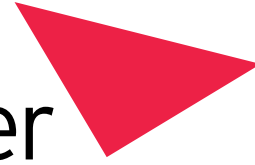


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Is the Future of Sobriety Event-Full?

A Critical Investigation of the Potential Effectiveness of Sober
Events as Alcohol Consumption Reduction Initiatives for Gen Z
Adults in Scotland.

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Abstract

This dissertation aims to assess the potential of sober events as an effective initiative to encourage alcohol consumption reduction in Gen Z adults (18 – 28) in Scotland. To achieve this, it explores young adults' views on alcohol, current related policies, and their effectiveness. Research was conducted on experiences of sober events' attendees to examine whether their attitudes toward sobriety were influenced by participation.

Generation Z has shown the lowest alcohol consumption rates compared to any previous generation (Corre et al., 2022). Simultaneously, there has been a rise of sober events happening, offering alcohol-free entertainment. This time correlation suggests a connection between these two social observations. There is no existing literature on sober events and their effects. Investigating this area can bring valuable insight into young adults' attitudes and what initiatives encourage change for this social group.

An extensive literature review was conducted, critically analysing independent studies and governmental publications to provide a wider context of alcohol consumption in Scotland, related policies in place, and sober trends among Generation Z. Research gaps were identified in age-specific statistics and studies on the effects of alcohol misuse among young adults.

Primary research of the study was designed using a qualitative approach and aligned to the interpretative philosophy. Non-probability and convenience sampling was used to recruit research participants. Eight young adults aged 22 – 28 who have attended a sober event in the past were recruited. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with research participants. It was later coded and analysed using Thematic Analysis and findings were built upon the Grounded Theory.

Upon findings, the sample participants were found to be sceptical of alcohol and highly aware of its negative health and social impacts. They felt discouraged by extensive drinking and expressed disapproval of the heavy Scottish drinking culture. Most

participants had a casual or social relationship with alcohol, main influencing factors were identified as health concerns, addiction awareness, and self-control. Interviewees found current policies aimed at alcohol harm reduction generally ineffective. They showed strong distrust towards the government's intentions which results in scepticism regarding any political campaigns. No significant changes in attitudes toward sobriety were related to attending a sober event by participants. However, all of them felt encouraged to attend more alcohol-free events in the future. Therefore, sober events were identified as encouraging alternatives to drinking for Gen Z adults. Derived from background research and primary findings are three recommendations for governments on how to effectively target Gen Z in future campaigns. It is recommended the government shifts focus from a limitations-oriented strategy to providing more alternatives to drinking. Considering the inherent distrust toward governmental campaigns, initiatives should be executed through independent organisations financed from the government. Creating more sober spaces available in the evenings and organising more sober events aimed at young adults in Edinburgh are believed to provide sufficient alternatives, effectively encouraging alcohol consumption reduction. Support toward widening the market of non-alcoholic drinks was identified as contributing to minimising isolation rates and encouraging sobriety exploration.

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1. Introduction

Sober events are an increasing theme in the entertainment sector, offering alcohol-free social environments. The concept emerged alongside recently observed reduction in alcohol consumption among Generation Z (people born between 1997 – 2012) (Corre et al., 2022). Because of the recency of this field, little academic research has been carried out so far. There is currently no definition of a sober event. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the author defines a sober event as:

“Any event that does not serve alcohol. This includes events with strict No Alcohol Permitted (NAP) policies and events labelled as Bring Your Own Beverage (BYOB)”

This dissertation aims to explore the influences of these events on Gen Z adults’ attitudes toward sobriety and assess whether they can serve as an initiative to encourage alcohol consumption reduction. The sample group was narrowed to the adult population of Gen Z to remain relevancy of the aim, while keeping the research process ethical. Gen Z adults include people aged 18 – 28 at the time of the study (2025).

This chapter provides a background to the topic and justifies the research rationale. The research aim and objectives are established and serve as a reference for further evaluation.

1.1 Research Rationale

What sparked interest for investigating this academic field, was the observation of an increase in sobriety awareness in the author’s environment. Upon initial research, the author realised the recency of this trend and an opportunity to conduct meaningful work. The research area being new means multiple field gaps and unidentified themes. The author narrowed the topic to realistic possibilities of research within time, location, and

research sample constraints. This dissertation investigates an important social issue of alcohol consumption and its harms. Exploring the ways they can be minimised will benefit policy makers in creating more effective health campaigns. Moreover, understanding young adults' behaviours and attitudes will help effectively target the issues they might be facing, contributing to a potential improvement of their quality of life.

1.2 Background to the study

Generation Z has shown the highest rates of sobriety compared to any previous generation (Burgess et al., 2022). Researchers theorise about different reasons for this major social change in attitudes – higher health awareness (Caluzzi, 2021a), changes in parenting styles (Vashishta et al., 2019), or the technological revolution (Room et al., 2019). Alongside changing approaches, the ways in which this generation is influenced also shift. There is a significant lack of research on the true consequences of alcohol consumption on the population of young adults who do drink. Current social and political campaigns were found to not target young adults effectively (Törrönen et al., 2019). Therefore, if the decreasing drinking rates are to continue, it is crucial to understand what approaches appeal to Generation Z. The simultaneous rise of sober events suggests a connection link. This creates an opportunity for exploration whether sober events can contribute or serve as a tool to alcohol consumption and harm reduction for this social group.

1.3 Study Aim and Objectives

Based on the identified research gap and the rationale for this study, the following research aim is formulated:

“To examine how attending sober events influences attitudes toward sobriety among young adults (18 - 28) in Scotland and assess their potential as an initiative to encourage alcohol consumption reduction.”

To achieve this aim, four research objectives are set:

1. To explore young adults' views on alcohol consumption.
2. To examine young adults' views on current governmental policies aimed at reducing alcohol consumption.
3. To assess whether attending sober events influences shifts in attitudes toward sobriety among young adults and explore if they appeal as an alternative to drinking.
4. To provide recommendations for governments on how to effectively appeal to young adults in alcohol consumption and harm reduction campaigns.

Achieving each of these objectives will allow for the accomplishment of the research aim and contribute to the existing literature within the relevant academic fields.

2. Literature Review

This chapter provides a critical analysis of existing literature which allows for a broader context of the study and its necessity. Scottish drinking culture is explored to provide an understanding into the nation's current relationship with alcohol, including concerning statistics for alcohol-related harm. With limited existing research, various legislations and third-sector publications are analysed and contrasted with governmental goals. This will act as a benchmark for further findings on young adults' opinions on current alcohol policies. Lastly, this chapter attempts to examine the rising numbers of sobriety and sober curiosity among Gen Z adults and understand reasons behind them. Accomplishment of this review will provide an insight into the potential improvements for the effectiveness of campaigns targeting Gen Z on encouraging alcohol consumption reduction.

2.1 Alcohol Consumption

Alcohol is a highly intoxicating and addictive psychoactive substance which was concluded to be the top risk factor for the burden of disease among people aged 15 – 49 (Murray et al., 2020). Europe remains the heaviest drinking region in the world (WHO, 2018), and European young adults (20 – 24) were found to be the leading social group to practice heavy episodic drinking (Murray et al., 2020). Although this group is visibly at risk, young adults are often excluded from alcohol harm research. As explored later, an analysis of alcohol harm commissioned by the Scottish Government identifies this group to be at risk yet undertakes no further research or adequate actions. Public health organisations continue to research the impacts of alcohol consumption on human health, working alongside authorities to tackle alcohol misuse and high numbers of related harm and deaths. However, to introduce successful policies and campaigns, it is crucial to understand the role and severity of alcohol in people's lives. Governments must stay inclusive of social groups highly at risk like young people or those with an alcohol dependency. To successfully address alcohol harm, its continuous and prominent position in society must be understood.

2.2 Alcohol in Society

The role of alcohol in social settings is prevalent. Researchers continuously attempt to assess how alcohol consumption affects social interactions, yet the results have been contradictory. Although there is a long-standing, general belief that alcohol enhances social interactions (Fairbarin and Sayette, 2014), some academics argue that these effects are ostensible. Steele and Josephs (1990) suggest a theory of Alcohol Myopia – the effects of alcohol consumption on one’s perceptions and thoughts. “Together with distraction, alcohol can forge a highly reinforcing and reliable diversion tactic for all drinkers, a means of effectively keeping one’s mind off one’s worries” (p. 932). Therefore, alcohol consumption will only enhance social interactions in particular settings. This explains why some research finds alcohol to play the opposite role, causing more distress and anxiety (Johnson, 2016). Event environments are particularly likely to nurture this occurrence. Although they might cause social anxiety, they offer a range of highly stimulative distractions.

Alcohol is often used as an example of a social lubricant – “a mechanism to ease feelings of anxiety and nervousness during social interactions” (Monahan and Lannutti, 2000, p. 175). With these qualities, they are used to increase conversationality and quality of social interactions (Simmons, 2015). Such use of alcohol has been found to be particularly helpful for people struggling with social anxiety, moderating the disorder’s effects upon consumption (Goodman et al., 2018). Fairbairn and Sayette (2014) argue that this is influenced by the tendency of alcohol to free people of worry from social rejection. Although this practice might bring immediate social rewards, it can contribute towards addiction development (Monahan and Lannutti, 2000; Goodman et al., 2018). Burgess et al. (2022) find Generation Z to be more prone to these disorders than any previous generations. Therefore, it is ever more important to address how these issues influence this social group.

2.3 Alcohol Consumption in Scotland

Alcohol has played a predominant role in the Scottish culture. Cook (2015) explores how deeply rooted the drinking culture in Scotland is, and the role of pubs in shaping the everyday lives of Scottish people over the last three centuries. The author provides an understanding of its extremity and the reasons behind it. He shows how they have ultimately led to alcohol being a significant part of the Scottish identity. In the book's review, Brown (2015) suggests: "In a nation characterised for so long by a poverty in the built environment, with poor quality construction and small homes, public spaces were at a premium". Therefore pubs, which in this case are synonymous with alcohol consumption, strongly contributed to shaping people's everyday lives.

