

# **An exploration of alcohol advertising on Social Networking Sites: an analysis of content, interactions and young people's perspectives.**

## **Abstract**

Young people increasingly communicate and interact via social digital media such as Social Network Sites (SNS) where they discuss and display alcohol-related content. SNS have also become an important aspect of the alcohol industry's multi-platform marketing strategies, which may contribute to the creation of intoxicogenic digital spaces in which young people learn about alcohol. This paper presents findings of a content analysis of the extent, nature, and user interaction with SNS-based alcohol marketing for brands popular among young people in the UK. It provides a systematic analysis of both official and user generated marketing content on brand Facebook and Twitter profiles, and user interaction with such content. Findings from peer group interviews (N=14) also present young people's (N=70) perspectives and experiences regarding alcohol marketing on SNS. New SNS engagement marketing strategies extended existing multi-platform brand marketing. Young people interacted with such strategies as part of their identity-making practices, yet through a discourse of immaturity distanced themselves from certain brands, online marketing practices and the idea that their own actions were influenced by marketing. Local night life economy marketing appeared more meaningful and relevant to young people and led to further interaction with brand marketing. Implications of the findings are discussed in relation to the influence of alcohol marketing on young people, and the implications for current regulatory frameworks.

## **Introduction**

In recent years, young people's drinking cultures have entered online environments such as Social Network Sites (SNS) (Griffiths & Caswell, 2010; Lyons et al., 2014; Moewaka Barnes et al., 2016) where they display and discuss alcohol-related content (e.g. drinking photographs) and are exposed to new forms of marketing (Brooks, 2010; Carah et al., 2014a; Carah, 2015; McCreanor et al., 2013; Nicholls, 2012; Niland et al., 2014; Pempek et al., 2009; Wilson et al., 2012; Winpenny et al., 2014). SNS have become integral features of young people's social lives and have extended the space in which they create, negotiate and perform identities through the display of active social lives and symbolic consumerism (boyd, 2007; Lyons et al., 2014; Pempek et al., 2009). Both drinking and SNS can have positive social functions for young people by enhancing peer group bonding and belonging through the display of shared drinking experience, and the creation of peer group memories and appraisal (Lyons et al., 2014). Young people negotiate and make decisions around what information (e.g. photographs, status) to share in an attempt to manage the presentation of the self, online

(Lyons et al., 2014; Niland et al., 2014; Tonks, 2012). Accordingly, these online spaces provide further opportunity for alcohol brands, the consumption of alcohol and related behaviour to become valued aspects of young people's peer groups and identities (Lyons et al., 2014; Tonks, 2012). This is the context in which the alcohol industry uses SNS to promote their brands and to engage young people in marketing (Carah et al., 2014a; Carah, 2015; Nhean et al., 2014).

SNS now form an important aspect of the alcohol industry's multi-platform marketing strategies, adding to the overall marketing mix (Brooks, 2010; Freeman & Chapman, 2008; Mart et al., 2009; Moor, 2003; Mosher, 2012; Nhean et al., 2014; Nicholls, 2012; Winpenny et al., 2014). Research has shown a variety of creative strategies being used by the alcohol industry on SNS to attract consumers and advertise brands (Carah et al., 2014a; Carah, 2015; Nicholls, 2012; Winpenny et al., 2014). Young people report finding this marketing informative, and SNS facilitate a reciprocal relationship between brands and consumers through interaction and conversation (Carah et al., 2014a; Carah, 2015; McCreanor, 2012; Moreno et al., 2009a,b; Nichols, 2012; Ridout, et al., 2011). Users can interact directly with the SNS marketing pages of alcohol brands through a number of means. This includes 'liking', 'following' and 'commenting' on official brand pages, 're-tweeting' and 'sharing' marketing messages, and interacting with official marketing and night time economy venue pages, and unofficial user-managed groups dedicated to brands. However, young people do not have to actively engage with such content in order to be exposed to it. Exposure may result from the algorithm predictions of social media which allows individuals to be targeted by alcohol brands based on their interactions with third party content (e.g. music and sporting events), and through brand content being displayed in their SNS feeds as a result of their friends' interactions (Carah et al., 2014a; Carah, 2015). Whilst the alcohol industry has taken advantage of the opportunities afforded by SNS, there is a relatively low representation of alcohol-related health campaigns on SNS, particularly those targeted at young people, and their impact is likely to be low in comparison to marketing campaigns (Atkinson et al., 2011; 2015; Westgate & Holliday, 2016).

Although empirical evidence on the effectiveness of alcohol marketing restrictions or bans on consumption by young people is weak (Siegfried et al., 2014), there is an association between individual exposure to alcohol advertising and attitudes towards alcohol and drinking practices among young people (Anderson et al., 2009; Babor et al., 2010; Gordon et al., 2010; Smith & Foxcroft, 2009). Emerging evidence has led to discussions of the suitability of current self-regulation mechanisms to limit young people's exposure to online marketing (Nichols, 2012; Westgate & Holliday, 2016; Winpenny et al., 2014). It has been suggested that such marketing may cumulatively contribute to the normalisation of youth drinking behaviour

through the creation of 'intoxigenic digital spaces' in which young people learn about alcohol (Babor et al., 2010; Griffiths et al., 2010, p528; Nicholls, 2012; McCreanor et al., 2008; 2012, 2013; Purves et al., 2014; Lyons et al., 2014). A number of recent studies have found associations between engagement with, and awareness of, alcohol marketing on social media and 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., 2016). However, as Westgate and Holliday (2016) note, whether online activity is an indicator of offline drinking behaviours remains unknown.

In western neo-liberal societies where discourses of individualisation, self-expression, autonomy, commodification and marketing dominate, young people are often reliant on consumption, leisure and lifestyle for self-improvement and the construction and performance of identity (Giddens, 1991; McCreanor et al., 2005a,b; 2012; 2013; Miles, 2000). Branding shapes social behaviour and ways of being in that individuals increasingly construct a self-image and narrative through the cultural meanings and images presented within the narrative and visual codes of consumerism (Giddens, 1991; Hearn, 2008). The signs and symbols embedded in brands are used as social tools to communicate the self through the creation and expression of certain tastes and lifestyles, and this process now also takes place in online spaces such as SNS (Atkinson et al., 2015; Hearn, 2008; Goffman, 1959; Stead et al., 2011). As such, brands are not valued solely for their practical functions, but also for their aesthetic and symbolic value, which help shape the creation and reinforcement of classed, aged, sexual and gendered identities (Atkinson et al., 2012a; Bourdieu, 1984; McCreanor et al., 2005a,b, 2012; Miles, 2000; Stead et al., 2011; Wetherell, 2009).

