

# Substance Use And Imagery In Hip Hop, R&B, And Popular YouTube Music Videos

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## Introduction

About 38,000 deaths occur each year from drug overdoses, and more than 4,300 annual deaths have occurred from underage drinking. Adolescent substance use is a rising public health problem that causes harm to millions of teenagers.

Music is a powerful medium through which friends socialize. Behavior and lyrics of favorite artists can demonstrate a modeling effect by mentioning, using, and celebrating the use of substances as “desirable” behavior. Exposure of substance use and product placement by celebrities may influence adolescents’ behavior that may allow adolescents to conform to positive attitudes in regards to substance use in popular music. YouTube is well known and is one of the most popular free video uploading and sharing websites in the world. It is popular among youth and adolescents, ages ranging from 12 - 17. YouTube, through music videos, may be a powerful marketing tool for alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. The imagery surrounding the use of those products can influence perceptions, norms, and use among youth.

This study identifies patterns of substance use and how tobacco and other substances are portrayed in YouTube music videos.



Party Scene with Multiple Products: Tuesday, ILOVEMAKONNEN Ft. Drake

## Methods

- Using the 2014 Billboard Music Charts we compiled a list of songs from the top 25 R&B/Hip-Hop weekly charts for all 52 weeks of 2014.
  - There were a total of 112 unique songs. Only 15 (13%) did not have official YouTube music videos at the time data were collected.
- Videos were downloaded using YOUTUBEINMP4 software website between February-March of 2015 and stored on a local hard drive.
- All 97 available videos (87% of songs) were reviewed and coded by at least one of three independent coders with 20 (20% of videos viewed) overlapping to check for consistency.
  - Coding consisted of identify substances: Alcohol, Marijuana, Cigars, Little cigar/cigarillos, cigarettes, Hookah, and vapes; whether each substance was shown being used/consumed or implied use; whether there was marijuana paraphernalia present (e.g. t-shirts with marijuana leaf, brands, bong) and the context in which these substances were portrayed such as physical (party, club), emotional (happy, depressed, angry), or values (sex, power, wealth).
  - For the purposes of this study, the term tobacco products refer to the full range whether they be combustible or not (i.e. cigarettes, cigars, little cigars/cigarillos, hookah and vapes). Blunts were considered marijuana products even though the product is a mix of tobacco and marijuana.
- Codes were reviewed and themes identified through group discussions.