In 1991, Pendleton et al. reported alcohol being mentioned in the national television every 6 minutes of programming. Jernigan et al. (2017) found young people to be especially affected by alcohol marketing. Furthermore, Gill's (2002) research found majority of undergraduate students in Scotland indulging in excessive drinking at least once, which often resulted in acts of violence or being injured (Delk and Meilman, 1996). In 2008, 57% of adults aged 18 – 24 found binge drinking acceptable (Gordon et al., 2008). Marks Wolfson and Maguire (2010) assessed that although students were aware of health implications related to alcohol consumption, it did not discourage them from heavy drinking. Their positive attitudes towards alcohol shaped their continuously excessive consumption behaviours.

Nowadays, Scotland still struggles with high alcohol consumption rates and their consequences. In 2023, 1 in 5 people drank more than the Chief Medical Officer's low-risk guidelines (Alcohol Focus Scotland, 2024a), and 1277 people lost their lives to conditions caused by alcohol alone (not including alcohol attributable diseases) (National Records of Scotland, 2024). Compared to England, Scottish men and women aged 16 – 34 had the highest scores of having drunk over 8 units of alcohol in the past week (Scottish Centre for Social Research, 2010) Although the City of Edinburgh has lower alcohol death rates than Scotland in general, in 2023, 89 people died solely because of

alcohol, and 2,040 were admitted to hospitals (Alcohol Focus Scotland, 2024b). Although Gordon et al. (2008) proved young adults to be at high risk of engaging in harmful alcohol consumption, none of the current statistics are age specified.

In 2022, the general public's opinion on alcohol was that the Scottish heavy drinking culture is harmful and is one of the country's worst attributes (ScotCen Social Research, 2023). Yet, over the years, non-drinkers have been facing stigma and were found to often decide on breaking their abstinence in social settings, fearful of being perceived as "odd" (Gordon, 2008; ScotCen Social Research, 2023). Alcohol consumption and misuse in Scotland have been increasing since the 1950s (Scottish Government, 2009). This pattern and the continuity of the issue suggest the inequality in accessing healthcare and the stigma related to seeking addiction support (ScotCen Social Research, 2023). This matter seems to be widely omitted by governmental bodies and there is little data identifying the real burden of alcohol abuse. In 2009, the Scottish Government released a document "Changing Scotland's Relationship with Alcohol: A Framework for Action". Recognising that 50% of men and 30% of women in Scotland were exceeding the weekly consumption limits, the document states that the government is not anti-alcohol but anti-alcohol misuse. The framework fails to recognise age patterns of these statistics which would provide an insight into what social groups need the most support. Regarding the Scottish whisky heritage, the following statement is given: "The Scottish Government welcomes this positive aspect of our relationship with alcohol" (p. 6). The revised publication in 2018 reevaluates this approach and states the government will not work with the industry unless necessary (Scottish Government, 2018). However, neither of these governmental publications recognise or address the social groups that need the most support. Data on the percentage of citizens exceeding the weekly consumption limits should be investigated deeper and age-specific research applied. Understanding who is most at risk allows for a curation of adequate and successful support systems.

2.4 Alcohol Policies in Scotland

The most known and prominent governmental attempts to tackle alcohol misuse in Scotland are the Licensing Act 2005, the Alcohol Act 2010, and the Alcohol Minimum Unit Pricing Scotland Act (MUP) 2012. These legislations regulate alcohol sales and aim to limit the accessibility of alcohol. The Licensing Act 2005 and the Alcohol Act 2010 ban multi-buy discounts, regulate where and when alcohol can be sold, and to whom. Although the 2018 Framework suggests a balanced approach to preventing and reducing alcohol-related harm (Scottish Government, 2018), the government's actions have been predominantly focusing on decreasing the affordability and accessibility of alcohol. MUP, passed in 2012 and put into action in 2018, sets out a minimum price for every unit of alcohol sold which currently stands at 65 pence (Scottish Government, 2024). Its initial implementation and the 2024 increase from 50 pence sparked controversy among the public and the academics.

In 2023 Public Health Scotland (PHS) released a synthesis of evidence on the impacts of MUP in Scotland. Although the publication used a mix of independent and internal studies, it was commissioned by the Scottish Government, which might create bias. PHS deemed the policy implementation as generally successful, having reached the goal of reducing alcohol-related deaths in Scotland. This decrease was noted in people aged 35+ and those living in deprived areas. Upon this finding, no further investigation was carried out to explore the policy's impacts on people aged under 35. There is significantly less attention paid to the negative effects of MUP which might be caused by limited research available and potential bias. Wyper et al. (2023) relate MUP with increases in deaths and hospital admissions due to acute conditions. They connect these results with misplacement of spending on food versus alcohol and switching from low-percentage drinks to spirits. However, the authors fail to investigate this data any further and conclude MUP to be mostly successful. Similarly to the PHS synthesis, this research was funded by the Scottish Government.

In contrast, Nguyen et al. (2024) argue that although a decline in consumption of moderate drinkers was observed, no change was noted for drinkers consuming alcohol in hazardous amounts. Although the research was limited to household-level surveys, the study underwent a thorough comparison analysis to understand the Scottish drinkers' patterns of drinking over time. Together with the publication being independent from the government, this method offers more honest results. It provides qualitative data over quantitative numbers taken from alcohol sales rates and purchase data, widely used in the PHS synthesis. These were used to estimate the overall alcohol consumption drop rates and were limited to officially reported sales. Johnston et al. (2012) argue that alcohol-related harm tends to affect those in deprived areas more, and heavy and disadvantaged drinkers felt more anxious about the implementation of the policy (O'May et al., 2016). Similarly, Holmes (2023) questions the effectiveness and consequences of this policy on people at the highest risk i.e., individuals with an alcohol dependency.

In their exploration of alcohol pricing impacts on young adults in Scotland, Seaman et al. (2013) highlight the diversity and individuality of this social group (aged 16 – 30). Using focus groups, the authors found ambivalent results among respondents. While some participants expressed discouragement from increased prices of alcohol, others shared they would turn toward cheaper alternatives, often including illicit drugs and alcohol. Understanding the nature of young adults as a social group, the article provides necessary criticism of implementing universal policies to tackle a nation-focused issue. The government states to take on a 'whole population' approach yet undertakes no further research upon finding MUP ineffective for people under 35 (Scottish Government, 2018). The 2023 PHS synthesis lacked in depth research into specific social groups like young adults, vulnerable persons, or those with an alcohol dependency to fully indicate the effectiveness of MUP. This gap in research unbares the identification of this policy's effects on these social groups. That poses a risk for the development of unmanaged negative outcomes like higher poverty rates or increased use of illicit drugs.

2.5 Alcohol Marketing

There is strong evidence of associations between levels of exposure to alcohol marketing and increased consumption behaviours in adolescents and young adults (Jernigan et al., 2017). Various types of marketing and media sources were found to directly encourage people under 25 to start or increase engaging in alcohol consumption (Finan et al., 2020).

A prominent part of the Scotland's relationship with alcohol is the country's whisky heritage. This topic contributes to a deeper understanding behind the government's true intentions toward reducing alcohol-related harm. Appendix A provides a literature review of alcohol marketing in Scotland and current regulations in place. Appendix B completes it with young adults' opinions on this issue and recommendations which emerged from the primary research.

2.6 Sober Trends

Over the past 15 years, young adults' drinking rates have been declining globally (Corre et al., 2022; Burgess, 2022). Health Survey datasets for people aged 16 – 24, over the period of 2005 – 2015 in England showed an 11% increase in abstinence rates, and a 15% decrease in alcohol consumption over the past week (Ng Fat et al., 2018). Although this research was limited to England, it contributes to the recognition of early stages of the global decline in alcohol consumption amongst young adults.

Compared with previous generations, Gen Z adults continue to abstain from alcohol to an even greater extent (Burgess et al., 2022). However, studies on this social group's drinking behaviours found that governmental policies and alcohol price increases have little influence over their alcohol consumption choices (Lintonen et al., 2013; Svensson and Andersson, 2016; Trollid, 2020). A further exploration of this social trend and motives behind it can provide valuable insight which can serve as a benchmark for crafting more successful public health campaigns (Cooper, 1994; Corre et al., 2022).

Researchers continue attempting to establish the reasons behind the sudden drops in alcohol consumption rates among young adults. Mansson et al. (2020) argue for these behaviours to be performative and predict heavier drinking in later stages of life. However, this study was limited to a narrow age bracket (17 – 21) and comes from outside of alcohol-related literature.

A more viable theory suggests healthism (a strong focus to a healthy lifestyle) to be a major factor for young adults' consumption choices (Caluzzi et al., 2021a). The study found Gen Z to be more concerned about the negative health outcomes, as opposed to the previous generations. They were also observed to be more cautious of long-term consequences like chronic conditions, brain damage, and addiction. This shows a significant generational shift in attitudes toward alcohol when contrasted with similar studies from the past. In comparison, research from the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s show that although young adults were aware of alcohol-related health consequences, it did not stop them from excessive binge drinking (Moore et al., 1994; Gill, 2002; Marks Wolfson and Maguire, 2010).

Robust evidence was found in shifting parental practices as a contributing factor. These account for domestic alcohol-specific rule setting (Vashishta et al., 2019), family drinking amounts and patterns, higher awareness of alcohol-attributable harm amongst families (Caluzzi et al., 2021b), and the quality of alcohol-specific communication between parents and children (Caluzzi et al., 2022).

At the same time, some researchers suggest that the rapid technological revolution strongly contributes towards this social trend. Young people spend more time online where they can connect with others without leaving the comfort of their homes. This limits opportunities for social gatherings where alcohol would usually be present (Room et al., 2019; Luomanen and Alasuutari, 2022).

