Reviewer's report

Title: A Feasibility Study of Short Message Service Text Messaging as a Surveillance Tool for Alcohol Consumption and Vehicle for Interventions in University Students

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Reviewer: Brian Suffoletto

Reviewer's report:

The authors describe a largely exploratory study of the feasibility of using mobile phone text messaging to collect daily alcohol consumption data from young adults and to deliver basic feedback based on the theoretical cost of alcohol consumed. The greatest strength of the study is the capture of longitudinal drinking data, allowing for unique analysis of change in drinking patterns over time. There are several weaknesses of the study as written, outlined below.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

1. Throughout the various sections of the manuscript, the use of “Study 1” etc is obfuscating. Suggest authors replace with “primary analysis”, “secondary analysis”, as there appears to be two studies, each with their own primary and secondary analysis.

2. The manuscript needs to be more appropriately placed in the context of what is currently known and has been published ecological momentary assessment (EMA) methodology, electronic journals, communication technology (including SMS) to collect alcohol use data on alcohol use and deliver interventions from young adults and college students. Essential background articles include: Weitzel JA et al., JSAD, 2007; Suffoletto B et al., ACER, 2012. Piasecki T et al., JSAD, 2012; Serre F et al., D&AD, 2012.

3. Missing are tables to describe the baseline characteristics of the two studies. These are critical if someone outside of your geographic catchment area is to make any judgements about how your cohort is externally valid.

4. Missing are flow charts for the two studies (especially the pilot RCT) showing exactly where participants fall out and what data is available at what time points.

5. It needs to be clarified repeatedly in the study that your intervention was a single text message half way through data collection estimating the theoretical cost of the alcohol consumed. Authors need also to address the limitations of this design of intervention. For example, students don’t likely pay for a significant proportion of their drinks, making the message less salient.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

My only competing interest is that I design and test SMS-based programs to collect longitudinal data and deliver brief interventions.