help...you make this time a better time to live in▨ (*Brew Dog's* provision of free school meals during lockdown) *These are the kind of news we need, well done* 🍸♠ ☐ (*Bacardi's* donations to hospitality sector)

Brand's labelled as 'heroes' and as saving lives	*Not all heroes wear capes* 🖤 (*Brew Dog's* provision of free school meals) *The hero we all need right now* (*Bacardi's* hand sanitiser production)
Community before profit	*While some companies are doing all they can to pass costs to staff and customers, Brewdog have done something good for the NHS. For free.* (*Brew Dog's* production of hand sanitiser) *This is why I bought shares in Brewdog. Not profiteering in a time of crisis.* 🙏 (*Brew Dog's* production of hand sanitiser)
Brand provides role of Government	*@10downingstreet a clue to how the nation feels guys - It's kind of embarrassing no? Anyway, great job @brewdogofficial I'll be trying soon* (*Brew Dog's* production of hand sanitiser) *Shame the government couldn't step up like this ...well done guys* 👍 💙 (*Brew Dog's* production of hand sanitiser)
Proud consumers	*A drink we can be proud to drink!* (*Bacardi's* hand sanitiser production) *I am beyond proud to see the effort made to keep those of us on the frontlines safer* (*Jack Daniel's* production of hand sanitiser) *Proud of being a shareholder [consumers can purchase shares in the brand] #keeppushing guys!!!* (*Brew Dog's* production of hand sanitiser)
Influence on purchasing	
Brand loyalty and future purchasing	*Another reason to love you. Will continue to buy your brand* (*Barefoot* funds to support hospitality personal and their families) *From now on i will drink only Bacardi rums* (*Bacardi* hand sanitiser production) *You and your company are setting a bench mark, in both the beer you produce , but more importantly in times like these... Keep up the good work and I'll keep drinking what you produce* (*Brew Dog's* production of hand sanitiser) *Brilliant job. Will be buying your beer to try once this is over* 😊 (*Brew Dog's* production of hand sanitiser)
CSR leads to immediate purchase and/or consumption	*Sooo pleased with these. We will buy a case!* (*Barefoot's* Pride Limited Edition bottle, with proceeds gig to COVID-relief) *Can you ship directly to my home?* (*Jägermeister's* Stay Home movement) *Well I've smashed a four pack of punk to support breeding and thus support the NHS* (*Brew Dog's* production of hand sanitiser)

	The brew dog site crashed because so many people wanted it (Brew Dog's production of hand sanitiser)
Sharing post with others to encourage purchasing, consumption and/or engagement	*We should get one for our bar* 😊 *[Tags friend] (Jägermeister's* Limited Edition COVID edition to support hospitality sector*)* *You need one* [Tags friend] (*Barefoot's* Pride Limited Edition bottle, with proceeds gig to COVID-relief) *Shall we tonight?!* [Tags friend] (Jack Daniel's live music events to support musicians during COVID-19) *Thought you'd like this* [Tags friend] (*Brew Dog's* COVID-19 donation edition)

Enhancing brand image

Reinforcing brand preference	*We always knew Bacardi was the best! (Bacardi's* hand sanitiser production) *This is the reason I have always loved Jack!*
Long lasting impact	*People won't forget who stepped up* 👊 (*Brew Dog's* production of hand sanitiser) *Incredible. Ppl like u will not be forgotten when we go back to normal and have to make normal purchasing choices again. Consumers will remember these stories.* (*Brew Dog's* production of hand sanitiser)
Brands reciprocates	*Because of wonderful people like yourselves is how we are able to donate to such causes. We appreciate you* (*Barefoo*t funds to support hospitality personal and their families) *Please thank your husband for all he's doing to keep our communities safe from all of us, Sarah* (*Jack Daniel's* production of hand sanitiser) *Thank you for all that you and your coworkers are doing. If you are with an organization in dire need of hand sanitizer, please email… to be considered* (*Jack Daniel's* production of hand sanitiser)