Most of the early literature trying to understand the decrease in alcohol consumption among Gen Z analyses it as a positive social change with the context of health attitude and lifestyle shifts. Burgess et al. (2022) put this social trend into a wider perspective. The authors draw on underlying impacts of previously studied explanations. Through globalisation, Generation Z has been pressured into individuality and facing an uncertain socio-economic and political future worldwide. Young adults are constantly exposed to global news and issues, facing high amounts of anxiety daily. The authors assess the constant isolation and hyperawareness of surroundings to be strong factors impacting the generation-wide low drinking rates. They theorise Gen Z's abstinence and moderate or low consumption might be perceived as the few things they have control over. Similarly, Kaylor et al. 2022 point at the struggles that the Generation Z was brought up with. Social reforms and increased diversity, contrasted with climate change and increased violence created the view of a 'broken world'. The authors theorise these factors contributed to a general distrust in governments and the Gen Z's belief of having to save themselves and others. Moreover, changes in social norms like gender identity, freedom of expression, and freedom of speech target stereotypical attitudes towards drinking (Törrönen et al., 2019). As these trends rise, there are many emerging themes to investigate. Understanding these generational changes sets a background for the primary research of this study and contributes to the research aim by identifying how Gen Z adults are influenced.

3. Methodology

This chapter analyses different research methods and methodologies. Although these terms are often used synonymously, definitions from Saunders et al. (2019) are adapted to provide a more critical and clear approach. The authors suggest using 'research methods' for techniques used to collect and analyse data, meanwhile defining 'research methodology' as 'the theory of how research should be undertaken' (p. 4). This distinction provides a deeper understanding of research approaches and contributes toward a clear justification of the research design of this study.

All choices are directly linked and based on the research objectives of this study. These are the following:

1. To explore young adults' views on alcohol consumption.
2. To examine young adults' views on current governmental policies aimed at reducing alcohol consumption.
3. To assess whether attending sober events influences shifts in attitudes toward sobriety among young adults and explore if they appeal as an alternative to drinking.
4. To provide recommendations for governments on how to effectively appeal to young adults in alcohol consumption and harm reduction campaigns.

The following chapter is divided into sections, each addressing crucial matters on conducting research.

3.1 Secondary Research

An analysis of secondary sources provides an in-depth understanding of existing literature and allows to set accurate context for primary research (Strang, 2015). It will be used as a benchmark to analyse primary findings from data collection. A critical review of existing literature was carried out to establish what is already known in the field of study. It allowed to assess areas where there is lack of research which justifies the need for this study (Fisher, 2010). Various databases were used to gather sources, including Google Scholar, Edinburgh Napier University Library, and its partnering universities' datasets through interlibrary loan services. Due to the recency of the topic in academia, the number of available sources was limited. On top of academic papers, governmental publications and relevant policies were analysed. This careful background research strongly contributed to the formulation of primary research method contents. A broad context of existing literature identified missing information which supported the shaping of interview questions.

3.2 Primary Research

3.2.1 Research Philosophy

Amongst various philosophical approaches to research, the topic of study and its objectives can serve as a direction towards identifying the most adequate theory (Saunders et al., 2019). To choose the most suitable approach, researchers must gain a wider context of existing philosophies and stay critical of their benefits and limitations (Wilson and Stuart, 2014).

For this study, an interpretative approach is believed to provide the most robust findings. The interpretative philosophy offers an open discourse of findings which improves their accuracy to the topic (Adams et al., 2007). An interpretative researcher acknowledges

the complexity behind one's beliefs and how they are influenced by external factors (Saunders et al., 2019).

However, a serious limitation of this philosophy is the collected data being deciphered by the researcher. It poses a risk of the researcher's existing beliefs subconsciously influencing their understanding of data. This might result in inaccuracy between research findings and research participants' true meanings. In contrast, a realist approach could minimise the possibility of that implication. As it is based on variables collected through quantitative research methods, it would provide more direct and clear results (Strang, 2015), less dependent on interpretation.

Nonetheless, this approach is believed to be unsuitable for achieving the aim of this research. This study intends to explore personal views and experiences which can be discovered more meaningfully through qualitative methods. A quantitative approach would strongly limit the detail and depth of data, resulting in a significant gap in findings (Fisher, 2010). A realist approach is often based on a pre-existing theory or thesis which is purposefully omitted in this study, as limited number of related theories exist due to the recency of the topic.

Understanding that personal opinions derive from one's past experiences and debates with oneself and others (Fisher, 2010), the study will therefore benefit from the dialogic nature of an interpretative approach to research. To share their views with the researcher, participants were likely to have already established attitudes toward the researched topic. This allows for more freedom and authenticity of findings, as opposed to research based on a pre-chosen theory (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.2.2 Research Type

An interpretative research philosophy is commonly connected to a qualitative research type (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Based on the broadness of the research subject and an aim to explore views and opinions, qualitative research will provide the most robust

findings. A mixed research approach was considered, however time constraints of the study unable the collection of exhaustive enough quantitative data. To explore participants' views and opinions, qualitative research will allow for a more interactive data collection where the researcher will be able to clarify shared meanings (Saunders, 2019).

To explore both participants' feelings and motives behind them, the approach toward this study will be descripto-explanatory. Meanwhile a descriptive study allows for the understanding of past events (Brown, 2006), this dissertation aims to assess how and why the participants feel based on past experiences. Therefore, using descriptive questions to assess variables and an explanatory approach for explore relationships between them is believed to provide the most adequate findings.

3.2.3 Research Design

Research design describes the researcher's strategy on what actions will be undertaken to achieve the study aims (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Based on these, different approaches can be applied. mn

The research design of this dissertation will be based on the Grounded Theory, developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). It is a known research strategy which aims to 'develop theoretical explanations of social interactions and processes in a wide range of contexts' (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 205). This theory will allow for an exploration of the researched social trend and a formulation of a theory (Brown, 2006). It is believed to be the most suitable approach, as this dissertation covers relatively new academic fields with a limited number of existing relevant theories.

Moreover, it gives freedom for themes to emerge naturally from collected data. This is an advantage over research designed accordingly to an existing theory, as it reduces the probability of leaning towards existing findings (Brown, 2006). The collected data will be coded and themed, upon which a theory of its own will be created. This is believed to be the most effective way to achieve this study's aim.

3.2.4 Time Horizon

The aim of this research is to explore existing experiences and feelings of participants. A longitudinal study exploring how these variables change over time could bring valuable insights. It could provide an understanding of what exactly influences young adults' attitudes. Especially useful would be a study of participants attending multiple sober events, evaluating their experiences after each one. That would allow for a detailed identification of influencing factors and more robust findings. However, considering severe time constraints of this dissertation, a cross-section time horizon will be used to investigate an existing phenomenon (Fisher, 2010), in this case – participants' existing experiences and views.

3.2.5 Sampling Strategy

The study aims to explore the views of a particular social group. It accounts for Gen Z adults (18 – 28) who have previously attended a sober event in Scotland. Therefore, non-probability sampling approach will be used. Although this approach fails to provide a generalisation of a trend, it allows for an in-depth investigation on complex human experiences (Fisher, 2010). In this strategy, the sample size directly relates to the desired aim of the study (Olsen, 2012). Exploring views and opinions, this study will sample participants until results are saturated. Data saturation is a point in the research process where no more or little new information is given (Saunders et al., 2019). Therefore, no minimum or maximum sample size is set out and the researcher will continue data collection until that point, the furthest that is allowed by time constraints.

A desired group of participants was identified as young adults (aged 18 – 28) who have attended a sober event in Scotland. A digital recruitment graphic (Appendix C) was designed and posted on the Instagram account of the researcher. The post included an explanation of the study and an invitation to share it among friends. This allowed for further snowball sampling where volunteering participants nominated other potential respondents (Fisher, 2010).

This type of recruitment is an example of a convenience sampling. This strategy creates a risk for introducing bias, as the sample is composed of the researcher's social circle. It can influence data collection in different ways. Participants might conceal their true answers to avoid exposure in front of the researcher or feel more comfortable to share details about their experiences due to familiarity with the researcher. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge this as a threat to the accuracy and credibility of findings. The limitations of this strategy are recognised, and it was chosen majorly due to severe time constraints of the research.

3.2.6 Data Collection Method

The data for this research was fully collected through semi-structured interviews. This approach is referred to as a mono method qualitative study, focusing on one data collection method (Saunders et al., 2019). It is often conducted through in-depth interviews which offer robust findings for qualitative research (Fisher, 2010). Previous studies on topics related to this dissertation used various methods, however interviews seem to be the most common choice.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most effective data collection method for this study. They allow a natural flow of conversation without steering away from the topic. However, there are limitations to this method. Opposed to fully structured interviews, the way each semi-structure interview looks like, differs. A lack of consistency poses a difficulty to code and theme the collected data resulting in a threat of incomplete findings. To avoid this, follow-up questions were prepared in case a respondent did not naturally cover an area of the research. This allowed for more coherent contents of each interview.

Ten questions were formed based on the four objectives of the study. Questions were designed to be open-ended to give participants the freedom to express all of their thoughts. They were put into sequences, each sequence addressing one of the set objectives. This contributed to initial coding of findings and further thematic analysis. The

interviews started with a question confirming the participant's consent to take part in the study and ended with a question whether they would like to share anything else that was not covered by the researcher. The list of questions (Appendix D) was sent to the researcher's supervisor at Edinburgh Napier University for approval, before starting the process of sampling interviewees.

The interviews were staged via Microsoft Teams calls which were recorded and transcribed. Participants were aware of this, and the data was stored on the researcher's Microsoft account powered by Edinburgh Napier University. After the results are analysed and the study submitted for review, the recordings and transcripts will be deleted. A transcribed sample interview from this study can be found in Appendix E.

3.2.7 Data Analysis Methods

Based on Staruss and Corbin (1998) method of coding collected data, Charmaz (2014) proposes a simpler approach of initial coding and focused coding. A mono method qualitative study requires the use of conceptualisation and data needs to be classified into categories (Saunders et al., 2019). Categorising interview questions into sequences before the data collection process provided a clear background for further analysis.

The gathered data was analysed through thematic analysis. It is a widely used approach for qualitative studies and requires the researcher to look for themes across collected data (Strang, 2015). From an interpretative position of this study, this approach allowed for an exploration of participants' personal views and an identification of similarities between them (Fisher, 2010). Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest a framework for successful use of thematic analysis which is presented below.