Branding thus aims to associate products and services with the resonant cultural meanings that consumers wish to align themselves in their presentation and promotion of self (Banet-Weider, 2013; Hearn, 2008). Brands no longer refer to a single product but a context for consumption; a specific way of using and consuming a product through associated leisure and social identities (Hearn, 2008). As a result, brands have become embedded in the everyday practices of consumers (Moor, 2003) and 'colonise the lived experiences of consumers in the interests of capital accumulation' (Hearn, 2008:200). Moreover, self-branding and SNS as an additional space to construct the self and make the self visible (Bucher, 2012; Hearn, 2008), are drawn on and manipulated by the cultural industries in ways that has led to what Hearn (2008:212) has described as the 'erosion of any meaningful distinction between notions of self and capitalistic processes of production and consumption'.

In response to a lack of certainty as to how consumers actually use and respond to adverts, consumer cynicism towards direct advertising and the fragmentation of audiences due to

media pluralisation (Moor, 2003), a variety of participatory or 'engagement' strategies are now used within alcohol marketing to embed brands into the everyday lives, friendships and identities of consumers (Nichols, 2012; Carah et al., 2014a,b; Carah, 2015; Moraes et al., 2014). Such marketing has also been incorporated into the marketing of local venues and events in the night time economy (Carah, 2013). These techniques attempt to use SNS users' online friendship networks in order to align and embed brands within consumers' everyday lives to instigate the co-creation of marketing content (Carah, et al., 2014a,b, Carah, 2015; Moor, 2003). For example, brands use cultural activities and events (e.g. sport and music events) based marketing to entrench themselves in the leisure of consumers, to create a lasting memory of the brand and to encourage consumers to create and interact with branded content (e.g. event photographs) (Carah, et al., 2014a; Carah, 2015; Moor, 2003).

Furthermore, by encouraging SNS users to interact with online marketing content (e.g. 'likes' 'shares', 'tagging' photos) brands use consumers SNS networks to maximize their audience reach (Carah et al., 2014a; Carah, 2015; Moor, 2003). For example, when an individual 'likes' brand content, the content may also appear in the feed of that user's Facebook friends based on whether the algorithm has assessed such content as relevant or engaging to the social network, or if brands are paying for additional reach. This practice spreads branded content to a wider audience including individuals who may not have personally interacted with brand marketing (Carah et al. 2014a; Carah, 2015). Moreover, by engaging with users' everyday mediation of drinking culture, identity construction and friendship networks on SNS, brands gain added value and lasting memory (Carah et al., 2014a). These practices not only blur the boundaries between virtual and cultural spaces, but also the distinction between content created by brands, venues and consumers (Hearn, 2008; Moraes et al., 2014; Nichols, 2012)

Social media has therefore transformed the relationship between consumers and brands so that rather than positioning consumers as passive recipients, marketing includes users in content creation (Carah et al., 2014a). This means that the influence of marketing goes beyond the discursive use of the symbolic meanings (e.g. connotations of gender, nationalism, music, sport) to reflect and perform identities (Carah et al., 2014a), to encouraging consumers to act in certain ways which can be monitored and responded to by brands (Carah, 2015). These SNS marketing techniques have additional benefits as the consumer-brand interaction instigated by engagement and events based marketing provides information (i.e. tastes, online social networks) on potential consumers through the predictive and analytic capacities of social media (i.e. algorithms), which can be further used to create, tailor and target subsequent marketing content (Moraes et al., 2014; Carah, 2015).

Studies have begun to explore the nature of SNS alcohol advertising and user interaction with such content (Carah et al., 2014a; Carah, 2015; Nichols, 2012; Winpenny et al., 2014). However, there remains a lack of UK based research exploring both industry and user created marketing content and interactions. Much work has presented young people as passive recipients of advertising influence and has failed to capture how they make sense of and engage with advertising as active media consumers (Atkinson et al., 2012a; Hepworth et al., 2016). This study therefore investigated the use of SNS alcohol marketing by five alcohol brands (popular among young people) and provides a systematic analysis of both official and user generated/industry instigated content on brand SNS profiles (Facebook, Twitter) and user interaction with brand content. The research also presents findings from peer group interviews to present young people's perspectives and experiences regarding alcohol marketing on SNS.

## **Methods**

In the first stage, a content analysis of SNS alcohol marketing, and user interaction with marketing for alcohol brands (N=5) popular among young people was conducted. Using data on SNS preferences among the UK population (Ofcom 2014, Ofcom 2013), the project focussed on marketing on the two most popular SNS; Facebook and Twitter, whilst mapping connected advertising on other platforms (e.g. websites, television). Using existing data on young people's consumption of specific alcoholic brands (Alcohol Concern, 2013; Alcohol Concern, 2012; Trading Standards, 2013), the five most popular brands consumed by young people were selected for analysis (Smirnoff, Budweiser, Strongbow, Fosters and WKD). Firstly, an analysis of text and visual SNS 'posts' (Tweets and Facebook statuses) on each of the selected brand's Facebook and Twitter profiles was conducted. Manual data collection and analysis was carried out during November and December 2013. Using screen capture software, both official (brand posts) and unofficial content (content created by other SNS users) displayed on the brand's SNS profiles were extracted over a four week period. Data were archived and then cleaned and analysed using a thematic coding frame incorporating a combination of pre-determined and emerging themes (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Krippendorff, 1980). The extent of multi-platform advertising (websites, television, newspapers, billboards and radio) over a one month period (December 2013) was assessed using the website [www.creativeclub.co.uk](http://www.creativeclub.co.uk), which provides detailed information on UK alcohol marketing strategies. User interaction with the brand SNS content was measured using the number of comments (Facebook and Twitter), 'likes' (Facebook), 'retweets' (Twitter), 'favourites' (Twitter) and 'shares' (Facebook) of each of the brand posts (Nichols, 2012; Winpenny, 2014).

