**[Introduction to youth drinking cultures in a digital world](file:///C%3A%5C%5CUsers%5C%5CWim%5C%5CDocuments%5C%5CAlcoholmarketing%5C%5CLiteratuur%5C%5CImpact%20alcoholmarketing%5C%5CNieuw%20boek%5C%5C04-9781315660844_contents.xhtml%22%20%5Cl%20%22toc-chapter101)**

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In many Western countries, drinking cultures are central to young people’s social lives. Since the mid-1990s an increasingly globalised, pervasive culture of intoxication has emerged amongst young people driven by deregulation of sale and supply, decreasing prices, wider ranges of products, decreased age of purchase, and increasingly sophisticated marketing of alcohol. These changes have seen increasing levels of consumption among young people across many Western nations, with important variations by gender, class and culture. Simultaneously, personalised, virtual, social media systems have developed and been taken up enthusiastically by young people in particular. These commercial platforms (e.g. Facebook, YouTube) have profoundly changed communications and relationships. But how do the pervasive social networking technologies contribute to contemporary drinking cultures? Do the new virtual spaces (with their associated targeted marketing and commercial innovations) alter the dynamics and consequences of drinking cultures in significant ways? The aim of this book is to bring together contributions from leading researchers in this emerging field, and explore how the new technologies are reconfiguring the key themes, traditional interests, practices and concerns of alcohol-related research with young people. In this introductory chapter we briefly outline the key concepts that form the focus of this edited volume, and consider the range and reach of research exploring this developing area. Different perspectives bring different emphases and sometimes fresh and new lenses through which to view the issues involved. We then describe three important areas that are involved in youth drinking cultures in a digital world, namely 1) identities, social relations and power; 2) alcohol marketing and commercialisation; and 3) public health and regulating alcohol promotion. These form the structure of this edited collection.

Social media are digital technologies that allow people to interact, share and consume online content. They include social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. Facebook is the most commonly used social media site in Western societies, reaching over a billion users in 2014 (Sedghi, 2014). It is a commercial platform that makes vast profits, with its net income in the first quarter of 2016 tripling to US$1.51 billion (Wong and Thielman, 2016). A *Guardian* newspaper article highlighted the value of advertising revenue to Facebook, stating that compared to the same period last year, as of the end of March 2016:

Ad revenue was up by more than half, from $3.3bn to $5.2bn. The company is at the forefront of trends toward greater mobile use and more significant video advertising revenue; monthly active users and daily active users were up in excess of 20% on mobile devices.

(Wong and Thielman, 2016)

The article goes on to note that just under one billion people (989m) check their Facebook site on their smartphones at least once a day (Wong and Thielman, 2016), demonstrating the ongoing shift to using social media on mobile devices.

Social networking is highly popular and almost ubiquitous among teenagers and young adults in Western societies. As social media are increasingly accessed on mobile devices (such as smartphones) they become more fully integrated into young people’s everyday lives. Within social media, alcohol content is quite common and most of this content portrays alcohol and drinking in positive ways (see Westgate and Holliday, 2016) for a review). Students at college or university have been found to have particularly high alcohol-related content depicted on their Facebook pages (Ridout, 2016). There are also hundreds of publicly available alcohol-related smartphone apps, most of which promote alcohol use (Moreno and Whitehill, 2016), and a strong pro-alcohol presence has also been found on Twitter (Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2015). Taken together these findings illustrate the high level of alcohol-related content on social media, which contributes to the normalisation of drinking for young adults (Nicholls, 2012).

Westgate and Holliday’s (2016) review highlights that research shows inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between *general* social media use and levels of alcohol consumption, but consistent positive associations between *engaging with alcohol content* on social media and alcohol consumption. Posting alcohol-related content on Facebook has also consistently been related to ‘alcohol consumption, alcohol-related problems, cravings, and clinical measures of risk for alcoholism’ (p. 28). Longitudinal studies show relationships between exposure to drinking content on Facebook and subsequent drinking behaviours. Westgate and Holliday (2016) suggest that these relationships may be due to creating individual and group identities, perceived social norms and direct digital marketing and alcohol promotion on social media sites. Additionally, Alhabash and colleagues (2016) showed that the mere exposure to alcohol messages on social media can affect people’s intentions to consume alcohol and engage in alcohol-related behaviours, such experiences priming people to think about alcohol. This is consistent with Ridout’s (2016) review of social media and alcohol use among college students, where he concluded that ‘it is the sheer quantity of social networking sites’ alcohol content (i.e. descriptive norms) that has the most significant effect on a student’s own alcohol use’ (p. 84). As we discuss below, the reach and volume of digital alcohol marketing messages on social media are of particular concern.