1. Familiarisation with the Data

During this step, the researcher transcribed performed interviews and immersed themselves in the data. This included multiple re-readings of data and composing notes. Using the Grounded Theory required this step to occur continuously, from the first interview (Staruss and Corbin 1998). All newly gathered data was then compared to what has already been collected before. Conducting eight interviews in total, constant comparison allowed for clarity in managing the data throughout the whole research process.

2. Generating Initial Codes

This part required identifying general observations and interesting features among data. For this study some codes included strong opinion statements (for example on governmental policies) and experiences of participants heavily affected by an issue (like struggling to socialise among heavy drinkers).

3. Searching for Themes

This process consisted of searching for broader patterns among data. For this study, themes were selected based on frequency of repetition, intensity of findings, and relevancy to the research aim and existing knowledge.

4. Reviewing Themes

During this step, themes were narrowed down and perfected. Upon review, some themes were discarded due to lack of relevancy. It was ensured that the themes adequately represented collected data and no crucial information was omitted.

5. Defining and Naming Themes

Upon grouping data into themes, an analysis of each one was conducted. Data for each theme was put into separate documents to ensure clarity of the evaluation. Based on the results of the analysis, themes were appropriately named.

6. Producing the Report

The final step of the thematic analysis was producing the report based on data analysis results applied to the wider context of discussion. During this process, the story of findings was created ensuring the reader can clearly identify and understand themes chosen by the author.

3.2.8 Research Limitations

Every research will suffer from limitations, and it is the researcher's responsibility to minimise their severity (Brown, 2006). Some of the most recognisable limitations to this study included access and time constraints. The study was undertaken by an undergraduate student, therefore over a relatively short period of time. Although the access to sources was broad, there were some publications that could potentially add to the findings, that were unable to be acquired.

All qualitative studies come with a risk of bias and misinterpretation of results (Adams et al., 2007). Due to the nature of this approach, the researcher merely interprets findings which might not always be fully accurate to what was meant by research participants (Fisher, 2010). It is important that the researcher does not influence participants with their own views, and construct research questions to be neutral (Saunders et al., 2019). Using a non-probability sample strategy, participants had many similar characteristics, therefore leaning toward certain approaches. To minimise the possibility of influencing the participants' answers by the researcher, the aim of the study shared with the participants

was very vague. Participants were also not provided with the interview questions prior to the study. Although they were given an option to request it, none of them did. This provided more neutral and accurate findings.

3.2.9 Ethical Considerations

It is crucial for any research undertaken to be ethical (Fisher, 2010). The research for this study was designed up to the standards of Edinburgh Napier University's Research Ethics. All volunteers were provided with an explanation of the study and a consent form to participate in the research (Appendix F). Participants were able to withdraw from the study at any point and could ask the researcher anything about the study. To ensure no vulnerable people took part in the study, the researcher decided to not interview any persons under the age of 18 or people with an alcohol dependency. This was communicated to participants together with other requirements; therefore, they did not have to disclose their reason for withdrawing from the study. Before conducting any interviews, the list of questions and an ethical declaration form was sent to the researcher's supervisor for approval.

3.3 Summary

This chapter explained and justified how the primary research of this study was conducted. It analysed different approaches to research elements and assessed which ones were the most suitable for this study. It explored limitations and ethical considerations of this research and explained how they were omitted or minimised. All choices were tightly aligned with the aim and objectives of the study. Theories and methods chosen were proved to be the most suitable for the nature of this research.

4. Findings and Discussion

This chapter analyses the primary research findings and discusses them in relation to secondary research and objectives of this study. Findings are categorised into themes relating to each study objective to provide clarity. Thematic analysis allows for recognition of common themes which allows for drawing appropriate conclusions and providing recommendations. Research participants are identified (Table 1) and discussed. Before moving onto the discussion of findings, the structure of findings is presented (Table 2), outlining the themes and key points for each objective.

4.1 Interview Participants

Results of the study are derived from eight interviews with young adults (22 – 28) who have attended a sober event in Scotland. Upon a recruitment social media post, ten volunteers expressed interest in taking part in the study. Two of them did not meet the sample requirements. After the seventh interview, no new themes were emerging, therefore no further recruitment was performed. Table 1 presents interview participants and their characteristics.

Table 1*Interview Participants Identification*

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Nationality	Drinking Status	Sober Event Attended	Event Alcohol Policy	Awareness of the Policy
Kieran	25	Man	Scottish	Sober	Sober Meet-Up	NAP	Yes
Sean	28	Man	American	Moderate	University Guest Lecture	NAP	Yes
Alice	27	Woman	American	Casual	Ceramics Class	BYOB	No
David	28	Man	English	Social	Artist Workshop	NAP	Yes
Gwen	27	Woman	Polish	Social	Ecstatic Dance	NAP	Yes
Julia	27	Woman	Scottish	Casual	Board Games Night	NAP	No
Lee	22	Man	Scottish	Casual	Bike Race	BYOB	Yes
Emily	27	Woman	Polish	Social	Sober Music Festival	NAP	Yes

Four participants identified as women and four as men which provided an accurate gender representation. All names were changed using an online random name generator to ensure anonymity and unbiased name selection. Interviewees' age range was 22 – 28, however half of them were 27. Three participants identified as casual drinkers, and three as purely social drinkers. One participant identified as sober, and one as a moderate drinker.

Participants were asked to choose a sober experience to share and what was its alcohol policy. Aligning to the definition of sober events for this research, they could talk about an event with a NAP or BYOB policy. They were also asked whether they knew the policy prior to attending the event. The structure of findings is presented below.

Table 2*Structure of Findings*

Objective	Themes	Key Points
To explore young adults' views on alcohol consumption.	Heavy Scottish Drinking Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Socialising tool - Drinking choices influenced close environments - Discouraged by excessive drinking behaviours
	Social Lubricant	
	Social Environment Influence	
To examine young adults' views on current governmental policies aimed at reducing alcohol consumption.	Ineffectiveness of Limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Current regulations are ineffective - Support over limitations - Mistrust in the Government's intentions
	Distrust in the Government	
To assess whether attending sober events influences shifts in attitudes toward sobriety among young adults and explore if they appeal as an alternative to drinking.	Reassurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reassurance of existing drinking attitudes - Reminder of alcohol-free entertainment - Interest in drinking alternatives
	Reminder	
	Alternative to Drinking	
To provide recommendations for governments on how to effectively appeal to young adults in alcohol consumption and harm reduction campaigns.	Sober Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More sober spaces and events in Edinburgh - More accessibility to non-alcoholic drinks
	Sober Events	
	NA Drinks	

4.2 Objective One

One participant declared to be sober. Three described their relationship with alcohol as 'Casual', rarely choosing to drink. Three admitted to only drink in social situations, never from their own initiative.

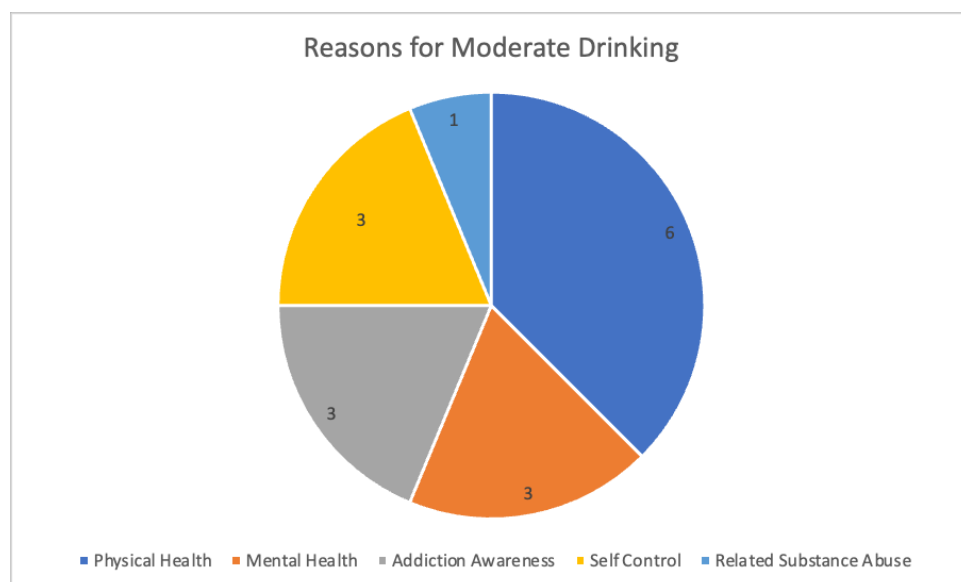
"(...) I only drink for camouflage, so I don't get the question of 'why aren't you drinking?'"
(David)

This corresponds to the long-standing stigma around sobriety in Scotland. Research shows non-drinkers are often likely to break their abstinence to not be perceived as 'odd' (ScotCen Social Research, 2023).

When asked for reasons influencing participants' consumption choices, five factors were identified. Some interviewees had more than one reason. Figure 1 presents these factors in a pie chart. It showcases the complexity behind each participant's decision for moderate drinking which is crucial to understanding young adults' attitudes toward alcohol.

Figure 1

Participants' Reasons for Moderate Drinking



As seen on the figure above, majority of young adults' concerns regarding alcohol are health related. Caluzzi et al. (2021a) explored the lifestyle shift occurring in Gen Z where they identified this group to be more aware of health-related alcohol consequences. As examined in Chapter 2, this was referred to as 'healthism'.

“The way that I felt physically, influenced me to change the way that I was drinking to a more moderate consumption.” (Alice)

Three participants shared strong addiction awareness as a factor and three wanted to remain their self-control. This can be linked to the heavy drinking culture in Scotland which is explored later in the chapter. Participants grew up surrounded by alcohol and substance addiction. Some admitted that seeing a close person suffer from one, played a role in their consumption choices.

“I feel like I'm someone who wants to avoid becoming dependent on stuff. (...) I don't think I have a massively addictive personality, but I guess I'm aware of that.” (Julia)

Furthermore, one participant expressed related substance abuse influencing their relationship with alcohol.

“I don't have any particular feelings about alcohol itself (...) it leads me on to take other things which I do have a problem with.” (Lee)

Participants observed a link between alcohol consumption and other intoxicating substances use. Many experienced or witnessed drinking leading to illicit drug consumption.