In the second stage of the work, semi-structured group interviews (N=14) with peer groups of young people (aged 16-21 years) (N=70) were conducted to explore drinking practices and the role of SNS and alcohol industry generated alcohol content in their drinking cultures. Group discussions were used in order to reflect real life group dynamics, experiences, shared knowledge and meaning within the group and how consensus was achieved, whilst acknowledging that different groups may construct different knowledge and express multiple meanings on the same issue (Charmaz, 2006; Eder & Ferguson, 2003; Griffiths & Caswell, 2010; Heath, et al., 2009; Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). Although interviews were based on a pre-determined, semi-structured interview schedule, emerging patterns and themes were identified from the transcripts and coded using an inductive thematic analysis approach in NVivo (version 10) (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Krippendorff, 1980). A representative selection of SNS alcohol brand marketing for the 5 brands analysed in the content analysis was available to participants to help guide discussion if required. This included examples of marketing strategies used on both Facebook and Twitter, such as competitions, real world tie-ins (e.g. events) and recipe suggestions. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and one hour and were conducted by the same researchers (white British females aged 25-30 years) who carried out the data analysis.

Participants were young people aged 16-21 attending educational establishments (i.e. schools, colleges, and Universities) and youth groups with low-high- and mid-point IMD<sup>1</sup> quintiles in the North West of England. The study area had significantly higher levels of alcohol consumption, hospital admissions, and 'binge drinking' than the rest of England (Public Health England, 2015). Participants included those approaching the legal UK alcohol purchasing age of 18 (51%, n=36) who may have been likely to have already begun drinking and those aged 18-21 year olds (49%, n=34), who in addition to being legally able to purchase alcohol, are targets of alcohol marketers. The mean age of participants was 17.8 years. More females (n=40, 57%) participated than males (n=30, 43%) and the majority of the sample were White British (77%, n=54). Most had consumed alcohol use in their lifetime (86%, n=60), with only 10% having never tried alcohol (primarily for religious reasons). Mean age of initiation into alcohol use was 13.3 years, which is similar to international research that suggests young people first consume alcohol at age 13 and under (Hibell et al., 2012). There were differences

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<sup>1</sup> The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) classifies distinct geographical areas based on a number of measures of deprivation including employment; health and disability, income; education, skills and training; barriers to housing and services; living environment and crime. Individuals are categorised according to the IMD score for the area in which they attend school.

in the Facebook analysis sample compared to the interview participants in that they were slightly younger (mean age 16.6 years). Again, more females (n= 27, 67.5%) participated in the Facebook profile study than males (n= 13, 32.5%) and a similar proportion were aged under (52.5%, n=21) and over (47.5%, n=19) the legal UK alcohol purchasing age of 18. Approval from the University Ethics Committee was granted for all stages of the research.

## Findings

### The extent and nature of SNS alcohol brand marketing

Alcohol manufacturers were using SNS to engage (potential) consumers as part of multi-platform brand marketing. A variety of simultaneously strategies were being used, with cross-referencing between traditional and new platforms (e.g. TV adverts, sponsorship of TV programmes and SNS encouraging the use of Twitter hashtags). There was extensive use of SNS marketing for each alcohol brand over the four week data collection period (see Table 1). Facebook was used more frequently than Twitter with a total of 446 official posts on the five alcohol brand Facebook profiles, compared to a total of 157 official brand Tweets. Facebook also had the largest number of individuals interacting with brand pages (Carah, 2014b; Nichols, 2012; Winspenny et al., 2014). A total of 22.6 million individuals had 'liked' the brand Facebook pages, ranging between 187,193 (Fosters) and 11,523,904 (Budweiser) (mean 4,532,430 per brand). Twitter had less user engagement, with a total of 50,000 followers, ranging between 11,107 (WKD) and 32,605 (Budweiser) (mean, 9,997 followers per brand) (see Table 2). Whilst these analyses provide evidence of extensive user engagement with brand Facebook profiles, it is likely that user interaction with brand marketing content is much higher than these figures suggest. Such interaction (i.e. page 'likes') is direct and visible for monitoring, yet it is important to note that SNS users are exposed to and engage with alcohol marketing without having intentionally interacted (e.g. 'liked') with brand profiles (see Introduction).

**Table 1: Brand SNS posts across the data collection period**

Brand	Type	Total brand Facebook posts	Number of brand Twitter Posts (Tweets)	Total number of SNS posts

Fosters	Lager	35 (8%)	12 (8%)	47(8%)
WKD	Pre-mixed/Ready to drink beverage	59 (13%)	51 (32%)	110 (18%)
Smirnoff	Spirit/Ready to drink beverage	80 (18%)	34 (22%)	114 (19%)
Budweiser	Lager	113 (25%)	60 (38%)	173 (29%)
Strongbow	Cider	159 (36%)	0 (0%)	159 (26%)
<b>Total</b>		<b>446 (100%)</b>	<b>157 (100%)</b>	<b>603 (100%)</b>

**Table 2: User interaction with brand Facebook profiles across the data collection period**

<b>Brand</b>	<b>Facebook Likes</b>	<b>Increase in Facebook Likes (%)</b>	<b>Twitter Followers</b>	<b>Increase in Twitter Followers (%)</b>
Budweiser	11,523,904 (51%)	169,388 (47%)	32,605 (65%)	4,582 (82%)
Smirnoff	10,438,249 (46%)	189,867 (53%)	2,347 (5%)	37 (0.6%)
Strongbow	227,983 (1%)	736 (0.2%)	1,981 (4%)	46 (0.8%)
WKD	284,821 (1%)	200 (0.05%)	11,107 (22%)	928 (17%)
Fosters	187,193 (1%)	1,452 (0.4%)	1,948 (4%)	4 (0.0.7%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>22,662,150 (100%)</b>	<b>361,643 (100%)</b>	<b>49,988 (100%)</b>	<b>5,597 (100%)</b>

A number of themes emerged from the analysis of brand Facebook (n=446) and Twitter (n=157) SNS alcohol marketing content, and this highlighted how brands disseminated

meaning through the use of connotations attached to particular cultural activities and identities to target and engage potential consumers. With regards the use of symbolic meaning aimed at associating brands with particular cultural identities, marketing of brands on Facebook was gendered in nature (22% n=96) with respect to the lifestyle associations presented (e.g. football) (Carah et al., 2014b), and the depiction of drinker prototypes within marketing content. All of the posts (n=136) that depicted an individual presented men. No women were protagonists in any of the brand posts, and when they were depicted (9%, n=12) they were shown alongside men. Humour, including gendered 'banter<sup>2</sup>', was used on both SNS (Facebook (16%, n=56), Twitter (10% n=15)), as were fictional/cartoon characters (Facebook 9% n=38; Twitter 4% n=6). Moreover, 7% (n=24) of the Facebook posts and 19% (n=30) of Tweets comprised celebrity brand endorsement. This included musicians and bands appearing at brand sponsored events (e.g. Budweiser) and the sponsorship of UK reality TV shows (e.g. WKD). Whilst these provide examples of traditional marketing techniques based on the transmission of meaning aligned to particular cultural identities and lifestyles, a number of additional techniques were employed to embed brands in the everyday cultural practices of consumers and to involve SNS users as active content creators (Carah et al., 2014a, Carah, 2015).

