

An exploration of the impact of social media on the drinking behaviour of students at University College Jersey

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Background

Kuntsche et al., (2023), found that 28-99% of participants within their study posted alcohol-related content, promoting drinking. Lukács et al., (2013), found that more than 90% of university students consume alcohol, with higher alcohol abuse in male students than female students. Balsa, Giuliano and French, (2011), found that having average or above-average academic performance decreases significantly as the frequency of alcohol consumption increases. Ng Fat, Cable and Kelly, (2021), found that social media use was predictive of increased drink and binge eating among youths and young adults. Atusingwize et al.'s (2022) findings indicated that those who reported high alcohol related social media use were 6.46 times more likely to be a regular drinker than those reporting no alcohol related social media use. Strowger, Braitman, and Barnett's (2022) found that higher engagement with network members who post alcohol-related content was statistically significantly associated with having more drinks per week ($p = 0.031$). O'Shields and Baldwin-White's (2022) found Snapchat was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) when associated with the amount of alcohol consumed in an episode of drinking, and use of this platform. Graupensperger et al.'s (2023) study explored how exposure to alcohol-related media content is associated with heavy episodic drinking. Their findings indicated that negative portrayals of alcohol related content could be a risk for increased negative consequences as they may normalise or glorify alcohol behaviour. Davis, Desmarais and Giguère's (2024) found that after exposure to risk-taking alcohol-related videos, participants perceived drinking norms differently. Boyle et al. (2016) examined how viewing alcohol-related content during the first six weeks of college influenced viewers' alcohol consumption during the second trimester. Snapchat and Facebook alcohol-related media exposure in T1 was found to be statistically significant in predicting drinks per week in T2 ($p < 0.001$).

Research Problem

It is clear from the research that alcohol consumption can be influenced by what is viewed on social media. Alcohol consumption among students can affect their overall academic performance. My research study focused on how social media influences drinking behaviour within this population. This study supports the need for exploration of how Jersey students are being affected by social media and alcohol-related content. From this identified research problem, a research question has been posed using the PICO framework to help structure it. The PICO framework refers to population (sample of subjects that you wish to recruit), intervention (the treatment that will be provided), comparison (what you plan on using as a reference group to compare with your intervention), outcome (what result you plan on measuring) and time (duration for data collection) (Riva et al., 2012).

Methodology

Research Question

What is the impact of social media on the drinking behaviour of students aged 18 to 30 at University College Jersey ?

Research Aim

The research aimed to investigate the influence of social media content on alcohol consumption among university students.

Research Objectives

- To explore what type of alcohol-related content students encounter and view on social media platforms;
- To explore how viewing peer posts related to alcohol consumption influences and impacts student's own drinking behaviour and intentions;
- To examine the influence of part and fully alcohol-related content on students' perceptions of normal or acceptable drinking levels;
- To explore social media influenced drinking behaviour among different demographic groups, including gender, age and course.

Research Philosophy

The research focused on drinking habits influenced by social media, and these are quantifiable behaviours. Positivism aligns with the objectives in the proposed research and predicts relationships between social media and drinking behaviour considering the variables gender, age and degree course. Positivism is characterised by a systematic and structured approach to research and emphasises generalisability (Bryman, 2016). This fitted well with the research aims and objectives.

Methodology

The methodology that best fits with the philosophy of positivism is quantitative research as it relies on structure and objectivity. It allows for objective measuring of the relationships between variables. Survey research was the quantitative methodology of choice.

Data collection methods

Surveys are a structured tool that can enable the collection of numerical data. An online survey was used. Surveys are a good way to test hypotheses as they can target a large population' (Meerkerk, Edelenbos and Klijn, 2019, p.67). They have the benefit of being able to be distributed to a large number of participants from different demographic groups. The use of structured closed questions and measurable scales can ensure consistency in responses which minimises subjective interpretation. This is important in quantitative research to minimise bias (Ong and Weiss, 2000).

Data analysis methods

The initial plan was to use inferential statistics to explore a causal relationship and correlation between social media and alcohol consumption behaviour. A low response rate (not uncommon in survey research) meant it was more appropriate to use simple descriptive statistical analysis to summarise the individual variables within the data. Descriptive statistics are suitable because they can be used to summarise data in an organised manner. Yellapu (2018), states that survey data can be condensed to allow for assessing populations in a more manageable form through percentages. This method allowed for results to be presented in charts and graphs for ease of understanding.

