



'I'm on board with the borg' : encouraging risky alcohol use on TikTok

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A 'Blackout Rage Gallon' (borg) is a dangerous new alcohol consumption trend popular with young people. It involves creating a customised, individual alcoholic beverage by replacing half the water in a four litre (gallon) jug with alcohol (usually spirits), flavourings, electrolytes and caffeinated energy drinks or caffeine supplements. The most prevalent 'recipe' calls for the addition of 750ml of alcohol. The 'blackout' part of the name refers to the intent of one person to consume the borg in one session, thereby encouraging risky alcohol use. Indeed, there have been reports in popular media of multiple hospitalisations attributed to consumption of borgs at college events in the United States. Part of the attraction of the trend is to label the borg with a clever name, usually incorporating the term 'borg'. The trend has gained traction recently on TikTok, which has become an important, yet unregulated, source of information for the public including young people⁽¹⁾. We investigated TikTok videos associated with the hashtag #borg to better understand this dangerous new phenomenon. We identified and analysed highly viewed TikTok videos (n = 105) for engagement, techniques, characteristics of featured individuals, and the portrayal of alcohol and risky drinking behaviours. Alcohol was visible in three quarters of the videos analysed (n = 78), and consumed in one third (n = 34). The average amount of alcohol present was well in excess of safe drinking guidelines (865ml). One quarter of videos (n = 25) promoted alleged benefits such as control of volume of consumption, protection from drink spiking, and mitigation of side effects due to addition of electrolytes and water. Alarming, only 9 videos included a warning about potential harms of the borg or alcohol in general. Indeed, videos discussing potential harms and benefits tended to encourage the use of borg, for example 'I'm on board with the borg'. Our study found the borg TikTok trend encourages risky drinking in a fun and entertaining way, supporting previous studies where the majority of content was positively portraying a product or behaviour⁽²⁾. As there is an association between viewing alcohol-related content on social media and alcohol use⁽³⁾, there is an urgent need for social media content restrictions to limit the visibility of risky alcohol consumption, particularly to underage users.

Keywords: Alcohol; TikTok; social media; borg

Ethics Declaration

Yes

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