The main technique used to embed brands in the cultural life and identifies of potential consumers was the use of 'Real-world tie ins' or events based marketing (Carah, 2014a; Carah et al., 2014; Nicholls, 2012) (Facebook 28%, n=124; Twitter 46%, n=72). This technique involved the sponsorship of real life cultural events and spaces (e.g. football tournaments [e.g. World Cup 2014], nightlife events) which were promoted primarily via social media. On both SNS platforms, brands not only sponsored traditional leisure activities (e.g. football spectating), but diversified to include sponsorship of new sporting/physical spectator activities, comedy and television shows, and even health and political campaigns. For example, Fosters sponsored Movember, a health campaign aimed at raising awareness of cancer and mental health among males, in order to associate the brand with masculinity. WKD used the political campaign for Scottish Independence (a referendum took place in 2014) as an opportunity to associate the brand with connotations of nationalism within the campaign. Competitions and quizzes (Carah, 2014; Carah et al., 2014; Nichols, 2012) (Facebook 10%, n=43, Twitter n=15, 10%), and the personalisation of content (Facebook 4% n=19) were other examples of engagement marketing used to encourage users to interact with brand content with the purpose of reaching a wider audience by allowing the users' interaction (e.g. 'like') with the post to become visible to their SNS friends. This was exemplified by how competition entry requirements differed from the traditional notion of a competition, consisting of users

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<sup>2</sup> Banter is the exchange of teasing and jokey remarks, which are often gendered (NUS, 2013)

interacting with brands by simply 'liking', sharing' or 'retweeting' brand posts. Using personalisation, the manufacturers of Strongbow posted images of their latest product with a random selection of inscribed first names in order to encourage users to tag themselves in the posts, providing another opportunity for the images to reach wider audience regardless of whether individuals had 'liked' the brand page. Asking users to provide recipe suggestions (Carah, 2014a,b) (Facebook 6% n=26, Twitter 5% (n=8) further instigated user interaction. In a similar manner, managers of new product promotions asked for user feedback (Facebook, 7%, n=31) as a means of gaining qualitative information on consumer tastes and preferences (Carah, 2014a), whilst providing another means of virally spreading brand content.

Such engagement marketing was reflected in the large number of users interacting with brand content (e.g. competitions) on SNS posted during the four weeks of data collection. There was a total of 47,626 Facebook 'likes' of the official content (78%, n=350 of the posts were liked), 3,373 'shares' (range 1 - 456, mean 16 shares per post) and 4,314 user comments (range 1 - 885, mean 20 comments per post). Less interaction occurred between Twitter users (2,472 retweets), yet interaction between the brand and users occurred in 12% (n=41) of Facebook posts and 13% (n=20) of Tweets). The success of events-based engagement marketing in instigating the creation of user generated content was also shown in the 162 user created brand related posts found on both Facebook (N=97) and Twitter (N=65) over the data collection period. User posts and Tweets related to a variety of different engagement marketing techniques including branded events such as the football World Cup (Facebook 10% (n=10), Twitter 45% (n=44)), brand competitions (Facebook, n=28, 60%) and alcoholic drink recipes (Facebook, n=10, 10%).

**Table 3: Extent of user interaction with brand Facebook and Twitter content over the data collection period**

<b>Brand</b>	<b>Total number of Facebook Likes</b>	<b>Total number of Facebook Shares</b>	<b>User comments on brand Facebook content</b>	<b>Total brand Tweets as user 'favourites'</b>	<b>Total brand Tweets retweeted by users</b>	<b>Total user comments on brand Tweets</b>	<b>Total user interaction with brand SNS content</b>

Fosters	3,320 (7%)	263 (8%)	275 (6%)	5 (0.5%)	5 (0%)	0 (0%)	3,868 (7%)
WKD	6,663 (14%)	1,219 (36%)	989 (23%)	82 (7%)	586 (24%)	42 (20%)	9,581 (16%)
Smirnoff	12,743 (27%)	344 (10%)	629 (15%)	113 (9%)	223 (9%)	26 (12%)	14,078 (24%)
Budweiser	20,427 (43%)	1,002 (30%)	1,577 (37%)	1,008 (83%)	1,658 (67%)	143 (68%)	25,815 (44%)
Strongbow	4,473 (9%)	545 (16%)	844 (20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5,862 (10%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>47,626 (100%)</b>	<b>3,373 (100%)</b>	<b>4,314 (100%)</b>	<b>1,208 (100%)</b>	<b>2,472 (100%)</b>	<b>211 (100%)</b>	<b>59,204 (100%)</b>

There was little reference to price offer promotions (Facebook n=1), and no reference to alcohol units or the potential harmful health effects of alcohol consumption. The only reference to this type of marketing was a WKD promotion advertising two large bottles for £5 in the large retailer Tesco. Reference to ‘responsible’ drinking was also limited (Carah, 2014b; Nichols, 2012), other than displaying web links to the industry funded Drinkaware.co.uk. Facebook (24%, n=105) referenced Drinkaware to a greater extent than Twitter (n=3, 2%), which may be expected given the limited text space this platform provides. Additional information was provided on the Smirnoff Facebook page alluding to ‘responsible’ drinking and posted a status encouraging the use of a unit calculator during the festive period. Budweiser also made reference to drink driving. Thus, other than following self-regulation guidance on displaying the Drinkaware website, the majority of brands were not explicitly promoting ‘responsible’ drinking.

## Young people’s perceptions and experiences of SNS alcohol brand marketing

### Overview of findings

Despite reporting limited direct engagement (e.g. ‘likes’) with alcohol brand SNS profiles, their access to SNS through mobile phones restricting their exposure to side bar advertising and not paying extensive deliberate attention to alcohol marketing content on SNS, young people did discuss alcohol marketing as a frequent aspect of their SNS activities.

Firstly, branding appeared to influence young people through the lifestyle and cultural meanings presented within brands which resonated with the identities young consumers wished to align themselves in the presentation and promotion of self both on and offline (e.g. gendered associations). However, young people also attached negative connotations to certain brands based on their own experiences, viewing them as marker of immaturity. This worked in a way to devalue the relevance of brand marketing within their own identity construction, and led to many distancing themselves from certain brands.