Before turning to the three main sections in the book, we briefly consider research conceptualisations of drinking culture and different disciplinary perspectives on this field. ‘Drinking culture’ is a major concept in alcohol research, although it is rarely defined. Around the world many policy documents discuss the need to ‘change the drinking culture’ to reduce the harms associated with alcohol, and the term has also been used increasingly in academic research since the early 2000s (Savic et al., 2016). Savic and colleagues’ (2016) recent review of this concept concludes that research on drinking culture tends to focus on the national level, with much less attention paid to cultural groups below this level. They ‘encourage a nuanced and multidimensional understanding of drinking cultures’ (Savic et al., 2016): 2) and argue that the macro and micro levels of focus are best seen as complementary perspectives. They also note that increasingly we might be seeing a more globalised (and homogenising) drinking culture that is linked to those seen in national contexts. Simultaneously, multicultural societies are diverse and local drinking micro-cultures may vary in patterns of drinking, as well as in the meanings and values attached to drinking practices. These authors argue for the need to examine local situations and ‘the meanings and practices associated with alcohol use that are culturally significant’ (Savic et al., 2016): 7).

Savic and colleagues (2016) also critically analyse the use of the concept of ‘drinking culture’ in social research. This provides useful insights into the range of ways in which culture, alcohol and drinking practices have been studied, and the kinds of tensions that exist across different disciplinary perspectives and approaches. They note that fields such as sociology and anthropology have long investigated the role of culture in alcohol consumption. More recently, public health-oriented approaches have turned their attention to cultural aspects of drinking, in an effort to more fully understand consumption in order to better prevent and alleviate health and social problems that stem from alcohol (Savic et al., 2016). As a discipline, public health is concerned with prevention of health problems at the population level by attending to the upstream conditions, the ‘causes of causes’ (CSDH, 2008). With respect to alcohol policy, this social catchment is complex and contested, reflecting the diverse interests, values, norms, policies and practices that influence consumption. Public health organisations and institutions with responsibility for the health and well-being of the public are involved in efforts to manage consumption, which is most effectively achieved through regulation of the alcohol industry (Babor et al., 2010).

Public health research approaches have been critiqued for a number of reasons. Although their concern has been on upstream factors beyond the level of the individual, their traditional focus on environmental and structural factors ‘has been relegated to the background in favour of a focus on the individual (and individual responsibility), behaviour change and unhealthy lifestyles, of which alcohol consumption is seen as a part (Hunt and Barker, 2001)’ (Savic et al., 2016): 1). In addition, again arising primarily from their population focus, these approaches have been accused of discounting the pleasures of consumption (Hunt and Barker, 2001); Savic et al., 2016). Public health researchers, however, would argue that there are key reasons for discounting a focus on pleasure in the research, the most obvious of which is that the alcohol industry is deeply involved in promoting the premium enjoyment and excitement of consumption. For the industry, such research may validate their promotion of alcohol and lead to increased population harms; research of this nature has been appropriated to strengthen and advance alcohol sales. Preventable population level harms driven by commercial industries dealing in risky commodities (such as alcohol, tobacco and fast foods) are central to a public health agenda. Problem-focused dimensions of drinking culture are a key focus of public health and public policy, as are ways to identify interventions to minimise harm (Savic et al., 2016) or reduce drinking levels by altering the environments in which alcohol is consumed.

