Reactions on Twitter to updated alcohol guidelines in the United Kingdom: a content analysis

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Background

- January 2016 – UK Chief Medical Officers announce public consultation on proposed new guidelines for low risk drinking (first since 1995)

Key points
- No safe level of alcohol consumption
- If drinking, limit to 14 units a week
- Health risks at this level equal for males and females
- Safest to not drink at all during pregnancy

- Public response not well described by available indicators

**Aim:** Describe source, sentiment, and themes of responses using comments made on Twitter
Data

- Tweets containing `#alcoholguidelines` made in the week following announcement retrieved using the Twitter Archiver tool

- Extracted 3,061 original tweets (2,631 on first day) from 2,291 unique accounts

- Excluded:
  - retweets with no additional input
  - spam, machine-generated, nonsensical, irrelevant tweets

- 2,402 tweets from 1,856 accounts used for analysis
Sources of tweets

- PUBLIC
- HEALTH-RELATED
- NEWS-RELATED
- ALCOHOL INDUSTRY
- CELEBRITIES
- MISCELLANEOUS

BHPRU Behaviour and Health Research Unit
Themes and sentiment

44%

SHARING (30.0%)
AGREEMENT (11.0%)
WILL HEED (2.7%)
YOU SHOULD DRINK (11.9%)
DISAGREEMENT (11.2%)
WILL IGNORE (9.5%)
LIBERTARIANISM (6.2%)
CONFUSION (4.3%)
FATALISM (3.4%)
WON'T WORK (2.7%)
HUMOUR (9.2%)

49%

- Positive
- Neutral
- Negative

9%
Implications

- Social media **monitoring** can provide valuable public feedback:
  - Misunderstanding and confusion
  - Misinformation being spread

- Could public health bodies provide **dynamic responses** to concerns?

- Would tagging health policy messages with **emotional content** improve their reach?
Thank you


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