Young people were also participating in 'engagement' marketing strategies (e.g. competitions, venue and event photographers) which embedded brands and alcohol related nightlife events into their everyday lives, friendships and identities. However, some participants distanced themselves from certain engagement practices and declared resistance to marketing influence, again with reference to the notion of immaturity.

The discussion below discusses three overlapping areas to highlight how brand marketing was entangled with young people's identity-making practices and that marketing strategies were dependent on young people negotiating brand material as part of their cultural practices. The *lifestyle and cultural identity associations* young people attached to brands are discussed before providing examples of *engagement with brand* and *local venue and event* marketing on SNS. A theme of age and maturity runs throughout the discussion, highlighting how the perception of drinking experience as a marker of maturity not only influenced brand choice but for some, their interactions with brand marketing.

### **Lifestyle and cultural identity associations**

The marketing of branded alcohol products appeared to influence young people's consumer choices in that they selected what to consume based on the lifestyle and cultural identities they associated with brands. Reflecting a shift in marketing based on the practical functions of products to branding based on wider cultural meanings (Banet-Weider, 2013; Hearn, 2008), the social acceptability of consuming certain drinks and brands, and being 'seen' drinking these on SNS, were largely influenced by connotations of masculinity and femininity, and maturity, rather than denoting differences in the preferences of beverage taste. Such connotations were used by young people in the presentation of self in real life and on SNS (e.g. profile photos depicting alcoholic beverages), with some brands being avoided due to the negative connotations young people associated with the cultural identities of those perceived to consume such brands.

As the extracts below highlight, young people were aware of the gendered lifestyle associations within marketing and chose their drinks accordingly. Reflecting the content analysis finding showing the gendered nature of alcohol marketing on SNS, young people also adopted a process of gendering brands themselves. As shown in Extract 1, young women paid attention to the aesthetics of drinks and associated brands that were viewed as 'nice' and 'pretty' with femininity. In contrast, the embedding of beer brands in cultural activities and events through the sponsorship of sporting events (e.g. football) were felt to reinforce such brands as masculine ('lads' drinks). Such connotations were important within their decision making processes with regards what brands they chose to consume. Young women reported rarely consuming such beer brands, and reinforced gender '*differences*' in brand choice, for example, by discussing men's consumption of '*girly*' brands as '*strange*'. As shown below, Female 1 interpreted the marketing language of Smirnoff vodka as '*not very manly*', highlighting their perception of what brands were acceptable for men and women to drink, and how this was reinforced by marketing content.

### Extract 1

Researcher: So what do you think of the brands that we've said you've seen marketed on SNS?

Female 1: Yeah, I think the Smirnoff ones look more, girly, again cause they look like cocktails.

Female 2: Yeah and fruity and stuff. Pretty!

Female 1: In nice cups. That (Budweiser) just looks like a lads' one cause it's got football in it

Female 2: Yeah, it's a girly drink. If I seen a lad drinking it I'd think it was a bit strange. But we'd drink it, but not the beer really. There's differences.

Female 1: Yeah like "Great drinks are yours for the making". I don't think that's not very manly!

(Females 20-21 years)

Age and maturity was also a common discourse within young people's discussions of alcohol brands. There was consensus that brands such as Lambrini (a popular perry drink), ready to drink beverages such as WKD, and cheap cider brands, mainly catered for under-age drinkers, which for some was felt to be reinforced by the nature of their SNS marketing (i.e. use of cartoon characters to market WKD). Extract 2 highlights how these brands were the products young people '*used*' to consume at the beginning of their drinking careers and how they associated these brands with younger people ('kids'). As a result they were viewed

as representing immaturity and disregarded as a current brand of choice. The contexts of consumption associated with the underage use of such brands also helped frame them as immature. For example, there was group consensus with Male 1's association of such brands with drinking in public parks and at family parties. These were contexts in which participants had consumed alcohol underage prior to gaining entry into licensed premises, and involved drinking without parental consent ('*hiding*') and a reduced level of drinking under parental control ('*That would be it for the night*'). Although young people had consumed such brands in the past, they were no longer valued or relevant to their identities due to these previous experiences, and as Male 1 confirms, therefore no longer consumed ('*We wouldn't drink them now really*'). The laughter accompanying these discussions worked to further devalue the relevance of the brands.

## Extract 2

Researcher: Are there any brands that you don't like at all? Any that have a certain image associated with them in SNS marketing?

Female 4: Lambrini [All laugh].

Female 5: Lambrini.

Male 1: Reminds me of kids hiding it in the park.

Female 4: Used to drink it when you were about twelve.

Male 1: Twelve, yeah [Laugh]

Female 7: Or like the bottles of cider.

Female 4: White Storm or whatever it's called, dead cheap.

Female 8: but yeah WKD [laughs]

Female 4: I think the blue ones, the blue WKDs are just like young girls.

Male 1: Like if I went to a family party when I was like 15 I'd get a WKD [All Laugh]

Female 4 and that would be it for the night! [Laughs]

Male 1: we wouldn't drink them now really.

(Females and Male 17-18 years)

## Engagement with brand marketing on SNS

Whilst the symbolic meanings associated with brands were influential and negotiated by young people in the presentation of self, they rarely reported directly interacting with alcohol brands through 'liking' or 'following' official brand profiles. However, they were regularly viewing and interacting with brand content through engagement with third party content (e.g. music and sporting events) as a result of brand sponsorship and events based marketing, which were found as a main marketing strategies in the content analysis. In addition, they were viewing marketing content through circulation in their news feed as a result of their friend's interaction (Carah, 2015). They appeared less critical of techniques that embedded alcohol brands within cultural spaces and practices such as music events and videos and were influenced by engagement marketing techniques such as competitions. Competitions were perceived as advantageous due to the potential to win prizes such as alcohol and free attendance at nightlife events.

Despite some participants engaging with events based marketing, they distanced themselves from any potential influence through associating marketing effects with individuals younger than themselves (e.g. '*younger people*', '*kids*'). This is highlighted in Extract 3, when participants were asked their opinions on the potential influence of SNS alcohol marketing. On the outset, young people distanced themselves from influence, suggesting '*some*' people and '*kids*' may be influenced through events marketing (e.g. festivals) and drink promotions ('cheap drinks') but not themselves ('*us*'). Here, the notion of influence itself was framed as denoting immaturity. Female 12 framed herself as holding agency and choice when discussing alcohol use and marketing ('*I'll do what I want*'), and discussed the influence of marketing on young people's drinking as being mediated through their peers' online activities ('*and their mates are sharing it and it looked good you think 'oh yeah, I wanna drink that*'). She continued to reaffirm her belief that she would not be influenced by marketing ('*I wouldn't say we are*'), yet appeared to interpret marketing only as the direct promotion of alcoholic drinks ('*Not to do with alcohol, I don't think*'). As the discussion continued she began to acknowledge that engagement with events marketing (e.g. music 'line up's) had influenced her drinking practices and decisions to attend sponsored events. Thus, young people appeared to interpret brand marketing in traditional terms with reference to the direct marketing of specific products, creating a distinction between product promotion and the branding of cultural events, leisure and spaces.