Researchers in other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and cultural studies have argued for the importance of attending to the meanings, pleasures and contexts of alcohol use, and being aware of the pathologising accounts of intoxication (as risky and harmful) and scientific discourses (Race and Brown, 2016), forthcoming). They also are committed to examining the relation between social and cultural practices around drinking and social structure (Race and Brown, 2016), forthcoming). Tensions arise because, while drinking practices have very real health outcomes, focusing solely on health risks or prevalence misses key aspects of meanings of drinking, and can function to pathologise certain groups in society (Race and Brown, 2016), forthcoming). Such tensions inevitably lead to debates around the appropriate level of analysis and relevant points of focus. For example, by pathologising particular (often marginalised) subgroups in society, such as youth, attention gets turned on them as the ‘problem’ and these groups are ‘othered’ and made abject (while the structural contexts of their lives remain under-explored). This type of critical analysis is apparent across some of the chapters in this book, but sits rather uneasily with other chapters where the public health perspective of problematising alcohol consumption to reduce harms is viewed as crucially important. New and alternative perspectives highlight the complexities inherent in the field, the tensions that exist around practical utility and critical dissent and how policy developments are never simple or straightforward (Race and Brown, 2016), forthcoming). It is only with a range of perspectives that we will be able to explore the importance of the multidimensional nature of drinking culture and its meanings at both macro and micro levels (Savic et al., 2016).

**Structure of this book**

With this broader critical context in mind, the book has three main sections: 1) identities, social relations and power; 2) alcohol marketing and commercialisation; and 3) public health and regulating alcohol promotion. Within this structure, specific chapters consider the ways in which digital cultures and social networking sites are playing a role within micro (local), meso (national) and macro (global) drinking cultures. Contributors draw on social theories and empirical research to explore the ways that social networking systems, with multimodal affordances that incorporate both user-generated digital photos, video, audio and narrative text, as well as similar materials from other (often commercial) sources, have become increasingly central to online drinking cultures. The significance of evolving mobile technologies increasing people’s access to virtual spaces (such as smartphones with mobile data platforms and geolocation features) is also considered, alongside their consequences for drinking norms and practices as well as identities, identity performances, and social relationships.

***Part I: Identities, social relations and power***

Young people are avid users of social media and these play a crucial role in identity construction (Zhao et al., 2008). In our New Zealand-based research, Facebook was central to young adults’ social lives and their participation in local drinking cultures. Participants posted photos of drinking events, engaged in online communication and photo-sharing while they were pre-loading (drinking before they went out into commercial premises) and while they were consuming alcohol in bars and clubs. Afterwards they continued to share and comment on the night out and the photos posted for days and sometimes weeks (Lyons et al., 2014); McCreanor et al., 2015); Moewaka Barnes et al., 2016). These activities were crucial for friendships and bonding (Niland et al., 2014) as well as identities. The ways in which participants engaged with the online worlds of cultures of intoxication varied for people across structural and social locations (e.g. see Goodwin et al., 2016); Hutton et al., 2016); Lyons et al., 2016). The five chapters in Part I therefore explore how identities play out across drinking cultures and social media and how this is intimately linked to social relations and power.

In [Chapter 1](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CWim%5CDocuments%5CAlcoholmarketing%5CLiteratuur%5CImpact%20alcoholmarketing%5CNieuw%20boek%5C09-9781315660844_chapter1.xhtml#chapter1), Ian Goodwin and Christine Griffin question the extent to which the concept of neoliberalism is useful for interrogating the inter-relationships between identity, youth drinking practices and digital media. While there have been critiques of neoliberalism as an analytical term, here they demonstrate how it can provide a broader critical context to make sense of the developments taking place in this field. In [Chapter 2](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CWim%5CDocuments%5CAlcoholmarketing%5CLiteratuur%5CImpact%20alcoholmarketing%5CNieuw%20boek%5C10-9781315660844_chapter2.xhtml#chapter2), neoliberal theories of class that construct young workers as flawed consumers, in ways that link to their drinking cultures and social media practices, are critiqued by Lin Bailey and Christine Griffin. They deconstruct online and offline depictions of women as a focus of concern around respectable femininities, and of men as reckless drinkers and explore how such identities play out in particular working-class drinking contexts. Jo Lindsay and Sian Supski draw together recent scholarship in the area of pleasure, identity, consumption and femininities in [Chapter 3](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CWim%5CDocuments%5CAlcoholmarketing%5CLiteratuur%5CImpact%20alcoholmarketing%5CNieuw%20boek%5C11-9781315660844_chapter3.xhtml#chapter3). Social media are depicted as an extension of public drinking space where contradictory pressures from personal, societal and commercial networks are inflected in practices of drinking, identity and gender relations across online and offline environments. [Chapter 4](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CWim%5CDocuments%5CAlcoholmarketing%5CLiteratuur%5CImpact%20alcoholmarketing%5CNieuw%20boek%5C12-9781315660844_chapter4.xhtml#chapter4) turns the focus on men and masculinities. Here Antonia Lyons and Brendan Gough examine the links between masculinities, drinking and social networking, and consider how distinctive markers of traditional masculine identities may play out at the confluence of youth drinking cultures and social media use. The section ends with a chapter on culture/ethnicity by Helen Moewaka Barnes, Patricia Niland, Lina Samu, Acushla Dee Sciascia and Tim McCreanor. These contributors highlight the importance of ethnicity in drinking practices and their representation on social networking sites through analyses of focus group data with young Māori, Pasifika and Pākehā New Zealanders. Societal power relations within and across the three groups are seen as central to their drinking practices and their social media use.