Substance Use and Gesture: Lifestyle, Young Thug Children present in music video



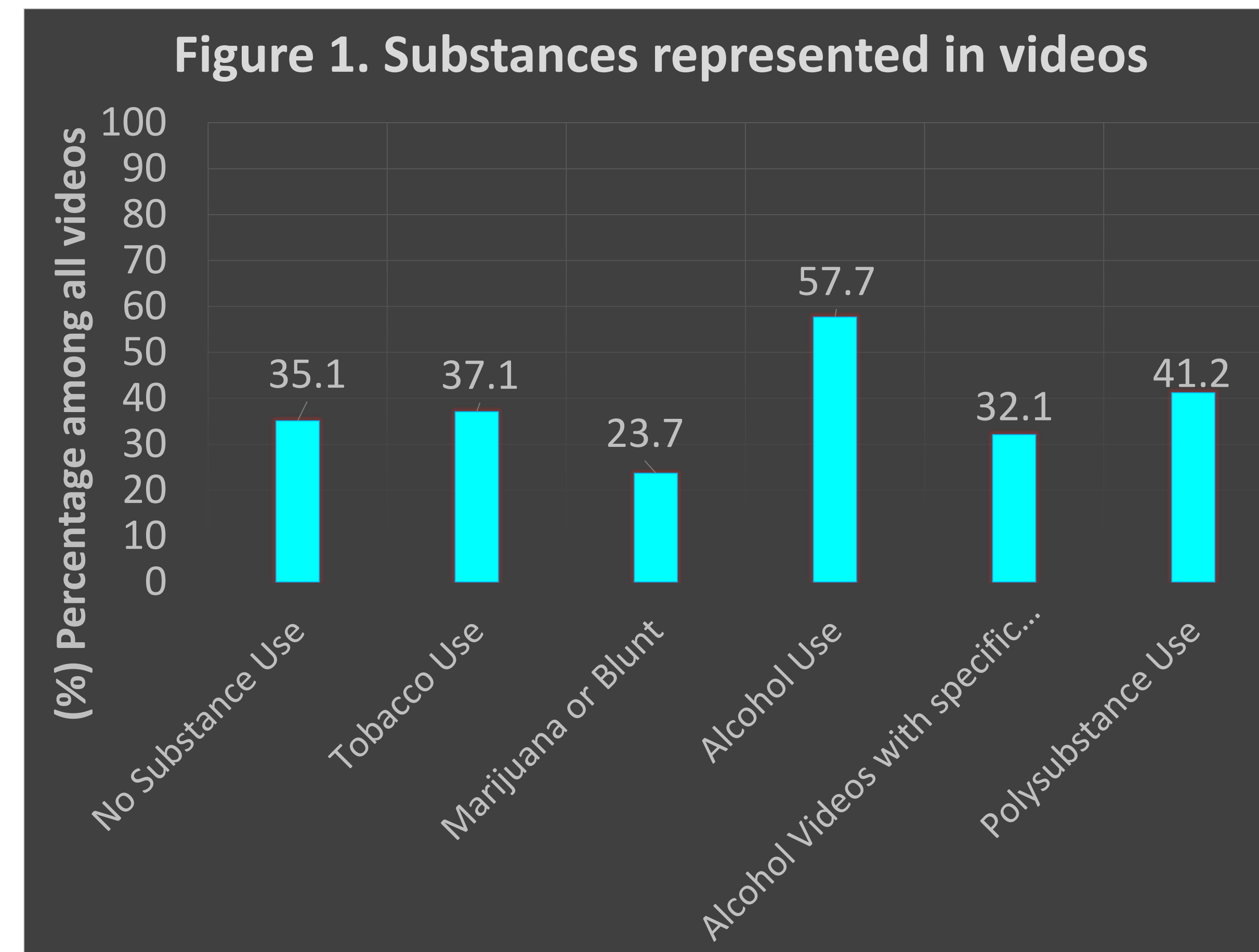
Product Placement of Alcohol in four different music videos



E-Cigarette or Marijuana Use: Gender Differences

## Results

- Out of 97 videos viewed, 63% (n=97) contained at least one substance reference or image.
- Males use wide range of tobacco products (cigar, cigarillo, blunts, hookah, vapes) but females only shown using vapes.
- There were blatant product placement for alcohol brands, specifically: GTV, MYX, Ciroc, Covado, and Zing.
- 56 of the 97 videos viewed (57.7%) contained alcohol scenes.



Party Scene with Multiple Products: Show Me, Kid Ink Ft. Chris Brown



Hookah Use: Hookah, Tyga Ft. Young Thug



Power, Wealth, & Money Symbolism with Substance Use Implied: She Knows, Ne-Yo Ft. Juicy J



Power, Sex, and Gender Differential with Alcohol Use Implied: New Flame, Chris Brown Ft. Usher & Rick Ross

## Discussion

The largely positive portrayals of each of these substances in music videos by popular artists create the positive social norms and environment that promotes the use of these products by youth and young adults.

Of all videos reviewed, none showed any negative health or social consequences for any products used and reinforced positive imagery of product use.

Because there is free and unlimited access to YouTube videos by youth and no regulation on the content of videos, public health practitioners need to address the powerful imagery and social normative influence these videos may have on youth in order to prevent uptake and progression of substance use.

Gender differences appear to show e-cigs/vaping as preferred by females and blunts/marijuana preferred by males.

### Limitations

- Only 57.9% inter-rater agreement. Some disagreement is due to not being able to distinguish tobacco/marijuana products.
- We do not know if the imagery of these substances in these videos are driving norms and perceptions or a reflection of life.

### Future Directions

- Analyzing themes surrounding the use of each product will be useful in gauging norms, expectancies, and attributions which can then be used in prevention messages and programming.
- Additionally doing a content analysis on the lyrics and not just imagery will also contribute to understanding how the norms around these products are being shaped and delivered.