



Substances Gone Social

“I’m sippin’ on promethazine, I can’t put down the cup.” Dave Blunts, a rapper and influencer, released a song called, “The Cup,” about drinking lean that has over 57,000 posts on TikTok and over 7 million streams on Spotify. This song spurred a trend on TikTok, with many social media users posting under this sound, including videos of people showing off their drinks, like a Starbucks coffee or a Taco Bell Baja Blast. Other posts made under the song are about lean.

The Drug and Alcohol Review found

that 13 out of 100 social media posts advertise illegal drugs.

CNN reported that the manufacturers of ZYN are not allowed to advertise on TV or in magazines; however, there are no limits to their ability to advertise on social media through online algorithms, which construct what videos show up based on what the user has liked or shared recently, and with celebrities who back these

products, spiking view counts. According to Google Trends, searches for ZYN rose in January 2024.

ZYN is a brand of nicotine pouches that has grown in use since it entered the market in 2014. The American Lung Association found that in 2023, 400,000 youth used the pouches, which is double the amount that used them in 2021. ZYN users play on the company name, inspiring the terms, “Zynfluencers” and “the Zynternet,” creating jokes about how popular ZYN is on social media. According to The Hub, these brands “highlight



flavors, and all of the pouches have catchy one syllable names. It almost seems like they're trying to make them come off more like a gum rather than an actual nicotine product," an associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine Tory Spindle said. These marketing tactics seem to be working amidst teens, as according to a casual survey from The Muse 10% see it daily, 31% see it weekly, 13% see it monthly, and 31% less than monthly but have seen it before.

"There's been an uptick in reporting (on new drugs) with ZYN out there," US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) head Derek Maltz told The Muse. "These businesses and entrepreneurs and criminals are going to be pushing this stuff on social media because that's where the kids are hanging out."

Lean is a mix of cough syrup, opioids, and other sweeteners. There are hundreds of TikTok videos with instructions on how users can make their own lean since it is a homemade drug. There are also multiple viral

songs on TikTok about using the drug, such as "Codeine Crazy" by Future, which has 167 million listens on Spotify and over 10,000 posts under the song on TikTok, featuring the lyric, "I'm sipping lean when I'm driving." According to Addiction Center, side effects of lean include dental decay, seizures, hallucinations, and impaired vision.

"My best friend is doing ZYNs right now, and I kind of don't like it," junior Brooke Tran* said. "From social media, I learned that what I was doing is actually worse than what I



these substances.

"I'd say ZYN patches got popular on TikTok because a lot of kids were doing them, and it was a better way to not get caught doing nicotine in school," Arturo said. "My friend wanted to do it, and now every time she puts one in her mouth, her gums hurt."

Certain social media creators have spoken about their fondness toward ZYN patches and other drugs. One of these people is Christian Joseph, a seven-year-old influencer known as "The Rizzler" on TikTok who has 1.5 million followers and 35 million likes collectively. He sells a gray T-shirt with the word "RYZ" displayed on a ZYN pack to his viewers. This is a play on the slang term "rizz" and combines it with the ZYN trend on social media. Another promoter of ZYNs online is Tucker Carlson, a conservative political commentator whose podcast was the most popular new show on Apple Podcasts in 2024 according to Apple. He is sometimes called "Tucker Carl-ZYN" because he pushes ZYNs in his content as a masculine drug to his conservative audience.

"It's (the drug issue on social media) probably gotten worse, and I'm sure it's also caused people to start (using drugs) just because of curiosity," senior Gerrit Ksenia* said.

"Whenever I've tried a drug, it's always been like, 'Huh, I wonder what this will do.' Seeing more of it on social media influences that. You're always seeing it, and so it's constantly on your mind all the time."

Galaxy Gas, a hallucinogenic drug and brand of nitrous oxide, has also gone by the names "whippets" and "laughing gas" in the past. Galaxy Gas is labeled as a culinary product and described on the brand's website as "high quality whipped cream chargers and whipped cream dispensers" to flavor whipped cream.

thought."

Yale Medicine said that using ZYN has several short-term side effects

including cavities, gum recession, and lesions that could be cancerous. Healthline pointed out a study that showed that out of 44 nicotine pouches, 26 of them contain tobacco-specific nitrosamines (TSNA's), which the Food Drug Administration labeled as causing a significant cancer risk.

"A lot of these substances have not been around that long," Maltz said. "We don't have extensive research on the long-term effects of these new substances that are appearing."

The National Institute of Drug and Abuse reports that some of the main causes of drug addiction are curiosity and social pressure. According to a recent casual survey from The Muse, 88% of students have seen drug related content on socail media. Sophomore Jennifer Arturo* noticed how some of her friends use ZYN after seeing it on social media apps. She believes these videos are targeting the youth because they are more curious than adults and more likely to try

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-National Library of Medicine

It is sold on the product's website, Walmart's website, and Amazon, and it can be found at various gas stations. The creators of Galaxy Gas's claims that the product is of culinary use have been drawn into question with it being sold in flavors such as Mango Smoothie, Watermelon Lemonade, and Vanilla Cupcake. The Alcohol and Drug Foundation found that inhaling nitrous oxide can cause memory loss, limb spasms, numbness, nausea, and an increase in heart rate. According to Google Trends, between July and October of 2024 when the TikTok trend was taking place, searches for Galaxy Gas spiked.

"A lot of times, I'll be scrolling on TikTok, and I'll get a video of someone doing Galaxy Gas, or it'll be of someone talking about ZYNs or ways to quit nicotine stuff," Tran said.

The National Association of Boards of Pharmacy explained how social media algorithms are intended to make sure that users stay on the app longer. If users like, share, or search a video about a trend regarding drugs, more of these videos will appear on their pages because the algorithm is pushing more drug-related content.

"They (teenagers) see it so often on their social media platforms," Arturo said. "Whether they have that algorithm or not, it's just there. It's always present."

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"I think social media is making it (the issue of drugs) worse because it's become a widespread joke that we (teenagers) want to be a part of," Ksenia said. "They (anti-drug videos) are important, but we learn to disregard them. It's pretty easy to just ignore it because we've also been taught to ignore other things on social media."

**names are anonymous*

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Drug - Related Music and Their Streams

"Fe!n" - Travis Scott - 1 billion

The song repeats the word Fein referring to someone who is addicted to a substance and willing to do anything to get more of it.

"Lean With Me" - Juice WRLD - 984 million

The song tells a story about a man who is aware drugs such as lean are bad for him, but is ignoring the dangers because he cannot give up the feeling of being high.

"Codeine Dreaming" - Kodak Black (Featuring Lil Wayne) - 335 million

The song is about the types of highs from substances such as codeine and other drugs and how it can give you a feeling of being out of this world.

"Codeine Crazy" - Future - 167 million

The song is about how after a breakup from his girlfriend he drowns out his sorrows using lean, causing a dependence on the drug.

"SS" - Ken Carson - 110 million

The song is about bragging of his celebrity lifestyle including how often he uses lean, codeine, and pills.

"The Cup" - Dave Blunts - 7 million

The song is about how after he tries promethazine he creates an addiction causing him to never be able to put down the cup and how this lifestyle brought him to a life of wealth and violence.