Upon exploring the participants' views on alcohol consumption, three themes were identified. Heavy Scottish Drinking Culture was mentioned the most, followed by Social Environment Influences, and alcohol being a Social Lubricant.

4.2.1 Theme 1 – Heavy Scottish Drinking Culture

As explored in Chapter 2, Scotland has been widely known for its heavy drinking culture. The statistics on alcohol-related harm and deaths prove this to be an ongoing issue. The alcohol heritage and the pub culture were often mentioned as an observation.

“Well, we very much have a drinking culture here in Scotland, the place in the evening everywhere is the pub.” (Kieran)

Yet again relating to the national social stigma around abstinence, Lee shared that it is difficult to stay sober during nights out:

“I think that especially in Scotland, (...) everyone makes quite a big deal out of the fact that you don't drink.”

It is worth to point out the quotes above come from Scottish participants. This part of the Scottish culture might be even more prevalent to those of different nationalities. Having moved from a different country, Sean observed the intensity of this occurrence:

“I think it's pretty drastic, (...). Scotland's drinking culture is prevalent.”

Moreover, two participants who have moved from abroad admitted experiencing peer pressure from Scottish colleagues at work:

“I had co-workers who were Scottish and very heavy drinkers. ‘We're going to the bar and (...) you're going to get what we're getting. Congratulations.’” (Alice)

This only furthers to show how heavy drinking has been a generational issue in Scotland. Alcohol is normalised to the point of often dismissing others' choices to abstain, whether it is in social settings or colleague interactions.

*“You’re saying to someone ‘I don’t want to drink’ and they say: ‘oh go on, have one’.
And they end up buying you one anyway.” (David)*

It is prominent that this theme is visible to young adults of different nationalities. It has been explored by many researchers before, yet it continues to affect new generations. However, Gen Z has shown the highest interest and involvement in sobriety so far. While older generations were more likely to be socially pressured, current young adults express resilience to peer-pressure and negative attitudes toward excessive drinking.

Building on the disapproval of extreme consumption, participants often mentioned feeling discouraged from attending events with high amounts of alcohol.

“(...) I see those people are getting drunk (...) and that puts me off (...), it leaves this bad after taste (...)” (Gwen)

This shows a contrast between participants’ feelings attending different types of events. Moreover, it further proves the generational change in attitudes toward alcohol consumption discussed in Chapter 2.

4.2.2 Theme 2 – Social Environment Influences

Interviewees often mentioned the impacts of their close social environments on their drinking choices. They naturally surrounded themselves with people supportive of their lifestyles, not experiencing any peer-pressure.

“I’m not friends with people who would try to pressure me into drinking (...) That’s probably a conscious decision.” (Julia)

This can be linked to the psychological homophily principle which suggests that people tend to surround themselves by individuals similar to them (McPherson et al., 2002),

including shared personal values (Youyou et al., 2017). Moreover, participants showed resilience to influences from people with different values. Compared with older generations who were easily influenced by drinking peers, this further shows the attitude change of Gen Z.

“Because if people were trying to put pressure on me to drink, I just wouldn’t be their friend.” (Lee)

Moreover, Gen Z adults who do not express interest in sobriety were found to be open-minded and inclusive of those who do. That is an important observation of how current young adults are influenced by one another. Julia noticed changes in her friend group behaviours after introducing her sober partner to them:

“I think that was a significant shift when my friends who also drink, started to have alcohol-free beers (...)”

She further shared an observation in shifting attitudes toward alcohol consumption:

“(...) I feel like in my friend groups, I’ve noticed that there’s a trend towards drinking less.”

Kieran observed a generational change in alcohol consumption and ways of seeking help. Comparing attitudes he saw in his elder family members and people around him now, he said:

“You can definitely see a shift in people in our generation who are seeking out help (...) less people are immediately turning to drink.”

These responses show what approaches are effective on Gen Z. Social pressure is met with resilience and shutting down, while a desire for social bonds and inclusivity of others’

lifestyles spark interest. This finding can be crucial for shaping further initiatives targeted at this social group.

4.2.3 Theme 3 – Social Lubricant

Social lubricants are described as “mechanisms to ease feelings of anxiety and nervousness during social interactions” (Monahan and Lannutti, 2000, p. 175), and alcohol is considered one of them (Simmons, 2015). This can also be observed through three interviewees sharing they only drink in social situations.

“(...) why people drink is to feel like they fit in better. (...) you feel more comfortable, less nervous.” (Julia)

Julia is aware of this occurrence, yet she stays confident in her drinking choices. While some might be more resilient to it, many people still give in:

“If I’m more anxious or stressed, I’m more likely to have a drink. Like if I don’t know anyone at a party or see my ex.” (Emily)

Therefore, the social role of alcohol is still prevalent. Although attitudes might be changing, coping mechanisms that have been practiced for generations keep affecting young people.

Findings from these themes provide an insight into young adults’ views on alcohol consumption, according to the set objective. They provide a context for further analysis of sober events influences and attitudes toward sobriety.

4.3 Objective Two

Data was collected on young adults' views on Minimum Unit Pricing and the Licensing regulations, which were discussed in Chapter 2. Table 3 presents the participants' awareness of these policies prior to the interview.

Table 3

Alcohol Reduction Policies Awareness

Participant	MUP	Licensing
Kieran	YES	YES
Sean	YES	N/A
Alice	YES	YES
Julia	YES	YES
David	N/A	YES
Gwen	NO	YES
Emily	NO	YES
Lee	YES	YES

Five participants were aware of MUP and six knew about licensing regulations. The two participant who did not know what MUP was, were briefly introduced to the policy before sharing their opinions. The most prominent themes were the ineffectiveness of limitations, and a general distrust in the government.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Ineffectiveness of Limitations

The Government's main strategy for reducing alcohol-related harm has been limiting alcohol accessibility (Scottish Government, 2018). Aligned to this objective are current policies. MUP aims to reduce affordability of alcoholic drinks, while the Licensing (2005) and Alcohol (2010) Acts regulate the circumstances under which they can be sold.

As explored in Chapter 2, criticism arose alongside the implementation of MUP which is considered the most extreme and controversial policy. Participants were mostly light drinkers, so the policy did not influence them to a high degree. Yet, they still expressed strong feelings about it. Burgess et al. (2022) described Gen Z as feeling responsible for 'saving the world' and caring for their communities. This might contribute to understanding why participants criticised the current policies.

"Minimum pricing doesn't stop them, it just puts them into poverty." (Lee)

Kieran observed his moderately drinking friends being discouraged by the increased alcohol prices which affect their consumption frequentness. However, he continued to criticise the outcomes of MUP on people with an alcohol dependency, correspondingly to Holmes (2023):

"(...) they either end up doing drugs or they max out a credit card (...) that puts them into a spiral of poverty, which then perpetuates circumstances where people want to drink."

Similar concerns were brought up by several independent studies on the effects of MUP. Nguyen et al. (2024) observed a decline in consumption of moderate drinkers, and no change in those drinking at hazardous levels. Further questioning the ethics of the MUP implementation, Julia asked:

"Is this the most effective way to address alcohol dependency? Or are there better ways to do it that maybe aren't risking being a bit classist?"

The statistics from the PHS Synthesis of Evidence (2023) show a decline in alcohol-related deaths. However, interviewed young adults expressed worry about the unmanaged negative effects of MUP, even if they perceive it as effective for some social groups:

“(...) People will still drink alcohol if they've got a problem. (...) The effective way to solve it is to give people support.” (Lee)

In contrast, when asked about the licensing regulations, Emily shared feeling positively impacted by them:

“I think not being able to buy alcohol after 10pm and closing pubs and clubs at 3am is really effective. People are not out for so long and it for sure stopped me to keep partying many times.”

Therefore, participants recognised some positive impacts of these policies. Although Julia did not agree with their excessiveness, she recognised their role:

“I think there can be a time and a place for banning things.”

Other interviewees shared not having observed any successful impacts of the policies. It strengthened their scepticism toward current governmental approaches. Some shared that the licensing regulations do not stop them from drinking, only influence the time they purchase alcohol.

“I don't think they're effective at all. I just think that there's an influx of alcohol sales at 9:48pm.” (Lee)

These findings show that participants see the limitation-focused strategy as generally ineffective. Many shared concerns regarding its negative consequences and stressed the

importance of support over limitations. Again, this might be related to the Gen Z's strong community focus (Burgess et al., 2022). When describing her views on the current governmental initiatives and their effectiveness on wider society, Gwen used the following metaphor:

"It's like cleaning your fridge when there is a rotten tomato inside, but you're not taking the tomato out. You are just cleaning the fridge around it. So you're not actually fixing anything."

4.3.2 Theme 2 – Distrust in the Government

Exploring participants' views on political efforts to reduce alcohol-related harm, a theme of distrust in the government emerged.

"I don't necessarily trust the government campaigns. (...)" (David)

There is limited research on Gen Z's attitudes toward the government. The most relevant literature found was Hoffmann's (2024) and Coleman's (2022), however both publications were submitted as undergraduate dissertation papers. Although more credible research could provide stronger findings, these papers are a starting point for further research in this academic field. Coleman (2022) explored the reasons behind the Gen Z's mistrust toward the US government. Themes like poor performance, discrimination, and decreasing democracy occurred. Hoffmann (2024) investigated the political environments Gen Z was brought up in, and how they contributed to their current attitudes. Although their research was conducted in the US, some generational qualities of Gen Z could potentially be adapted to the findings for Scotland. Kieran shared:

"People have such an inherent mistrust of politics that if the government's telling them something, there's almost innate response to want to rebel (...)."

Burgess et al. (2022) explored these factors in relation to the increasing abstinence among Gen Z adults. The authors theorise extreme world events Gen Z population was exposed to from a very young age, sped up their maturing processes and created a sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of themselves and others. Quilter-Pinner et al. (2021) examined the potential determinants of political trust from citizens and identified economic growth and living standards as factors; Lee touched upon that:

“(...) the more the cost of living goes up, the more people become reliant on substances to try and take them away from it.”