***Part II: Alcohol marketing and commercialisation***

In 2015, *Adweek*, the US advertising trade publication, ran a story entitled ‘With better targeting, alcohol brands bet big on digital’ (Johnson, 2015). The article outlined the ways alcohol brands are ‘stepping up their digital marketing’, increasing proportions of their budgets to digital platforms; for example, Pernod Ricard ‘increased its digital budget by more than 50% every year for the past few years’. Twenty-five percent of Heineken’s marketing spend is digital, and they are working in partnership with different social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter ‘to build mini profiles of users to target its ads against’. The piece also outlines how brands are ‘zeroing in on location targeting too’ through using geolocation technology in mobile phones, and creating geotargeted ads. A recent article in the *Journal of Interactive Advertising* noted that ‘the 14 leading alcohol brands [in the USA] spent in excess of $3.5 billion in marketing expenditures, with approximately eight investing heavily in digital media, which is a fourfold increase during the past few years (Federal Trade Commission, 2014)’ (Alhabash et al., 2016): 44).

McClure and colleagues (2016) comment that, as alcohol companies shift their emphasis and budgets into the digital environment, there is greater engagement with consumers and much greater promotion of interactive relationships. This fundamentally alters the landscape of alcohol marketing, such that young people are no longer passive recipients but active in engaging with, co-creating and disseminating marketing messages (Dunlop et al., 2016). There is also greater exposure of such marketing to underage youth. As De Bruijn and colleagues (2016) point out, Heineken and Google’s global partnership to increase Heineken’s YouTube activity ‘very likely means that at least 103 million minors around the world are being exposed to the harmful effects of alcohol marketing on a monthly basis (EUCAM, 2011)’ (p. 6).

A burgeoning area of research aims to examine the impacts of digital alcohol marketing, highlighting consistent associations between exposure to online alcohol marketing and drinking behaviour in teenagers and young people (Moreno and Whitehill, 2014). A study examining this relationship among over 9,000 adolescents across four European countries (Germany, Italy, The Netherlands and Poland) demonstrated that these young people were frequently exposed to online alcohol marketing, and this was significantly related to starting to drink and binge drinking in the previous 30 days (De Bruijn et al., 2016). Perhaps unsurprisingly, active engagement with this type of marketing was more strongly linked to drinking outcomes. Similar findings were obtained in a sample of Australian young people (Jones et al., 2015) and a recent UK study demonstrated that digital alcohol marketing was able to reach young people more effectively than traditional alcohol marketing, and was strongly associated with the frequency of high levels of episodic drinking (Critchlow et al., 2016). In New Zealand, researchers found that 13 and 14 year olds who engaged with digital alcohol marketing had increased odds of being a drinker by 98%, while having an online allegiance to a particular brand was related to greater frequency of alcohol consumption and drinking larger quantities, and increased the odds of being a drinker by 356% (Lin et al., 2012). McClure and colleagues (2016) are the first to show a prospective relationship between engagement with digital alcohol marketing and drinking outcomes one year later.

