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# SOCIAL MEDIA ALCOHOL ADS REACH UNDERAGE KIDS VIA SMARTPHONES

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Kids as young as 13 may be inundated with daily ads from the alcohol industry on social media, and while Twitter has an age-gate that blocks direct-to-phone updates for underage users, Instagram does not, according to a new study.

"I'm surprised by these findings given that age-gate technology is available on these social media platforms and easily implemented," said lead author Adam Barry, of Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas.

The alcohol industry trade association Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS) issued a self-regulation guidance note asserting that digital marketing communications are intended for adults of legal purchase age and should be placed only in media where at least 71.6 percent of

the audience is reasonably expected to be of legal age, and brand advertiser pages should require age affirmation by the user before full interaction begins.

Based on the results of the new study on Twitter and Instagram, the industry is not adhering to this self-regulation guidance, Barry said.

"While it is not illegal to expose underage young persons to alcohol advertising/promotions, I believe it is unethical to intentionally expose underage persons to alcohol advertising given alcohol advertising influences the likelihood of whether or not a young person will initiate alcohol use, as well as how much existing drinkers consume," he said.

The researchers set up 10 Twitter and 10 Instagram profiles for fictitious users ages 13, 15, 17, 19 or 21. Using these, the researchers tried to interact with alcohol ad-

vertising content by attempting to retweet, comment or share alcohol industry posts or follow the official Instagram and Twitter profiles for 22 alcohol brands for one month.

All the profiles could access, view and interact with alcohol industry content, the researchers reported in the journal *Alcohol and Alcoholism*.

On Twitter, profiles made for kids younger than 21 could not follow or receive promotional material from alcohol brands. But two profiles for users age 21 or older received almost 2,000 alcohol-related tweets, collectively, over one month.

There was no age-gate for Instagram, and all underage profiles could follow alcohol brand accounts and received on average 362 advertisements during the study.

Doyle writes for Reuters.