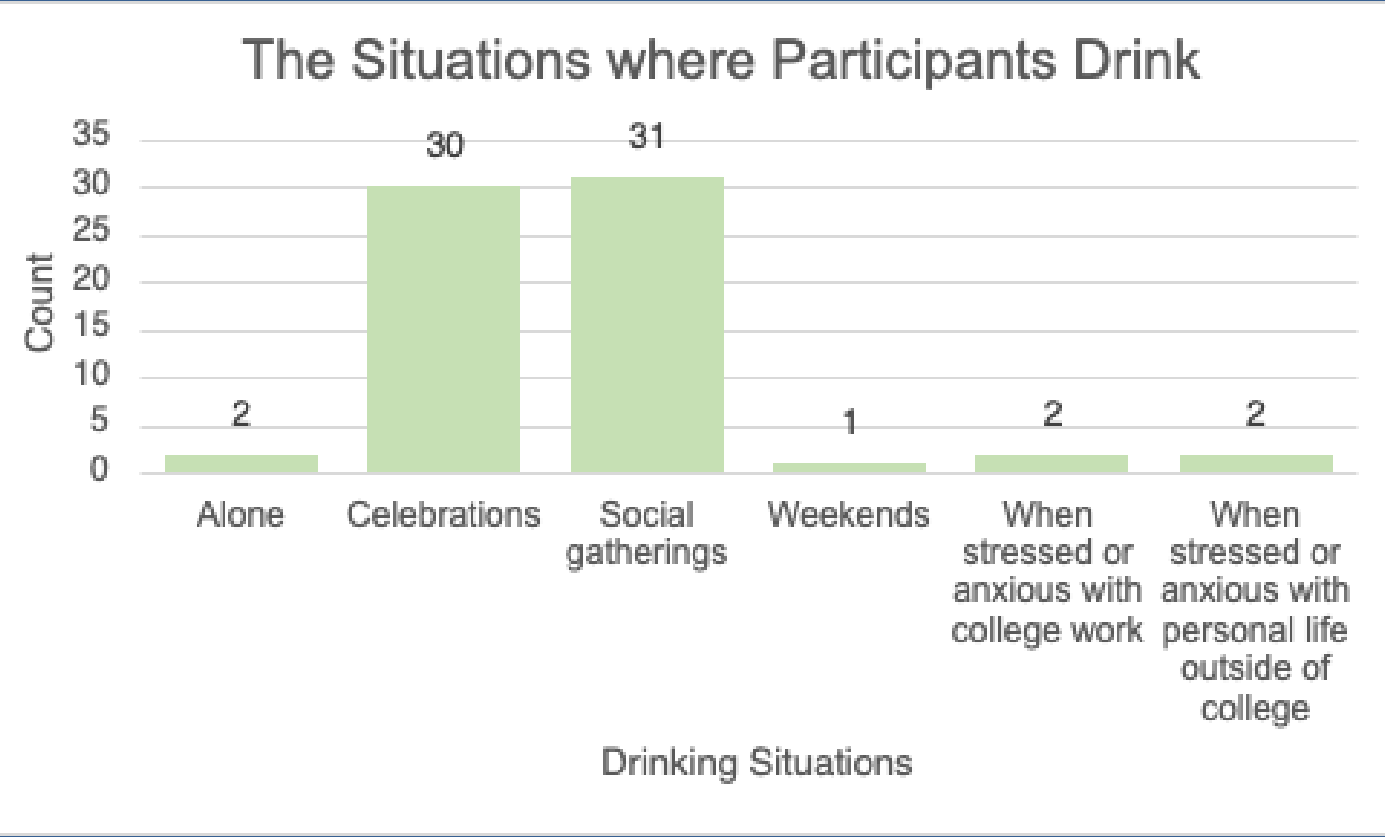