Alcohol companies embed their brands into the everyday lives of young people through their activities on social media (Brodmerkel and Carah, 2013). In Part II of this book, the four chapters by leading researchers in this rapidly developing field explore how alcohol interests increasingly employ social media systems to create sophisticated marketing strategies, and the ways in which young people actively and passively engage with corporate content online. In [Chapter 6](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CWim%5CDocuments%5CAlcoholmarketing%5CLiteratuur%5CImpact%20alcoholmarketing%5CNieuw%20boek%5C15-9781315660844_chapter6.xhtml#chapter6), at the start of this section, Nina Michealidou provides an overview of the multiple issues involved in big alcohol use of social media. She then theorises the associations between social media and alcohol consumption that highlights their potentials for health and harm and the long-term implications of embedding social media practices into young people’s drinking cultures. In [Chapter 7](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CWim%5CDocuments%5CAlcoholmarketing%5CLiteratuur%5CImpact%20alcoholmarketing%5CNieuw%20boek%5C16-9781315660844_chapter7.xhtml#chapter7), Nicholas Carah focuses in on specific activities of alcohol brands on social media to illustrate participatory, data-driven characteristics that appropriate the creativity of users for industry purposes. Drawing on industry and public good research and analysis, this chapter deftly scrutinises claims about commercial impact, the increasing invisibility of customised marketing and the challenges these dynamics present to public health research and policy. [Chapter 8](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CWim%5CDocuments%5CAlcoholmarketing%5CLiteratuur%5CImpact%20alcoholmarketing%5CNieuw%20boek%5C17-9781315660844_chapter8.xhtml#chapter8) turns to the evolution of social media within mobile platforms. Here Rebecca Monk and Derek Heim consider the ways alcohol marketing makes use of new mobile technologies and the affordances they offer. They review published public good research to explore the opportunities and threats of these mobile marketing developments, considering what impacts they might have for public health and related policy development. In the final chapter of this section – [Chapter 9](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CWim%5CDocuments%5CAlcoholmarketing%5CLiteratuur%5CImpact%20alcoholmarketing%5CNieuw%20boek%5C18-9781315660844_chapter9.xhtml#chapter9) – Richard Purves focuses on user-generated promotion and viral phenomena common on social media. He points out how difficult it can be to identify what influence commercial marketing is having in these spaces. He explores alcohol marketers’ use of social media as part of their repertoire of marketing activities to create and reinforce powerful brands and how they work with users to co-create and distribute marketing messages.

***Part III: Public health and regulating alcohol promotion***

Most countries around the world do not regulate digital alcohol marketing by law, but rely on self-regulation by the alcohol industry (Finland is a notable exception, as discussed below). However, the research demonstrates that this does not protect young people from high exposure to online alcohol marketing, or from the impact of this exposure on their consumption (De Bruijn et al., 2016). Through social media, alcohol companies are able to reach underage and young people at vulnerable ages (De Bruijn et al., 2016); Moreno and Whitehill, 2014). Any effort to try to reduce young people’s exposure to digital alcohol marketing will require targeting multiple areas (McClure et al., 2016), and Casswell (2012) has called for a global response to this issue. Given that teenagers and young adults are high users of social media, these platforms provide many opportunities for health promotion agencies and activities (Dunlop et al., 2016). As Dunlop et al. (2016) note, however, ‘health promoters lag far behind commercial marketers in the extent and sophistication of their use of social media to communicate with young people about alcohol’ (p. 8). Researchers also struggle to keep up with alcohol marketing on rapidly changing social media technologies, with time lags between technological changes and research analyses and dissemination of findings (Westgate and Holliday, 2016). There are also challenges in accurately measuring digital marketing exposure, engagement and interaction (Dunlop et al., 2016).

