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

Version: 3 Date: 5 August 2013

Reviewer: Janette - Baird

Reviewer's report:

Dear Editor;

I started to read the revised manuscript fully expecting to be able to approve it given the assumption that the authors had addressed all the previous reviewer comments and suggestions, and that the manuscript would be a coherent report of the studies conducted. My general response is that the authors have failed to improve many aspects of this manuscript and in some instances this is a worse version of what has previously been presented. It reads as if the authors simply took the comments drafted a response and put the change in the appropriate place without giving any thought to how the overall flow and cohesion of the manuscript had been affected.

The main problem is with the introduction, materials and methods section, and parts of the results section. I give specific comments below. I cannot accept this manuscript as it is, and I do not reject it lightly. I also know that this is a very frustrating experience for the authors, but it would not do their study justice if this manuscript were to be accepted as is.

Introduction: Opening paragraph seems poorly placed, should be concluding paragraph after background literature (Page 4)

Page 5 second paragraph, poor choice of words line 5/6 using ‘knowing’ and ‘known’ in same sentence, change ‘known’ to specific. End of page 5 to start of page 6 is a really long sentence and contains some grammatical errors ‘While there is also some interested (should be interest) in developing…….’ Needs broken up as it is really confusing to read.

Page 8 second paragraph ‘take up and attrition’ of what? The SMS texts, the surveys?

Again this section is confusing and poorly written, as an example: “The latter aim was necessary as SMS messages are limited in size yet through surveillance data might be used to reflect back to respondents’ aspects of their consumption” I think this means using SMS messages as feedback but I am not sure.

Methods: page 9. I think scrutinized is an odd word to use here, given the role of an IRB or research ethics committee; would ‘reviewed’ be a better one?
Page 10, second paragraph, for sake of uniformity, as the authors briefly stated how participants in study I were obtained I think this should also be briefly done for participants in Study II.

Materials page 10 and page 11. On page 10 it reads that at the Freshers’ fayre (I think), potential participants completed consent and gave information about contact and alcohol use, then on page 11 it is reported that an online survey was created (I am not sure when) that seemed to collect the same information, with the addition of the AUDIT. So why was contact and FAST data collected twice? Are these data collection points separated in time, if so by how long?

Page 11: I am still confused as to why the AUDIT and FAST were used, but that aside, what does this sentence mean: “Both AUDIT and FAST are therefore used to allocate alcohol intervention resources efficiently, so that effectiveness is maximized”? If both measures screen levels of severity of alcohol use, is it efficient or effective to use both measures?

Procedures: page 12. The online survey discussed in the last paragraph is actually administered 3 times, as I learn later in the results section. This needs to be stated earlier either in the measures or procedure sections.

Page 13 second paragraph. Were the interviews with the participants taped?

Analysis

Page 14: When using abbreviation define at first use. FE = fixed effects

Page 16: Why were the questions on social perceptions and delay discounting not included in study II?

Results: Page 18. Introduce the first CONSORT diagram (this should be figure 1 and not the table of results). Also, the CONSORT diagram for study I omits any information on those who completed the semi-structured interview, no numbers (how many took part in the semi-structured interviews) no information showing where these participants fit in this flow diagram. I do not know, but should know from the CONSORT figure, if the participants who completed the semi-structured interviews completed all three surveys, two surveys, one survey, or no surveys.

Page 24: Why so little information about the participants interviewed for the qualitative analysis?

Page 28. We go from past to present tense “students are happy…….” A lot of this paragraph is poorly written. Although in general the earlier sections of the results section read well.

Study II Page 29. Again make reference to the appropriate CONSORT figure. This figure is very confusing, I think because it contains arrows at the wrong place. The way it is currently presented it seems that those who failed to respond to the invitation (n =406 ) continue to have baseline data collected and one of this group drops out. I know that this is not what happens but if you looked at this figure and did not read any of the results it would look as if this is what
happened.

Page 29. What were the ages of these participants, and gender the composition? Was age and gender equal for each group? Such basic information needs to be presented. I do not understand the effect size and power estimation give. If only the student cohorts are examined, the control students decreased by .05, the intervention by .26, this is a difference in means of .21, using the assumed pooled SD used by the authors of 1.7 (but not adjusting for repeated measures) the effect size is .13, so I am not sure how 45 per sample would achieve the power necessary to reject the null hypothesis.

Discussion section: Are you using information from any particular source when you state that attrition was caused by students not being aware of what they were signing up for? If you are please state what this is. Last line first paragraph, “suggesting that this medium is generally more acceptable”; for what?

In general the discussion section does read well, although the non-significant difference between groups from study II is really overlooked.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

'I declare that I have no competing interests’