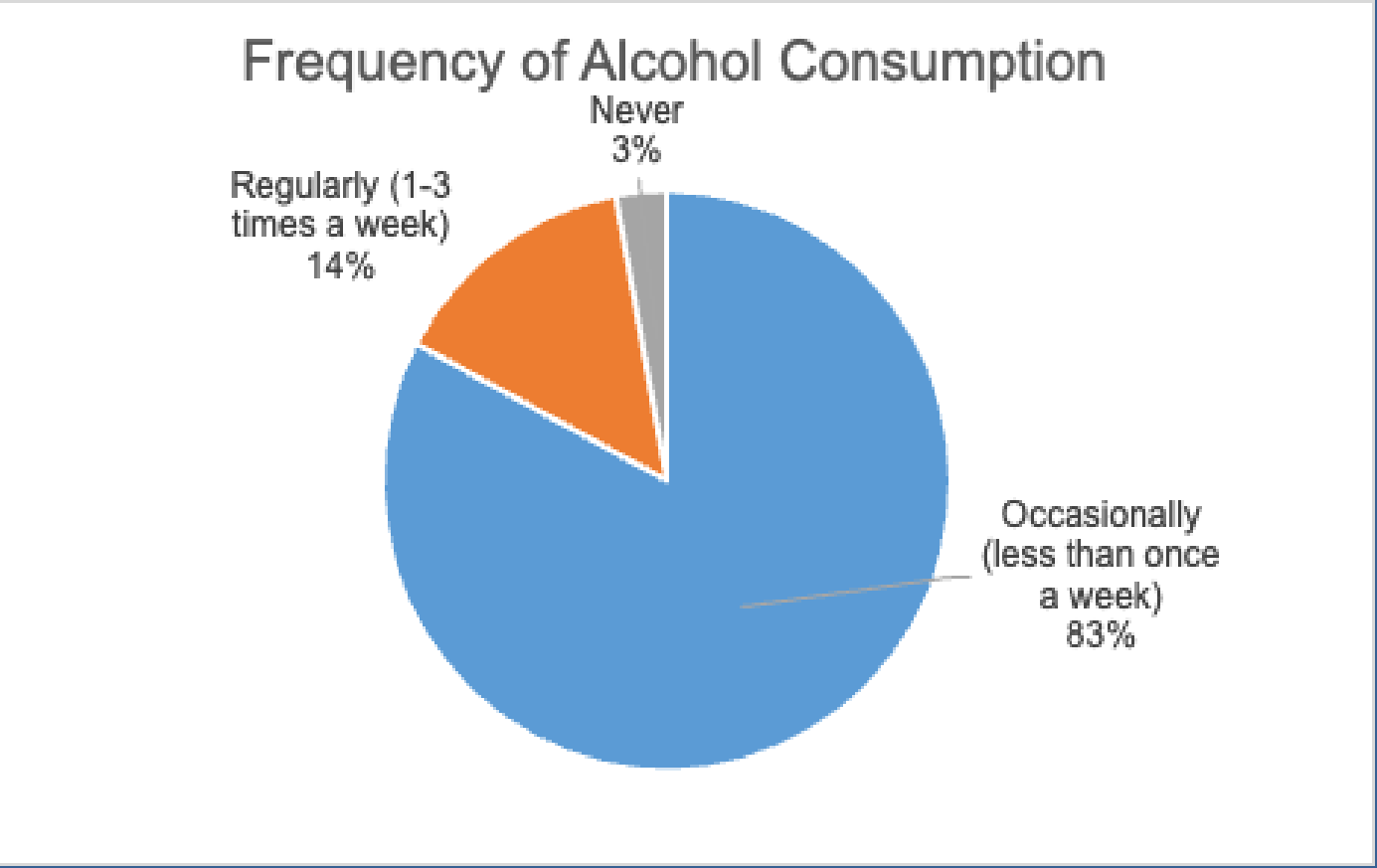