In this section of the book contributors to the five chapters consider the new challenges and possibilities that social media and digital technologies afford for health promotion, public health and health policy. Regulation and legislation is discussed in terms of the ineffective industry voluntary codes for the digital environment and the innovative regulation that Finland adopted from 2016 to control online alcohol marketing. Methodological and ethical issues that arise from undertaking research within this emerging arena are also considered. The section begins with [Chapter 10](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CWim%5CDocuments%5CAlcoholmarketing%5CLiteratuur%5CImpact%20alcoholmarketing%5CNieuw%20boek%5C20-9781315660844_chapter10.xhtml#chapter10) by Hélène Cherrier, Nicholas Carah and Carla Meurk, who outline some of the health communication efforts that have employed social media to intervene in problematic alcohol use. They describe the successful ‘Hello Sunday Morning’ project in Australia, an online website and intervention programme that encourages people to join and commit to a period of alcohol abstinence, while communicating, blogging and sharing their experiences. This programme is effective in providing support and enabling users to reflect on their own drinking, not drinking and alcohol more broadly. In [Chapter 11](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CWim%5CDocuments%5CAlcoholmarketing%5CLiteratuur%5CImpact%20alcoholmarketing%5CNieuw%20boek%5C21-9781315660844_chapter11.xhtml#chapter11), Andy Ruddock explores the complications social media bring to understanding the relationship between commercial messages and high levels of alcohol consumption. He draws on Gerbner’s cultural indicators project to make sense of intoxicating cultures, and argues this approach is highly relevant for questions around youth, social media and alcohol within broader political aspects of media systems. He describes an empirical study to show how complaints about alcohol marketing provide us with insights into issues of access and participation in media culture.

Implications for public health are considered in [Chapter 12](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CWim%5CDocuments%5CAlcoholmarketing%5CLiteratuur%5CImpact%20alcoholmarketing%5CNieuw%20boek%5C22-9781315660844_chapter12.xhtml#chapter12). Here Marjatta Montonen and Ismo Tuominen provide an account of the introduction of a policy based ban on the use of alcohol marketing on social media in Finland. They describe the country’s regulation of alcohol marketing, the rationale that was given to extend this to social media and the mechanism and limitations of the ban. They then provide some comments on the projected outcome of this policy. In [Chapter 13](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CWim%5CDocuments%5CAlcoholmarketing%5CLiteratuur%5CImpact%20alcoholmarketing%5CNieuw%20boek%5C23-9781315660844_chapter13.xhtml#chapter13), Sarah Mart, a pioneer in the study of alcohol marketing in social media in the USA, reviews developments since her 2009 landmark paper on this topic. She includes developments that have occurred among alcohol companies, social media corporations and policy makers. She offers a palette of possible solutions built around legislation, monitoring, enforcement and accountability that resonate with evidence offered by many of the chapters in this book. [Chapter 14](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CWim%5CDocuments%5CAlcoholmarketing%5CLiteratuur%5CImpact%20alcoholmarketing%5CNieuw%20boek%5C24-9781315660844_chapter14.xhtml#chapter14) is the final chapter of the section and the book, and is written by the editors. It presents an overview of issues concerning research methodologies and ethics that are apparent across the chapters presented in this volume, and more widely evident in the field. We explore the imbalance between industry and public good research as a way of highlighting the assets and possibilities that the latter brings to providing quality empirical foundations for new policy to manage the challenges of online alcohol marketing.

We end this chapter by acknowledging two important issues. First, this collection is focused on young people’s drinking practices and social media use. This focus on young people is reflected in the research literature and is driven by their high levels of engagement with alcohol and social media and by the relative vulnerability of young people as they are recruited into alcohol use. Commercial sellers of alcohol have a strong interest in recruiting new generations of drinkers and are therefore constantly seeking new means of promotion. Currently we know little about different age groups, social media use and alcohol consumption (Westgate and Holliday, 2016), but it is likely that many of the possibilities, problems and challenges identified in this volume apply across other age bands. In this rapidly expanding field, researchers work across many disciplines, including media studies, psychology, sociology, public health, geography, education, criminology, cultural studies and so on. This raises tensions around the focus of research, research approaches, and meanings of key concepts and terms. These tensions are taken up in different ways, and/or with different emphases, by researchers working in diverse fields with their own disciplinary viewpoints. From our own standpoints, this is one of the positive aspects of working in this field, as we see the beneficial cross-fertilisation of ideas and development of theories and constructs across disciplinary boundaries, creating debates that help to create relevant and important knowledge and understandings.

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