### Extract 3

Male 2: Maybe some [would be influenced by brands on SNS], but not like everyone, not us

Female 9: Yeah because like loads of kids be like drinking now a day because of the adverts, like the party ones

Male 3: Yeah like festival ones and stuff like that

Female 9: And if it is like cheap drink, and if there is a sale or something on then the kids will be like 'Oh' ok'.

Female 12: Yeah it could because if they're advertising on the likes of Twitter and Facebook and that. More people sit on their phones than watch cartoons at fourteen/fifteen don't they? Just sit on their phone and it's like if you see your mate drinking as a younger person you're more influenced to it cause they're doing it. Like I'll do what I want, but when you're younger you wanna do what they do. And if its advertising and their mates are sharing it, and if it looked good you think 'oh yeah, I wanna drink that'

Participant 10: People do it to look cool though. Like the amount of kids, well not kids but year nines from our school that are like fourteen this summer will go down the woods and get pictures of the Lambrini because it makes them look cool

Female 10 9: I wouldn't say we are.

Female 9: No.

Female 12: Not to do with alcohol I don't think.

Female 12: With the events maybe cause we'll think 'That looks good'. The line-up and that.

Female 13: With the likes of an actual drink, I'll just scroll past it

Female 11: [to participant 10]: but then in Bar X when they put cheap cocktails up (on SNS), next time I go in I order that cocktail, like that cocktail, I seen that on Twitter so the next time I went into the bar I ordered it.

Female 9: Yeah on Twitter and Facebook they promote stuff.

(Male and females, 17-18 years)

Furthermore, some perceived engaging with brand marketing content as immature and as such distanced themselves from this practice. For example in Extract 4, the young men began by clearly stating a lack of engagement with marketing but prior engagement when younger ('*when we were younger*', '*years ago*') and continued to label such engagement as the behaviour of '*younger people*'. By questioning the intentional sharing of brand content asking '*Why are you doing that?*' and assuming such sharing to be a result of account '*hacking*', they further distanced themselves from the practices of younger people, thus reinforcing their own maturity. The perception of interacting with brands on SNS as an immature behaviour

associated with young people '*show[ing] off*' and attempting to be '*cool*' was discussed as having negative consequences for their identities and social lives. As Male 3 suggested, such interaction was discussed as potentially leading to being '*bullied*' and an '*end of [their] social [lives]*'. This provided evidence that young people not only created and applied their own connotations to brands (e.g. negative connotations of immaturity), but also to brand marketing, as part of their identity-making practices. The relevance and meaning of brands and brand marketing also changed with age, encouraging the consumption of brands and brand interaction when younger, and hindering such practices as they matured.

#### **Extract 4**

Researcher: So do you ever engage with such marketing content and see it in your feeds?

Male 3: No, not us, not really, like maybe when we were younger but like not now [laughs] but I do see it and just think why are you doing that?

Male 4: We see it all the time, people have liked and people have shared videos of like an advert or whatever, but usually I'd say that's like when their account gets hacked surely?!

Researcher: right ok, so you don't know anyone who kind of posts or interacts with brands?

Male 3: if they do they just get bullied in school

Researcher: so is it something that you'd get a hard time for?

Male 4: yeah [laughs]

Male 3: start to like retweeting about beer and like sharing videos and its like the end of your social life

Male 4: but younger people try to show off

Male 3: Yeah like I might have liked something years ago, not sure if I have, but you just don't that [laughs]

(Males, 18 years)

## Engagement with local venue and event marketing on SNS

Of particular importance and relevance to young people, was local night time economy event and venue marketing. They reported interacting with such content on SNS to a greater extent than official (inter)national brand marketing as it provided a means of being informed on future nightlife events and drink promotions. This is important as the content analysis found little use of drink promotions within brand marketing on SNS. Thus, drink offers on brands initiating consumption were promoted through venues and event marketing on SNS, rather than directly through brands themselves on SNS. Local venue and event marketers were using a number of SNS engagement marketing techniques similar to those used by the alcohol brands on SNS. For example, young people were encouraged to 'tag' themselves in drinking locations in an attempt to create user generated content and to market the venue within the peer networks of SNS users. However, in a similar manner to directly liking and interacting with brand SNS content, many young people discussed this practice as immature. To be mature was to acquire drinking experience as a normal aspect of their everyday leisure, and as such drawing direct attention to participation in nightlife through tagging held connotations of immaturity. For example, in extract 5, Female 1 distances the group from this marketing strategy referring to it as a practice participated in when they '*first started going out*', but a practice they do not engage in '*now*'.

'Activations' (Carah et al., 2014) were also encouraged by local venues and event marketers. They appropriated 'camera culture' as a common and valued aspect of young people's drinking occasions and peer relations in order to persuade young people to create their own drinking photographs to upload to venue and event Facebook profiles. The labour and identities of independent photographers (Carah, 2013) was also being used by venue managers to photograph young groups of patrons in their establishments and to encourage young people to interact with the images on SNS. As with the event based engagement marketing strategies found in the content analysis, this technique encouraged the creation of user involved imagery and interaction ('liking', 'sharing', 'tagging'). As Female 1 and 2 discussed below, photographs taken by venues led to them interacting with venues online presence and facilitated further exposure and interaction with additional marketing content ('*see their other stuff*') including promotions (*certain drinks and offers and stuff like that*) and '*competitions*'. Although aware of this tactic as promotion, participants openly discussed engaging with it due to the value placed upon photos in creating shared '*memories*' (Niland et al., 2014). Such marketing techniques use the importance of friendship and photographs to young people in creating peer group memories, and as Female 2 confirmed ('*you remember them and see stuff just cos of the photo thing*'), created a lasting memory of the venue, event

and any sponsored brand. Such techniques also have the added benefit to marketers of content reaching a wider online audience through users' SNS friendship networks (Carah, 2013; Hearn, 2008). The local relevance and embedding of marketing into young people's leisure and friendships was thus an important factor in influencing young people's interaction with brand content.