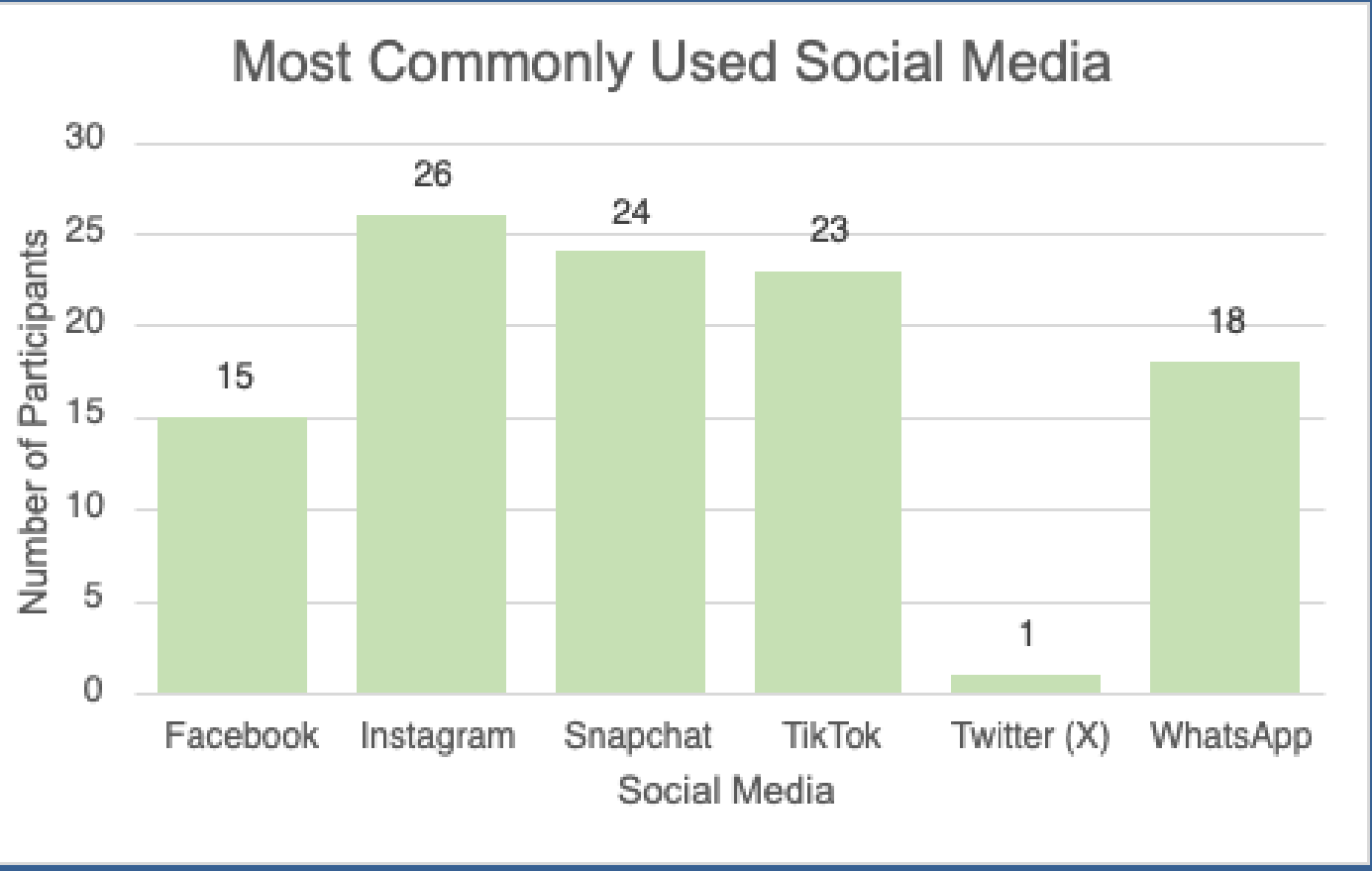
Results