These findings reflect on the themes in young adults’ opinions on current alcohol policies and provide a context for why they might be ineffective. This will allow to create recommendations on how to successfully target this social group in future campaigns.

4.4 Objective Three

The most prominent experience which shows a significant change in attitudes toward sobriety upon attending a sober event was Emily’s:

“When I was younger, I attended a sober festival where you couldn’t drink. We still drank before the entrance, hiding somewhere. So forbidding stuff and searching bags didn’t really encourage us to oblige. (...) Seeing people not doing it [drinking], did for sure. (...) people were dancing to techno and I knew they weren’t even drunk; they were just dancing. With their own energy, it was just amazing. This thought that ‘Wow, it’s actually possible and people are doing it. And so can you.’ it was very inspiring for sure.”

Other participants were found to have positive experiences attending sober events, however changes in attitudes toward sobriety were not significant. For some they served as reminders of alcohol-free entertainment, and some found attending them reassuring

of their current consumption choices. Two participants were not influenced by the attended event and expressed no further feelings toward it.

4.4.1 Theme 1 – Reassurance

Participants who were confident with their current relationship with alcohol felt reassured in their choices. David usually looks for sober events to attend:

“Yeah, it’s not really a change of mind, just sort of reaffirming that idea.”

Being sober, Kieran benefited from meeting like-minded people. The event did not change his attitudes toward alcohol, but he felt more comfortable with his choice of abstinence:

“It made me more aware of the volume of people that are choosing to severely limit their alcohol consumption. (...) And so, it did change my view, on not feeling as alone.”

This statement shows the loneliness the stigma around sobriety causes. It highlights the importance of inclusivity and community for Gen Z in their social interactions.

4.4.2 Theme 2 – Reminder

Some interviewees expressed feeling reminded they can have fun without alcohol after attending a sober event. Considering the power of close friends’ influences on attitudes and behaviours of Gen Z, this is a promising effect of sober events.

“Because I had been to a lot of sober events growing up, going to this one reminded me that drinking is not actually necessary to get through stuff.” (Alice)

Relating back to the homophily principle, being around like-minded people can build individuals’ confidence and improve their sense of belonging. That can also be seen in

Kieran's experience explored earlier. Therefore, being exposed to more sober environments can positively influence other drinkers.

4.4.3 Theme 3 – Alternative to Drinking

Throughout the interviews, participants often mentioned the need to provide people with an alternative to drinking. This came from their own experiences and behavioural observations among their age group.

“In the UK, there's not much else to do apart from drinking.” (David)

Upon asking what governments could do to reduce alcohol consumption and related harm in young adults, Julia said more sober spaces can be a start:

“Just to give people an idea, an alternative (...) Something else to do outside of meeting up at the pub. Because it's easy and it's always there.”

As explored in Chapter 2, events can offer highly stimulating environments which can be utilised to minimise feelings of social anxiety. Highly engaging activities can distract attendees from stress, something alcohol is often used for.

These findings contribute to establishing the role of sober events in alcohol consumption reduction approaches. By assessing to what extent they affect young adults' attitudes toward sobriety and drinking, more effective campaigns can be curated.

4.5 Objective Four

To understand the reasons behind their recommendations, interviewees were asked to identify challenges they faced while attending sober events. Some of the challenges related to the social role of alcohol discussed in Chapter 2, like feelings of anxiety prior to the event or struggling to socialise. Together with challenges related to organisational and resources issues of such events, they further the need for suggested changes.

4.5.1 Theme 1 – Sober Spaces

While sharing his experience attending a sober meet-up, Kieran criticised the venue choice for the event:

“(...) it was held in a Wetherspoons. And for someone who may have an alcohol problem, (...), having it in a Wetherspoons could be potentially triggering.”

He further explained the event’s organisers looked for a different venue before concluding that no other place offers a wider range of non-alcoholic drinks:

“(...) It made me aware of that as an issue in the city.”

Participants recognised a lack of places to spend time without being surrounded by alcohol. Many of them mentioned the negative impacts of the pub culture and the issue of limited public spaces which has been an ongoing occurrence in Scotland (Cook, 2015):

“But I think when so much of your potential warm social space is somewhere that centres around drinking (...) people are going to struggle to move away from that because it feels like you end up isolating yourself.” (Julia)

Therefore, this issue poses a threat for higher isolation and loneliness rates. Young adults should not have to choose between a sober or social life. Gwen said:

“A big thing that encourages you to go to these pubs, is because this is the only place you can go and meet with your friends.”

Interviewees shared a desire for more accessible and affordable venues that are not centred around alcohol. Kieran identified most of existing sober spaces as not aimed at young adults:

“I’d like to see (...) a communal environment, especially with younger people. I find a lot of these initiatives tend to scoot older demographics (...)”

The most often mentioned idea for sober spaces were late night cafes.

“Especially in Edinburgh, late night cafes aren’t a thing.” (David)

Participants mentioned short opening hours of places that do not serve alcohol which result in the lack of sober spaces in the evenings:

“(...) even finding a cafe that’s open past 6:00 PM is really hard.” (Julia)

They felt it would give them an alternative place to meet friends. Recognising the economic challenges for such businesses to stay open later, David suggested governmental funding or partial support by utilising the income from alcohol taxation:

“Maybe even subsidizing businesses like cafes to support them in certain ways to stay open longer.”

Considering the rising numbers of sobriety among Gen Z, such places could serve as an appealing alternative to drinking and result in lower drinking rates.

4.5.2 Theme 2: Sober Events

Participants listed some sober events they would like to see in Edinburgh. All of them were mentioned in the context of evenings, as recognised earlier was a lack of activities or places to spend time during that time. Kieran wants to see more opportunities for young adults to be creative:

“(...) a sort of communal art night where there's sober drinks (...)”

Emily suggested events that are mentally or physically engaging, to make them more appealing:

“(...) like art activities, sports, etc. It'd be good having them in the evening as well.”

Strong focus was paid to sober dancing parties. Participants mentioned seeing examples of other cities hosting them.

“(...) I'd love to see more things like that. Where you can go and just like have a dance and be out with people.” (Julia)

Julia talked about an event that was alcohol free, but not substance free. This might pose a challenge for those in substance addiction recovery. As explored before, young adults observed a link between alcohol consumption and other substance use. Although no participant struggled from alcohol abuse, many cared for people who do. This again shows the Gen Z's strong focus on communities. Alice recognises these events as ways others can support people living in or wanting to explore sobriety:

“(...) straight edge sober dance party. (...) a very clear option of 'if this is something you're trying to do, it's going to be supported by this thing.’”

Interviewees had a unique perspective on sober living. Over stereotypical activities associated with abstinence like “knitting clubs” (Alice), they expressed strong desire for what can be described as regular, fun experiences for young people:

“I’d love something like a techno dancing event (...) where I know that people are not drunk or on drugs (...)” (Emily)

Taking from Julia’s previous answers, her friend circle changed their behaviours and attitudes toward drinking upon having a sober member in the group. Providing more sober environments would result in higher exposure to sobriety and could encourage reducing alcohol consumption amongst drinkers.

4.5.3 Theme 3 – Non-Alcoholic Drinks

Another theme emerged from respondents was the lack of diversity and availability of non-alcoholic drinks. Participants observed not only a lack of places serving alcohol alternatives but also a limited choice in places that do. The most concerning experience was that of Kieran who criticised the sober meet-up he attended for being held in a known pub chain:

“If you’re trying to have a sober meet up, but you must go to the largest pub chain in the UK to get an access to alcohol free options, there’s something wrong with the market.”

Participants said soft drinks in pubs are unreasonably priced and the availability of drinks mimicking alcohol, like non-alcoholic (NA) beers, is very limited. Having these options could majorly benefit those who are interested in moderating their consumption.

“(...) just adding one non-alcoholic cider would make a big difference.” (Kieran)

Alternative drinks could not only provide more inclusivity for non-drinkers, but also benefit businesses economically, having a wider consumer base and higher income. Emily observed a social occurrence:

“People like having something to hold in their hands. You can do so many cocktails without alcohol that taste the same.”

Moreover, NA drinks or cocktails are usually cheaper to make as liquors tend to be the most expensive ingredient. However, prices for these drinks should be reasonable to avoid the effect that soft drinks carry. There is a growing market of NA liquors like gins or rums, which could serve as an interesting and unique alternative. Understandably, alcoholic drinks tend to bring more profit for businesses. As an encouragement to investing in more NA alternatives by more places, the government could offer support like tax reliefs or regulations for participating businesses.

The themes in this section provide directions toward answering Objective 4 - creating a set of recommendations for curating effective public campaigns targeting young adults.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored the correlation between sober events, young adults' attitudes toward alcohol consumption, and the effectiveness of current alcohol-related policies. By bringing these topics together, it analysed and assessed the potential of sober events acting as encouragement tools for effectively targeting Gen Z in alcohol consumption and harm reduction campaigns.

This chapter outlines the summary of findings and provides evidence of accomplishing the research aim and objectives. Recommendations drawn from findings are stated and future research suggestions are given.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The research findings were discussed accordingly to each objective. Data gathered from interviews with study participants was analysed and related to existing literature. Common themes within each objective were recognised using thematic analysis which allowed for clear findings. Below is the summary of findings for each objective.

5.1.1 Objective 1: To explore young adults' views on alcohol consumption.

To address this objective, research participants were asked about their relationships with alcohol. They shared what social factors influence their consumption choices and how they perceive the position of alcohol in a wider context of their age group. Most participants had a casual or social relationship with alcohol, with one sober person, and one moderate drinker. All of them were very aware of the negative outcomes of alcohol consumption. Majority of interviewees' reasons behind limited drinking were health concerns. Some expressed influences of addiction awareness and self-control. Within the findings, three themes were identified: Heavy Scottish Drinking Culture, Social Lubricant, and Social Environment Influence. Participants expressed worry regarding the intensity

of the drinking culture in Scotland. Many felt discouraged by excessive drinking which proves theories on generational shifts in alcohol attitudes. Participants were aware of the social role of alcohol, and some admitted to still using it as an integrational tool. The only way they experienced peer pressure was from heavy drinkers and lack of alcohol-free spaces. Although peer-pressure was mentioned, most participants were resilient and resistant to external pressures which were misaligned with their existing beliefs. Participants shared there was no direct pressure from alcohol environments like pubs, yet they were likely to break their abstinence to not stand out. They were found to be greatly supported by their close friends and expressed being strongly influenced by the people around them. These findings contribute to understanding what affects Gen Z's changes in attitudes. Introducing a sober member to a friend circle, the rest of the group showed changes in drinking behaviours and attitudes. Participants shared being more willing to change when it feels like an autonomous decision. This is a crucial insight into targeting this social group.

