

Exposing Alcohol's New Advertising Playbook: Digital Marketing in RESET Alcohol Initiative Countries



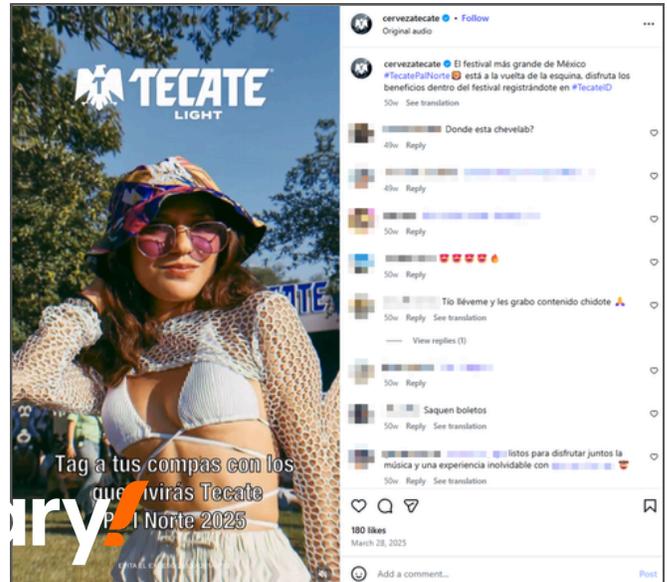
Targeted Alcohol Advertising in the Digital Age

Alcohol has historically been promoted through traditional advertising strategies glamorizing its consumption, despite its well-documented links to health and social harms such as road traffic crashes, violence against women, homicide, suicide and deadly diseases, including cancers and liver and cardiovascular disease. There is now well-accepted evidence of a causal relationship between exposure to traditional alcohol advertising (such as television, radio and magazines) and the early onset of drinking.

But alcohol marketing tactics are evolving along with media habits, and recent research that specifically looks at digital marketing and social media suggests a more pernicious impact on consumption than that of traditional advertising.

Canary is a real-time media monitoring and reporting service that harnesses AI tools alongside expert analysis to identify emerging threats in the marketing of dangerous substances.

Alcohol marketers can now leverage user data collected and analyzed by social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to understand user habits and preferences, allowing them to precisely target customers with persuasive messages. Marketers can also encourage engagement and personal interactions with their brand—precious currencies that allow brands to secure user attention—by partnering with paid celebrity influencers, sponsoring sporting events, cobranding concerts, or offering vacation giveaways for engaging with their advertising.



These advertisements are then pushed and replicated by powerful algorithms, further targeting consumers by showing them what their peer groups and friends like, follow, share and comment on. Tracking technologies provide advertisers with real-time metrics and an insider view of users' online actions, allowing them to adjust their messaging and content continuously to maximize their impact. All of this can be achieved at a low cost: A report from Australia found that an advertising campaign could reach "a thousand young people profiled as interested in alcohol" for as little as about US\$2.00.

The combined power of these features of digital marketing should be of utmost concern for the public health community.

A new report from Vital Strategies seeks to document digital marketing of alcohol products with a focus on the industry's scale, tactics and target audiences, as well as policy implications for digital marketing.

About This Report

“Exposing Alcohol’s New Advertising Playbook: Digital Marketing in RESET Alcohol Initiative Countries” was created as part of the RESET Alcohol initiative and presents data collected with the help of AI tools and carefully analyzed by researchers. The data in this report offers a snapshot of digital marketing activity in countries from the [RESET Alcohol initiative](#) —Brazil, Mexico, the Philippines and South Africa—over a 31-day period in March 2025.

Key Findings

- Canary’s monitoring system captured nearly 4,000 publicly accessible posts for this analysis. Although this represents only the visible portion of alcohol marketing activity online, these posts alone were estimated to generate more than 2 billion impressions—the potential reach of a post, or the number of times content may have appeared on users’ screens—highlighting the substantial reach of online alcohol promotion.
- Targeted approaches appeared to seek out young people and women as customers. To attract these consumers, marketers offer sweet and flavored products and empowerment messages.



- Posts also used marketing tactics around events, sponsorships and “corporate social responsibility”, as well as price promotions.
- Specific country-level marketing themes observed included *Carnival* in Brazil; *masculinity and bravery* in Mexico; *cartoons and female empowerment* in the Philippines; and *pride in “regional” alcohol products* in South Africa.

Conclusions and recommendations

Within the broader [WHO SAFER](#) recommendation to ban or severely restrict alcohol marketing, our analysis highlights the urgent need to extend these measures to the digital ecosystem, where marketing practices are more pervasive, personalized, and harder to monitor or enforce.

Other WHO SAFER interventions such as raising excise taxes on alcohol, strengthening restrictions on availability, advancing drink driving counter measures, and facilitating access to screening and treatment for alcohol use disorders also constitute cost-effective ways to curb existing alcohol harms and prevent potential consumption increases.

About Canary

Canary is a project of Vital Strategies, a public health organization that partners with governments and local organizations to tackle the growing burden of noncommunicable diseases and injuries, using data and evidence to assess health and environmental threats and to move policy, practices and people. Our team of 400+ includes epidemiologists, policy experts, communicators, data analysts, and others who work in 80+ countries around the world.

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