Looking Back at the Pandemic Onset: Twitter Chatter Reflects Changes in Alcohol Themes

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Abstract

The COVID-19 global pandemic brought with it massive disruptions across many aspects of daily living including losses of employment and financial opportunities, reduced access to essential resources, lack of engagement in social activities, increases in social isolation, and mass transitions to remote school and work environments. Pre-pandemic research on events with paralleled community-wide effects has demonstrated a resulting increase in alcohol use and misuse as a result of these massive disruptions. However, early research on the impact of the current global pandemic on alcohol use has painted a complex picture. The current study utilized social media content (i.e., Twitter) as a way to investigate the initial impact of the pandemic on our relationship with alcohol. Analyses were also conducted to determine if the pandemic resulted in a shift away from typical weekly patterns related to alcohol use (i.e., increased on weekends vs. weekdays). A 2 (pandemic: pre-pandemic vs. post-pandemic) x 2 (day of week: weekday vs. weekend) ANCOVA was calculated to predict the prevalence of alcohol related tweets while controlling for the total number of tweets. The prevalence of alcohol related tweets significantly increased following the declaration of the global pandemic; however, the pattern of alcohol related tweets across the days of the week did not differ as a result of the pandemic. These results may be a reflection of major shifts in the psychological and social phenomena associated with alcohol as a result of the devastating impacts of the global pandemic.

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