Criticism of COVID-19 related CSR posts

Following other brands	*Jameson did it first lol that's probably why Jägermeister have* (*Jägermeister's* support for hospitality industry)
Impacts on customer service	*Instead of more marketing why not deliver the delayed online orders?* (*Brew Dog's* production of hand sanitiser)
Inappropriate marketing ploy	*I commend you for producing it, but plastering your branding all over the bottle is beyond tacky* (*Brew Dog's* production of hand sanitiser)

Causing harm	*Should we really be advertising wife beaters during a lockdown when domestic violence is expected to rise* (*Stella Artois* support for musicians during the COVID-19 pandemic)
Political commentary	*Last Brew Dog beer I'm afraid. You should have stuck to brewing and left politics alone* (*Brew Dog's* limited edition product commenting of Government advisor breaking lockdown restrictions, profits to NHS)
Contradictory actions	*Yes it is great you are helping the cause with the sanitiser, however it's one step forward and two steps back if social distancing isn't being applied* (*Brew Dog's* production of hand sanitiser)

Discussion

This paper explored how alcohol brand marketing adapted to the restrictions imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It specifically focussed on how products and drinking werepromoted on Facebook and Instagram during the first UK lockdown. We found that brands creatively pivoted their marketing to reflect restrictions on onsite alcohol sales and the new context of social distancing and self-isolation within the home. This included changes to the availability of alcohol products through a shift from promoting supermarket sales to online purchasing and delivery services. Shifts to digital forms of availability (Global Health Policy Unit, 2020) were positioned in a way that framed brands as providing a public service by meeting the needs of consumers through the availability of alcohol as an essential item, and by providing a means of obtaining alcohol whilst maintaining social distancing to reassure customers.

Moreover, brands were able to effectively reposition their products in relation to home drinking, by framing alcohol use as a way of coping with lockdown and as an essential feature of lockdown entertainment. Marketing posts suggested various forms of lockdown entertainment to accompany drinking such as the commonly used tactics of cocktail recipes and food pairing suggestions (Atkinson et al., 2017). New forms of entertainment were also suggested, such as encouraging virtual drinking with friends and family through messages of 'connectedness' and 'togetherness', and the intensification of live streaming to provide a range of online events and activities such as online bars (Global Health Policy Unit, 2020). These activities also provided new opportunities for participatory engagement strategies that are designed to appropriate social media users' online friendship networks to align and embed brands within consumers' everyday lives (e.g. lockdown experiences, virtual drinking interactions) and to instigate the co-creation of marketing content that is more meaningful to consumers (e.g. requesting photos of virtual drinking) (Atkinson et al., 2017; Carah et al. 2014; Moor 2003). This form of marketing also encourages followers to interact with online marketing

content (e.g. 'likes' 'shares', 'tagging' photos) in an attempt to use followers own online networks to maximize audience reach by spreading branded content to individuals who may not have personally interacted with brand marketing (Atkinson et al., 2017; Carah 2015; Carah et al. 2014; Moor 2003), These examples are particularly important, as a number of studies have indicated associations between engagement with alcohol marketing on social media and a number of drinking measures (Noel et al., 2020, e.g. intentions to drink (Alhabash et al. 2015), alcohol-related problems, more frequent alcohol consumption (Hoffman et al. 2014) and heavy episodic drinking (Critchlow et al. 2015)).

