

Social media giants send mixed signals on muscle-building supplement content

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A new study finds that while user-generated content and advertising content related to illegal muscle-building drugs is prohibited across all social media platforms, legal muscle-building dietary supplements have

faced few restrictions.

The paper is [published](#) in the journal *Substance Use & Misuse*.

"These findings are concerning given that the use of muscle-building [dietary supplements](#) can have negative social and behavioral effects, which adolescents and young adults may be particularly susceptible to," says lead author Kyle T. Ganson, Ph.D., MSW, assistant professor at the University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work.

"There is a need for robust social media policies, as well as [federal public policies in Canada](#), to protect the health and well-being of these populations."

Social media use is heavily ingrained into [modern society](#), with almost 100% of Canadians ages 15 to 24 using one or more [social media apps](#). Studies have shown that over 50% of adolescents globally are spending more than 2 hours a day on an electronic device, and users are regularly exposed to user-generated content and advertisements from all over the world.

While recent research has examined the advertising and user-generated content policies of social media companies with regard to alcohol, tobacco, and [unhealthy foods](#) or beverages, there has been a lack of studies conducted to investigate social media content and advertising policies related to muscle-building drugs and dietary supplements.

The study found that user-generated content and advertising related to illegal muscle-building drugs, such as anabolic-androgenic steroids, were prohibited across all [social media platforms](#). However, content related to legal muscle-building dietary supplements, such as creatine monohydrate, whey protein, had few restrictions—a stark finding given that use of these dietary products is common among adolescents and young adults.

"Social media is a major driver of the use of muscle-building dietary supplements among adolescents and [young adults](#), and many young people seek out information on the purported benefits and means of use of these supplements via social media," says Ganson. "It is important that health care, public health, and policymaking professionals are alerted to the major gap in content and advertising policies regulating what is posted on social media and how this may influence the behaviors of young people."

The authors conclude that there is a need for social media companies to implement stricter and explicit content and advertising policies related to muscle-building dietary supplements, as well as improved oversight of users and advertisers via both algorithms and content moderators. Given social media's global reach, [social media](#) companies may consider aligning their muscle-building and dietary supplement advertising policies with those of weight loss products by prohibiting content and advertising that influences poor body image and esteem while fostering a healthy online environment for next generations.

More information: Kyle T. Ganson et al, Analyzing Social Media Policies on Muscle-Building Drugs and Dietary Supplements, *Substance Use & Misuse* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/10826084.2023.2275557](https://doi.org/10.1080/10826084.2023.2275557)

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