## Extract 6

Researcher: So, what other types of alcohol marketing do you see or interact with on SNS? Do you tag yourselves in venues, like, if it's encouraged?

Female 1: No! we don't do that, maybe when we first started going out but not now

Female 2: Like, the bars and venues and like their promotions cos they like take pictures that you then go on and...

Female 1: Most clubs have a photographer

Researcher: Do you think there is a reason for that?

Female 2: Cause even if you didn't like them on Facebook or you didn't follow them on Twitter you'd then do it cause you'd be like "Oh I wanna look at that photo".

Female 1: Yeah, they do it for like promotion don't they?

Female 2: They tend to get everyone together and like because nobody really has a group photo before they go out they'll be like "Oh yeah, let's have a look at that group photo we've got".

Female 1: Yeah a memory

Female 2: So then like you follow them and then you see like certain drinks and offers and stuff like that. Like or a competition you might enter to get some kind of expensive drink or brand by like sharing their stuff.

Female 1: and you like remember them and see stuff just cos of the photo thing really

Female 2: It's then like it's all promotion yeah. Like that Vodka X stuff I wanted

(Female, 20-21 years)

## Discussion

The research highlighted how the alcohol industry and nightlife spaces have responded to the increasing popularity and culture of SNS to transmit marketing messages to, and engage, a larger audience of potential customers (Carah, 2013; Carah et al., 2014a,b; Carah, 2015; Nicholls, 2012; Purves et al., 2014; Mart et al., 2009; Nhean et al., 2014; Winpenny et al., 2014). Among brands popular with young people, new and novel strategies formed an important element of their multi-platform marketing strategies and were participated in by large volumes of consumers. Young people reported little direct formal engagement with alcohol marketing on SNS (e.g. 'likes'), yet still reported frequent engagement with alcohol marketing practices as part of everyday social media use. This has implications for how engagement with SNS marketing is studied, in that measuring direct interaction such as 'likes' is unlikely to gain an accurate picture of the true extent of engagement, whilst masking how users are exposed to and engage with alcohol marketing as a result of algorithmic predictions and their friends' interactions (Carah et al., 2014a; Carah, 2015).

Alcohol brands were a key component of young people's identity construction due to their symbolic value, acting as cultural resources that young people actively used and re-appropriated in the representation of self both on- and offline (McCreanor et al., 2005a, 2005b, 2012). Particular brands resonated cultural meanings (e.g. gender, immaturity), and they created their own associations between brands and particular social groups (e.g. young people, men, women), whilst recognising how these meanings and associations were reinforced by marketing (Banet-Weider, 2013; Hearn, 2008). Like other consumer products, alcohol brands helped construct a desired image and as a means of judging and distinguishing themselves from others (e.g. opposite gender, younger people) (Miles, 2000; Stead et al., 2011). They applied their own connotations (e.g. immaturity) to brands based on their personal experiences and at times rejected certain brands. Such connotations devalued brand marketing and worked in a way to hinder rather than encourage such brands as a consumption choice. This suggests that perhaps young people's responses to certain brands are not always in line with the emotion brands wish to evoke (Purves et al., 2014). Brand marketing thus interacts with young people's identity-making and marketing strategies are dependent on young people negotiating brand material as part of their cultural practices, and as active rather than passive consumers.

The influence of marketing went beyond the transmission and use of symbolic meaning in reflecting and performing identity by instigating consumer interaction through event and engagement marketing techniques (Carah et al., 2014a,b; Carah, 2015; Nicholls, 2012). Such engagement marketing is advantageous as it provides added value by embedding and

activating brands and venues in the cultural leisure activities, spaces, friendships and identities of potential consumers (Carah et al., 2014a; Carah, 2015; Nicholls, 2012). As Lyons et al., (2014) found in their study of young people's SNS drinking cultures in New Zealand, young people were sceptical of direct advertising of SNS, but were exposed to and engaged in marketing in the form of competitions, event based marketing and sponsored leisure (e.g. music events), and drink promotions, particularly in a localised context (e.g. bar promotions). Although they viewed most forms of marketing as informative and reported engaging with SNS marketing for personal gain (e.g. competitions), some distanced themselves from marketing influence (Atkinson et al., 2012b) and dissociated themselves from the practice of directly liking or interacting with brand content due to connotations of immaturity. However, they were still viewing such content in their news feed through their online social networks (e.g. friends) and potentially through the algorithm predictions of SNS (Carah, 2015).

As an example of events based marketing, local venue marketing was highly valued by young people as an informative source of information on local events and drink promotions. Carah (2013, p.1) discusses how such techniques have been adopted by local nightlife venue marketers; one example being how photographers were employed as 'below the line' cultural labourers who use their own identities and communicative capacities to provide opportunities to create and circulate images of individuals participating in events on SNS. The encouragement of photography documenting participation in branded events (e.g. sponsored music events) and the subsequent uploading of photos to SNS is used by both brands and venues to create imagery of greater value and relevance to consumers (Carah et al., 2014a; Carah 2015; Moor, 2003). Despite being aware of the promotional nature of such content, for young women in particular, such promotional photo taking provided opportunities to document their participation and appearance in nightlife, whilst providing content that bonded the group through documenting and creating memories of enjoyable shared experiences (Lyons et al., 2014; Niland et al., 2014). Here marketers have responded to the desire for individuals to make themselves visible on SNS to initiate the creation of real world media content (Bucher, 2012; Carah et al., 2014a; Carah, 2015; Nicholls, 2012).

Of particular importance throughout each theme was the perception of drinking experience as a marker of maturity, which appeared to influence young people's brand choice, and interactions with, and perceptions of, brand marketing on SNS (Purves et al., 2014). This reflects the important cultural role of alcohol use as a marker of impending adulthood and echoes other research showing maturity as an important feature of young people's accounts of evolving drinking styles (Järvinen & Gundelach, 2007; Seaman et al., 2011). Our research found that young people denoted connotations of immaturity to certain brands due to their associations with underage drinking, a lack of drinking experience and certain contexts of use

(e.g. 'park' drinking). This had implications not only for what brands young people drank and avoided, but how they interacted with brand content. A similar study conducted in Scotland (Purves et al., 2014) found that young males preferred to consume alcohol brands with simpler packaging as it signified maturity and self-assured drinking, and as such rejected certain brands (e.g. WKD) with colourful pack design. The ways in which some brands signified contexts of drinking that were perceived as immature such as unsupervised drinking in outside public spaces (e.g. parks), may be bound up with the belief that the attainment of proof of age identification (ID) is a transitional marker of adulthood allowing freer participation in commercial drinking spaces (Seaman et al., 2011). Moreover, some young people perceived interacting directly with marketing through likes and the sharing of posts, and 'tagging' drinking locations, as immature and an attempt by younger individuals to appear 'cool'. Although drinking itself is a marker of maturity, as Johnson (2013) highlights, young people often view drinking as an attempt to appear socially 'older' as 'showing-off'. Such attempts at creating a favourable self-impression (i.e. 'cool') and to over-claim beyond one's age thus further signifies immaturity, with older youths avoiding certain practices to reinforce their own maturity.