Of particular importance is the finding that alcohol brands adapted their marketing to reference the health and social concerns associated with COVID-19, in an attempt to frame themselves as 'doing good' in times of crisis. For example, brands promoted social distancing, aligned themselves with the actions of key workers and initiated various CSR initiatives such as the provision of hand sanitiser and donations to a range of COVID-19 related relief activities. CSR activities assist brands in promoting their core interests by promoting products, enhancing reputations, and reaffirming consumer loyalty. From a commercial determinants of health perspective (Lee and Freudenberg 2020) they are viewed as providing new opportunities to market and promote products, pacifying industry opposition, and even enhancing corporations' reputations with policy makers. Garriga and Mele (2004) identify four goals of CSR. Instrumental CSR which is used to advance primarily economic objectives, political CSR which is used to influence policy and extend corporate power, integrative CSR whereby social objectives are met alongside economic goals, and ethical CSR where social responsibilities are prioritised and met. Many of the the activities discussed provided funding and supplies to assist national governments, international organisations and civil society, amid rapidly escalating infection rates and losses in revenue and capacity (Global Health Policy Unit, 2020), which from a public health perspective could be framed as purely instrumental (Babor et al., 2013; Mialon and Cambridge, 2018L Yoon and Lam, 2013). However, it is important to note that not all brands initiating COVID-19 related CSR responses used these as an opportunity to promote their products and enhance brand image on social media. In particular, the efforts of brands to produce hand sanitiser could be labelled as an example of integrative CSR by providing a tangible example of alcohol corporations meeting social and health objectives by helping to resolve shortages in the health and commercial sector during the pandemic, whilst enhancing brand image in a way that contributed to their economic goals. However, it is important that the broader implications of corporate philanthropy and social responsibility initiatives are critically considered.

Our analysis of online comments found that these actions were overwhelmingly received positively by brand social media followers. Potential consumers appeared to interpret brand COVID-19 actions as purely ethical, and as examples of brands acting in the public interest and 'doing good' by prioritising the social and health objectives rather than profit-driven activities (Babor and Robaina, 2013; Fooks et al., 2013; Fooks and Gilmore, 2013; Yoon and Lam, 2013). There was little recognition that these activities may have been fulfilling a marketing or CSR function. CSR related posts were effective in enhancing brand's positive image, reputation and consumer loyalty, and through messages of community spirit and action, helped build support within local communities. We also found that such actions met economic goals by instigating sales in the short term and a commitment to the purchasing of products in the long-term. Whilst our research cannot provide evidence of how these CSR activities may help achieve corporate and political interests by influencing policy and extending corporate power (Banerjee, 2008; Yoon and Lam, 2013), the efforts of alcohol corporations in the UK assisted the Government in meeting shortages in supply which are likely to have been received positively (UK Government, 2020).

BrewDog's marketing is worthy of discussion here, in that although like many alcohol brands the company provided hand sanitiser for a range of health organisations to fill shortages in the health care system, they were unapologetically and satirically critical of the government's response to the social and health harms associated with COVID-19. As discussed, brand marketing was critical of the government's initial lack of free school meal provision, and critical of a senior government adviser's alleged breaking of lockdown rules. Whilst these examples clearly reinforce positive brand image among consumers who hold similar outlooks, their criticism of policy somewhat complicates the narrative that CSR are attempts to forge positive relationships with policy makers. Brew Dog is a rapidly expanding global business with hedge fund backing, yet has maintained an identity of independence and resistance, which differentiates it from multi-national conglomerates. This identity has implications for how its creation and distribution of hand sanitiser and other community based action during the pandemic, is considered, relative to those of companies such as *Bacardi*. As well as developing a range of products that incorporate local identities and collaborations with small local brewers, the brand has a physical presence in local communities through their branded licensed premises, a humanised image (i.e. the owners are the face of the brand), inclusive values through providing customers with the opportunity to invest and claim ownership of the brand as shareholders, and a history of engaging in a number of social justice/activism causes. As such, *BrewDog* could be said to be an example of a brand that has successfully connected itself to the lifestyles, identities and politics of its consumer base, and in turn created a community of consumers with shared interests and a sense belonging in a way that has enhanced brand image, loyalty and affiliation (Alexander et al., 2002; Banet-

Wesier and Lapsanky, 2008; Holt, 2016). This community of *BrewDog* consumers, the localised nature of the brand's COVID-19 actions and the political criticism that underpinned their actions, has implications for labelling these CSR strategies. Instead, these may be an extension of the brands ongoing social cause related activities at local and national level, which have allowed it to place itself within the cultural community and consumer identity of their consumer base; one that is hip, woke and politically engaged.