Age and Gender of Eligible Participants

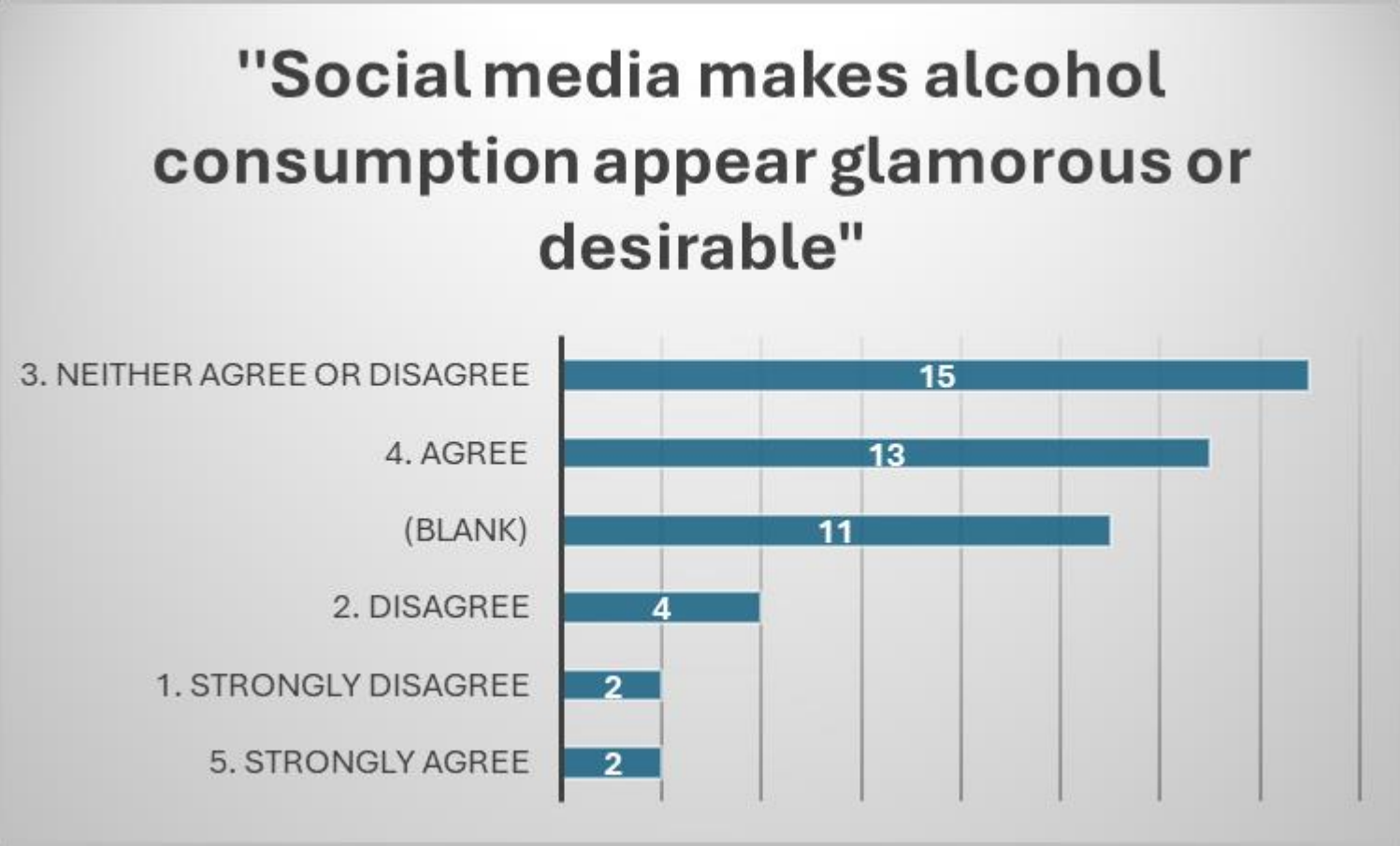
Age	Female	Male
18-21	15	5
22-25	3	2
Over 25	8	2
Total	26	9

Year of Study and Hours Spent on Social Media Per Day

Hours per day	First year	Second year	Third year	Total
1-3 hours	3	6	4	13
4-6 hours	3	3	7	13
Less than 1 hour	0	1	3	4
More than 6 hours	4	0	1	6
Total	10	10	15	35



Results



Implications and Recommendations

- As the response rate was low, and it would not have been valid to analyse the data using inferential statistics, it was not possible to conclude a relationship between social media use and alcohol consumption. However, the research did offer some useful baseline data that can be used to justify a larger study over a longer period of time.
- While previous literature does report on some link between social media use and alcohol consumption, albeit not a causal relationship, the findings are suggestive of some trends towards increased drinking where social media has glamorised this.
- Whether influenced by social media or not, alcohol consumption remains an issue in young people, and support should still be put in place, particularly in university settings, where stress levels may be high and they may be more susceptible to developing detrimental habits (Emran et al., 2024).
- The findings add to the literature surrounding the influence of social media on alcohol consumption in university students. The unexpected non-influence of social media on alcohol consumption provides a different view of the population in comparison to previous studies.
- This suggests the need for further research within the population to ensure results are representative and generalisable, as well as to ensure a better understanding of alcohol consumption in university students.
- There is a case to explore UCJ students as a separate and unique population to UK university students.

References