Young people thus placed positive value on maturity and this had implications for brand choice, interaction with brand marketing and also their views with regards the influence of alcohol marketing on their behaviour. They framed drinking in ways that suggested all individuals drink in a 'childish' or 'immature' manner at some stage (Järvinen & Gundelach, 2007), and that this practice is signified through the choice of brands, the location of drinking, and the display of drinking and interaction with brands marketing on SNS. This further suggests that young people move through a process of transitional drinking practices, and that with age they aim to distance themselves from the practices of younger people in the management of their social status and identities (Järvinen & Gundelach, 2007). Drinking practices, were thus related to 'maturity', with some being labelled more immature than others, and signified by brand choice and online interaction with brand marketing. The importance of the notion of maturity in young people's alcohol-related perceptions and decision making is a novel finding worthy of future study.

The role of brands within their identity making practices may work in a way to contribute to the normalisation of youth drinking behaviour through the creation of 'intoxicogenic digital spaces' in which young people learn about alcohol (Griffiths et al., 2010, p528; Lyons et al., 2014; McCreanor et al., 2008; Nicholls, 2012). There are strong associations between exposure to traditional alcohol advertising and young people's own alcohol use (Anderson et al., 2009; Smith & Foxcroft, 2009; Babor et al., 2010; Gordon et al., 2010) and increasing evidence of an association between young peoples' awareness of and interaction with SNS

alcohol marketing and a number of drinking outcomes (Alhabash et al., 2015; Critchlow et al., 2016, Hoffman et al., 2014; Westgate & Holliday, 2016). However, the relationship between engagement with SNS alcohol marketing and drinking behaviours remains unknown and may run in both directions (Westgate & Holliday, 2016). Any association is likely to be complex as young people report finding online marketing informative and useful (Lyons et al., 2014), whilst online peer networks will play a mediating role in SNS alcohol marketing influence and peer drinking practices represented on SNS may contribute to the overall alcohol marketing that young people are exposed (Atkinson et al., 2015; Nicholls, 2012; Griffiths & Caswell, 2010;; McCreanor et al., 2013; Ridout et al., 2011; Tonks, 2012).

Whilst the display of user content created without consideration of UK Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) (2010) codes presents challenges to SNS marketing regulation, there is an inherent problem with the application of existing codes designed to regulate marketing on traditional media (e.g. television) to SNS marketing (Carah et al., 2013). Such codes are based on the assumption that SNS marketing aims to influence consumer behaviour solely through the symbolic meaning of brand content and thus fail to address the importance of consumer engagement and the involvement of consumers in the circulation of cultural practices and value in ways that remain invisible to outsiders (Carah et al., 2013; Carah et al., 2015). Approaches are required that go beyond the monitoring and regulation of the specific representations in brand marketing content to consider how brands actively aim to stimulate and manage user participation, and respond to and use the existing social networks of SNS users to widen their reach (Carah et al., 2013; 2014a).

Social media such as Facebook may have an important yet underused role in disseminating public health messages around alcohol to young people and in providing brief interventions to effectively change social norms and reduce drinking (Westgate & Holliday, 2016). Alongside other approaches such as media literacy training (Babor et al., 2010), SNS approaches may offer a useful opportunity to engage young people with public health messages as part of multi-component initiatives (Atkinson et al., 2010; 2015, see Carah et al., 2015 for example). Social media may be used to promote health in alcohol social marketing campaigns, yet it is important that such approaches are based upon clear evidence-based principles.

This paper is unique in that it provides the first UK account, to our knowledge, of a systematic analysis of both official marketing and unofficial consumer created content and interaction, and acknowledgement of young people's own experiences and perspectives. A number of limitations must be acknowledged. The research included a cross sectional examination of only two SNS, Facebook and Twitter, over a one month period. Marketing and

user alcohol representations are likely to be seasonal, and other SNS are used by the industry. Whilst the analysis of young people's SNS profiles confirmed key findings from focus groups, it relied on researcher interpretation of content. Methodologies involving young people's own navigation of their SNS accounts would have added value in that they would have allowed us to explore in more depth the real life relationships young people have with alcohol brands on SNS (Lyons et al., 2014; Niland et al., 2014). In turn, the weaknesses associated with relying on the 'liking' of brand Facebook pages and sharing of brand content as an indicator of engagement and exposure could have been addressed by exposing interactions with brands that remain invisible to outsiders (e.g. of alcohol brand content in their newsfeeds). Whilst group interviews provide a useful means of gaining insight into how young people represent themselves in relation to alcohol and branding in a peer group context, they can produce different results and accounts to individual interviews, with group interviews producing more positive accounts of drinking experiences than those produced by individual interviews (Lyons et al., 2015). Such limitations should be addressed by future research.

## **Conclusion**

This study highlights SNS strategies as new and novel extensions of existing multi-platform marketing and how alcohol marketing on SNS was a common feature of young people's online activities. Although young people reported little direct formal engagement with alcohol marketing on SNS, they still discussed frequent engagement with brand and venue marketing as part of their everyday social media use. Alcohol marketing on SNS was entangled with young people's cultural and identity-making practices in ways that created greater relevance and meaning to young people. However, marketing strategies were dependent on young people negotiating brand material, with some connotations (e.g. immaturity) hindering rather than encouraging interaction with marketing content and use. We have further highlighted how the emerging use of SNS in alcohol brand and venue marketing has extended the aim of marketing from influencing consumers through the transmission of meaning through visual and discursive codes, to encouraging consumers to act in certain ways as active participants in marketing content creation and the use of consumers online social networks and relationships to gain added value and wider audience reach (Carah, 2015). (Carah et al., 2014a; Carah, 2015). With an apparent lack of prominent alcohol health campaigns on SNS (Atkinson et al., 2010; 2015) it is important to further consider how such marketing messages might be modified by public health orientated actions on SNS (Westgate & Holliday, 2016), whilst considering the challenges SNS marketing poses to current regulatory codes designed to solely monitor the content of official brand marketing.

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