Our research was not intended to investigate the development of advertiser posts and the dynamics of sharing, but the nature of social media marketing is changing, and this has implications for researching marketing on these platforms. Whilst social media platforms still provide opportunities for brands to quickly create, adapt and circulate content to large numbers of potential consumers, and to encourage co-creation, interaction and the sharing of content among consumers online social networks, such platforms also support data-driven activities (Carah and Brodmerkel 2020). These allow marketers to collect and utilise data on consumer preferences and online behaviours, including through third-party data sets and algorithmic models, which enable them to optimise the targeting of ads and integrate them with purchase decisions. This means that the posts that social media users see, particularly commercial posts, are influenced by wider browsing behaviour. For example, in the context of the current research, the browsing behaviour of activist or COVID-related content is useful to marketers in informing the development and targeting of future campaigns. Platforms such as Facebook prioritise sponsored posts and paid for content, which means that these are prioritised in users' feeds, and the availability of user-insight data incentivises the development of campaigns that reflect wider online behaviour. Research approaches that assume a passive user interaction with marketing posts, or that do not take into account that campaigns may be developed along particular themes because they are in line with consumers wider online interests, may therefore inadequately reflect contemporary marketing activity.

Some limitations of the research must be acknowledged. Firstly, the data collection period covered the first UK lockdown, and it is possible that brands further adapted their marketing to include additional strategies in light of the prolonged impact of COVID-19 restrictions beyond this period. Moreover, whilst we did include a number of international brand social media profiles (e.g. *Jack Daniel's, Jägermeister, Smirnoff*), many of the profiles analysed were targeted towards UK consumers and as such the findings may not be easily generalised to other geographies. Nevertheless, the examples of marketing discussed do reflect those reported in international analyses (Global Health Policy Unit, 2020). It is also important to highlight that whilst our analysis of online comments on CSR posts provides a valuable insight into consumer reception, they cannot be generalised and it is likely that other consumers hold differing and competing views than those reported here. Finally, as discussed

above in relation to the changing nature of social media marketing, the methodological approach taken in this study does not adequately account for the data-driven capabilities and affordances of digital platforms, which should be considered in future research on alcohol marketing on social media.

Conclusion

Alcohol corporations are highly resilient in times of crises. The research found that alcohol producers were able to quickly adapt to the new social, economic and health contexts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which offered new marketing opportunities. Hospitality and on-trade outlets have suffered economically over the pandemic period, yet sales data suggests that off-trade sales of many alcohol products increased. This was underpinned by changes in online marketing strategies that encouraged the stock piling of alcohol as an essential item and the intensification of marketing that encouraged home drinking. Moreover, messages of togetherness underpinned the promotion of virtual interactions, for which alcohol use was presented as a key component. A discourse of community spirit encouraged consumers to do their bit to combat COVID-19 by '*staying at home'*, and consuming alcohol, and some brands presented alcohol use as a way of coping with lockdown. The research also highlights how COVID-19 provided a useful marketing opportunity for alcohol producers to present themselves as private partners to a primarily public sector response, through innovative CSR initiatives such as philanthropic donations to help combat the spread of the Corona Virus. However, these COVID-19 related CSR actions could be seen as selective, with brands opting to 'do good' only for the public health crises that do not jeopardise their economics goals, whilst potentially contributing to the public health harms associated with alcohol use. Importantly, our analysis of online comments on these CSR posts showed how such activities were interpreted by consumers as ethical actions, and that they were effective in reinforcing positive brand image and loyalty among existing and new consumers. Whilst our analysis found various examples of new marketing as a direct response to the changing nature of drinking as a result of COVID-19 restrictions, such as the promotion of online group drinking and the intensification of delivery services to encourage drinking within the home, these are likely to endure after the pandemic. Future research is required to examine whether these profitable strategies are maintained post pandemic.

Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflict of interests to declare.

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