5.1.2 Objective 2: To examine young adults' views on current governmental policies aimed at reducing alcohol consumption.

To establish whether sober events could serve as an alternative to drinking, participants were asked about their views on current alcohol-related political campaigns and their effectiveness. When sharing their experiences, participants found the strong focus on limitations generally ineffective which was the first recognised theme. They expressed criticism of current political affairs in Scotland and a wider mistrust in the intentions of the government. Young adults expressed strong care for others, especially the most disadvantaged in society. Seeing negative impacts of the current policies on vulnerable people seemed to further their scepticism toward any governmental decisions. Although they saw the purpose of these policies, the negative outcomes outweighed the positive ones. The theme of distrust in the government was prominent and allowed for an understanding of the reasons behind young adults' opinions on current policies. These findings align with existing theories on Gen Z's strong focus on communities and 'the

need to save the world' (Burgess et al., 2022). This section provided a valuable perspective on shared characteristics among Gen Z adults and how different they are to previous generations. The findings can serve as a guide for what to avoid when curating campaigns for this social group. Built upon that can be new approaches to alcohol harm reduction.

5.1.3 Objective 3: To assess whether attending sober events influences shifts in attitudes toward sobriety among young adults and explore if they appeal as an alternative to drinking.

To address this objective, participants were asked about their experiences attending a sober event, and whether it influenced their attitudes toward alcohol consumption or sobriety. Some participant felt reassured of their existing consumption approaches, while others felt positively reminded of a different way to spend time. Two participants shared not feeling influenced by the event they attended. The shared sober event experiences were positive, and no interviewee expressed negative feelings or influences. Although they did not significantly influence shifts in young adults' attitudes toward sobriety, all participants expressed an interest in attending more sober events in the future. Generally, these findings show that sober events can positively impact those who do not drink, drink casually, or socially. Participants who described themselves as 'social drinkers' shared they only drink when they are surrounded by other drinkers. Although they do not experience direct pressure, they are likely to drink to 'not stand out'. This group could especially benefit from more sober spaces and events. Not experiencing these social expectations can strongly reduce their overall consumption.

5.1.4 Objective 4: To provide recommendations for governments on how to effectively appeal to young adults in alcohol consumption and harm reduction campaigns.

This objective is addressed partially building upon findings from Objective 1 and 3. They are then aligned with Objective 2 which established young adults' opinions on relevant political strategies. To robustly utilise those findings, interviewees were asked to suggest appealing initiatives for governments to execute. The first theme suggested more sober spaces in Edinburgh. Participants found that there is a lack of places to spend time in the evening that are not centred around alcohol. As found earlier, they were more likely to drink when surrounded by alcohol. The lack of sober and sober-friendly spaces can lead to less people choosing to stop or limit their drinking, and more people isolating themselves. These findings suggest places like that can not only decrease drinking rates but also improve the quality of life for people in abstinence. Participants also expressed a desire for more non-alcoholic beverages in pubs and bars. It is believed that a wider availability and diversity of these options can reduce the chances of breaking abstinence. It is also a valuable solution for sober people to be able to socialise regardless of the venue choice. Upon positive experiences, interviewees showed strong interest in attending more sober events. The most mentioned desired sober events were arts and crafts workshops and sober dancing parties. Such events were found to be perceived as a unique way of exploring sobriety, without the pressure of commitment. Together with the findings on how Gen Z's attitudes are influenced, it is believed that providing alternatives and allowing autonomous choice can be more effective in encouraging alcohol consumption reduction. Sparking curiosity among young adults by providing them with fun alternatives to drinking has a potential to be an indirect, yet inclusive form of alcohol consumption and harm reduction. Considering the distrust in governmental campaigns among young adults, supporting independent organisations and businesses that align with this goal can be a strategic approach for effective results.

5.2 Recommendations

Built upon the findings of this study, the author proposes a set of three recommendations for governments on how to improve the effectiveness of targeting Gen Z in alcohol consumption reduction campaigns. They are derived from an extensive literature review and an in-depth primary investigation directly with Gen Z adults. The recommendations are based on the exploration of Scottish young adults' views on alcohol consumption and the effectiveness of current related policies. Potentially appealing alternatives were explored and applied to the following suggestions.

1. To create more sober spaces available in the evening in Edinburgh.
2. To organise and support more sober events in Edinburgh targeted at young adults.
3. To encourage local businesses to invest in more non-alcoholic beverages.

Shifting the strategy from limitations to alternatives is believed to successfully target Gen Z adults. Having explored their attitudes toward the government, an indirect approach is believed to be beneficial. That can be achieved through executing alcohol consumption reduction campaigns through non-governmental organisations. To make that possible, the government should provide financial support to partnering event organisers, venue owners, and local businesses who wish to participate in the campaign. That can be done through utilising money from alcohol taxation for campaign funding and tax relief initiatives.

5.3 Review of Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study was *to examine how attending sober events influences attitudes toward sobriety among young adults (18 - 28) in Scotland and assess their potential as an initiative to encourage alcohol consumption reduction*. Four objectives were set to achieve this.

Objective 1 was met through a review of literature on the major changes in attitudes towards alcohol in Generation Z, and a primary investigation into their views on alcohol consumption. Qualitative research using semi-structured interviews was performed which allowed for detailed and meaningful results. Using thematic analysis, key findings were identified and young adults' views on alcohol consumption explored.

Objective 2 was achieved through a critical analysis of governmental frameworks and current policies aimed at alcohol harm reduction, and a primary examination of young adults' opinions on their effectiveness. These findings were crucial to achieving the study aim, providing insight into what effectively targets Gen Z's attitudes.

Objective 3 was accomplished through a detailed primary investigation into young adults' experiences attending sober events. The use of semi-structured interviews provided robust findings which allowed for establishing the potential of sober events as initiatives to encourage alcohol consumption reduction.

Finally, Objective 4 was met by curating a set of recommendations for governments on how to effectively target Gen Z in alcohol consumption reduction campaigns. They are a product of extensive research conducted through this dissertation and based on substantial evidence.

By meeting each of these objectives, the study's aim was achieved. The study found that young adults who have attended a sober event felt encouraged to attend more. No significant changes in attitudes toward sobriety were observed which might be caused by all research participants having already limited relationships with alcohol. Therefore, sober events served them as a reassurance of existing choices. Those who drank more felt reminded of the benefits of alcohol-free entertainment. Sober events were found to be appealing alternatives to drinking which can be used as effective initiatives to encourage alcohol consumption reduction.

5.4 Study Limitations

Although the study limitations were carefully considered and minimised, some factors were out of the author's control. The sample size and the research location limit the study findings' generalisation. Although all participants were based in Scotland, all of them lived and attended sober events in Edinburgh. Other places across Scotland might have different circumstances, for example more sober spaces available. This variable would strongly impact the study findings. The desired participants sample was Gen Z adults, equalling in people aged 18 – 28. However, time constraints contributed to the final researched sample being aged 22 – 28, which limits the applicability of these findings on younger Gen Z adults. All research participants had an already limited relationship with alcohol. This was due to the research target being individuals who have attended a sober event in the past. A sample of heavier drinkers would provide different findings. The academic fields explored in this study are fairly recent, resulting in limited amounts of existing literature. Future research might change the adequacy of these findings. Lastly, time constraints and the author's undergraduate status serve as limitations to the thoroughness and validity of this research.

5.5 Future Research

It is strongly recommended to undertake further research into this academic field. The topic and its relevancy are vastly growing and tackle important social issues. More research is needed for deeper understanding of Gen Z as a social group and their behaviours. It is recommended to investigate this study's findings with a sample of heavier drinkers and individuals who have never attended a sober event before. Such research could provide a valuable insight and continuity to this study.

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Appendix A

Alcohol Marketing in Scotland - Literature Review

With over 130 active distilleries open to the public, whisky has played a major role in shaping the Scottish tourism industry (Scotch Whisky Association, 2024). The Scotch Whisky Experience – an attraction offering a variety of whisky-related tours and events, won the Best Visitor Attraction 2024 in the National Scottish Thistle Awards. This event is organised by Visit Scotland – a Non Departmental Public Body funded by the Scottish Government through multiple grants (Scottish Government, 2023). The event is known for its promotional opportunities for nominated and winning organisations, having continuous partnerships with media providers like News Scotland (Visit Scotland, n.d.a), which is one of the most known UK & Ireland Publishers (News UK, n.d.). Using the keyword “whisky”, the Visit Scotland (n.d.b) website lists 570 attractions from different providers. Although aiming to support Scottish tourism economy, governmental funding towards the whisky industry contradicts the 2018 Alcohol Framework goal to restrict alcohol marketing. Spracklen (2014) criticises the Scotch Whisky Association (SWA) and the Scottish Government for performative goals and inadequate legislations. The author points out an important observation of these public bodies contributing to normalization of alcohol consumption. It is worth mentioning that this study was published over 10 years ago yet remains applicable to the current governmental actions.

The World Health Organisation (2020) urges for complete bans or state regulated restrictions on alcohol marketing. In Scotland, related restrictions focus on the contents of advertisements, rather than the volume of their exposure (Scottish Government, 2022). As an example, the CAP Code forbids alcohol promotions in public spaces where 25% or more of the audience is under 18 (Advertising Standards Authority, n.d.). This means that any open public space will theoretically align with the code. Moreover, most of these restrictions are self-regulated by alcohol and advertising industries, creating a clear conflict of interest. Alcohol Focus Scotland (2022) assesses these legislations to be failing the protection of young people from alcohol marketing. In 2022, the Scottish Government published the “Consultation on Restricting Alcohol Advertising and Promotion” where they asked for the public’s opinion on current and proposed measures to reduce alcohol marketing. In 2023, Social Research concluded the analysis of responses to be of mixed results with an unclear aim for further governmental actions. However, the main concern of these results is a strong bias from respondents whom majority of were identified as individual participants, advertising organisations, alcohol producers, and retail or hospitality businesses. Unsurprisingly, this group neglected existing research on alcohol marketing harm and expressed their content with current restrictions. Academics, public health and third sector organisations, and local authorities voted for increasing legislation regulations. Considering clear proof from academic and public research on alcohol marketing harm, local authority reports, and the obvious conflict of interest from majority of respondents, this consultation fails to adequately analyse the real consequences of alcohol marketing harm. The government continues to carry an open, public debate on this matter, dismissing the WHO (2020) recommendations on urgent preventive action.

Appendix B

Alcohol Marketing in Scotland – Participants' Views and Recommendations

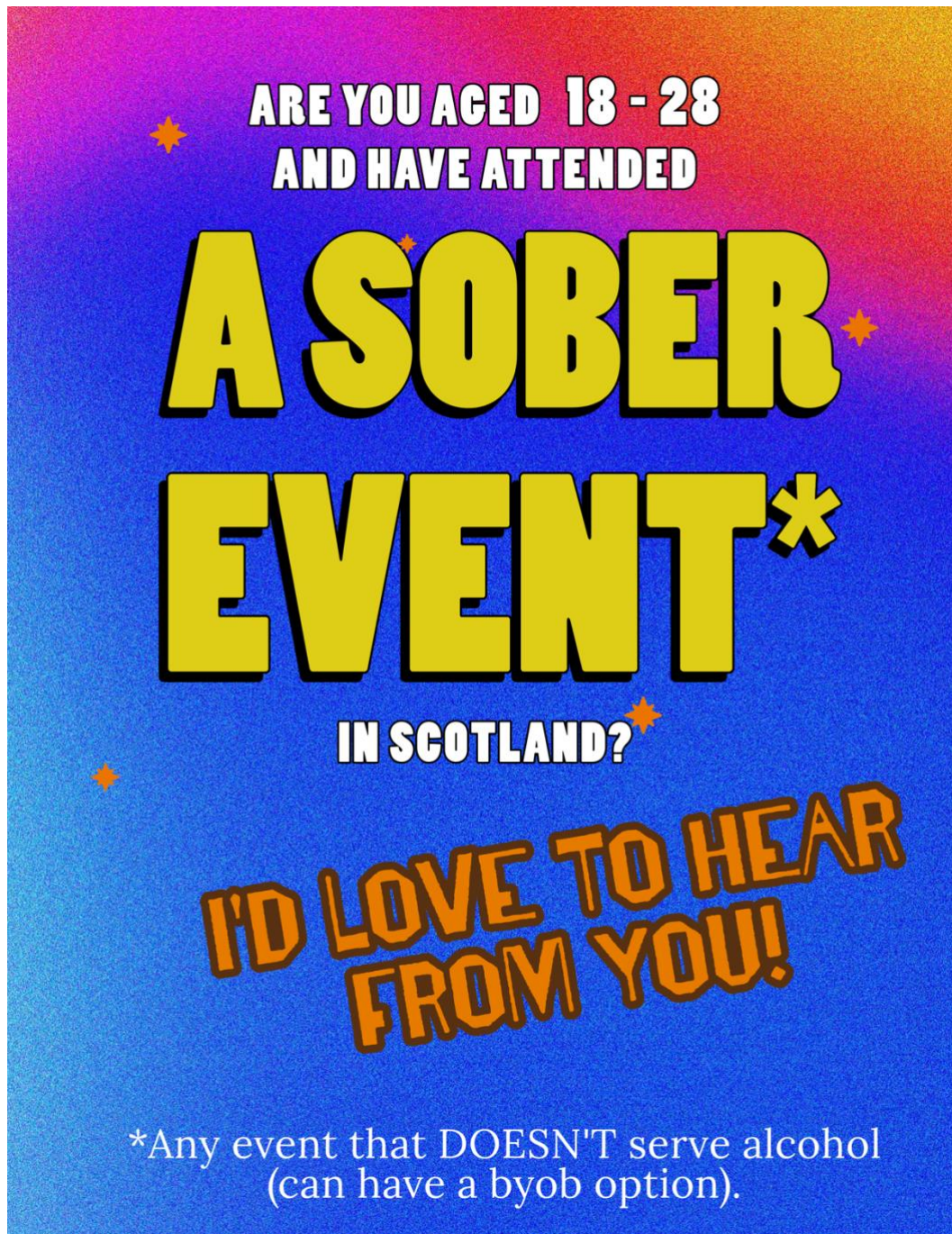
Many participants, especially those describing themselves as artists, expressed concerns regarding alcohol marketing and branding. They described the colourful and creative packaging designs as encouraging to purchase. Some contrasted the lack of regulations for alcohol branding with strict policies on cigarette packaging.

“The current cans are really encouraging; they look super cool. (...) with cigarettes, you have pictures of diseases and plain coloured packaging.” (Emily)

Chapter 2 analysed the ineffectiveness and lack of regulations regarding alcohol marketing in Scotland. Although WHO strongly encourages strict policies on that matter, governments benefit from the lack of them. Especially in Scotland, where the Whisky industry is supported as a part of the national heritage and plays a big role in the tourism industry. Therefore, regulating them would potentially bring profit loss for these departments. Young people and those recovering from addiction were found to be highly affected by alcohol marketing. The Scottish Government should assess their priorities and decide whether that profit should be on the expense of people's health. Based on these findings, it is recommended to increase marketing restrictions for alcoholic products.

Appendix C

Research Recruitment Graphic



Appendix D

List of Interview Questions

1: How would you describe your relationship with alcohol, if you have one?

Yes:

-Have you ever thought about changing your drinking habits? If so, what influenced that thought?

No:

What influenced/ still influences you to be sober or drink moderately?

2: How does society/ people around you influence your drinking choices?

3: How do you perceive alcohol consumption in a social context among your age group?
(Increased/decreased consumption, more/less pressure)

4: Are you aware of any government policies or social campaigns aimed at reducing alcohol consumption?

5: Do you think these policies or initiatives feel relevant to you and your age group? Why or why not?

6: What are some things you wish/ think would be helpful for governments and organisations to do to encourage you and people in your age group to explore a more sober lifestyle?

- What do you think would make a public health campaign or initiative more appealing to young adults?
- What kind of messaging or resources do you think would be most effective for reducing alcohol consumption among your age group?

7: What might make sobriety feel like a more appealing or normal choice?

Prompt: What is the event you attended? Was it NAP or BYOB? How old were you? Did you consume alcohol?

8: How was your experience attending a sober event? What did you find potentially challenging or enjoyable?

9: Did attending this event make you think differently about drinking in any way? If so, what aspects stood out?

10: What kind of sober events would you like to see an increase of in your city?

+ Would you like to add anything else?

Appendix E

Interview Transcription Example

R: How would you describe your relationship with alcohol if you have one?

P: Yeah, I don't really drink alcohol that much. I think luckily, I was raised in an environment with my parents, they were not really drinking. So I was never really used to it. Like I always found that quite unhealthy and I know that it affects my health and skin and how I feel later and so on. I just kind of managed to, I think build that not resistance, but like just feeling that I don't really need it for anything. When I'm at parties, I drink sometimes, but like nothing really changes.

R: So what would you say is the main factors influencing your moderate drinking?

P: I think mostly health reasons and just kind of being aware of it. Trying to be careful with it when you go out with people and you want to have fun but you don't want them to be taking care of you. I can have fun without alcohol and I'm trying to keep that mindset.

R: How do you think the people around you or society in general influence your drinking choices?

P: When someone brings beer to a party or when I have a social event in the evening, I sometimes ask if I can have a tea. But most social events happen during the evening and people drink in the evening; beer, wine, etc. Sometimes I'll drink wine because apparently it's healthier, has less sugar. But to be fair, I don't feel the pressure from the people I meet at those social meetings. But I met with my friends yesterday in a pub and they didn't have any tea, you know and we met at 7pm. And honestly I would prefer to meet for a coffee. But this is the kind of time you meet with people. So when we met at 7 in the pub, I felt the energy of going out. So I took a cider to drink so the kind of place and music and the atmosphere in general put me in that mindset.

R: And how do you perceive alcohol consumption among your age group?

P: I think it depends on friends but all of mine are aged around 30 and they don't really drink that much. But it really depends on the social group, I have some artist friends that are older and I see them going to a pub every week. But it's not my close friends. My close friends don't really drink that much, maybe wine sometimes but not on regular basis. They're the kind of people who rather play board games and do crafts, so they're not bored even without alcohol. They're not trying to entertain themselves with alcohol but fun activities. Also, when I joined dancing groups, I noticed that even though the events were taking place in pubs, a lot of people didn't really drink. I think because when you drink and dance it doesn't work together, especially when you need to focus on your

moves. So although a lot of people in this group are younger, they just want to dance. They entertain themselves with another activity, not drinking.

R: Okay, cool. Are you aware of any governmental policies aimed at reducing alcohol consumption in Scotland?

P: Of course selling alcohol to people above certain age, they are quite strict and they ask me for ID every time. It works quite well because I was refused to be sold alcohol on few occasions or wasn't let into pubs because I didn't have my ID on me and didn't look over 18. At least in Edinburgh, I don't know about the rest of Scotland.

R: Keeping in mind those policies, how relevant and effective do they feel to you and your age group?

P: I think not being able to buy alcohol after 10pm and closing pubs and clubs at 3am is really effective. People are not out for so long and it for sure stopped me to keep partying many times. Or from buying more alcohol. I mean people can always buy more before the cut-off time but when they're drunk they tend to buy more. And there's more surveillance in pubs than in shops. So yeah, I think it works.

R: What are some things you wish or think would be helpful for governments and organizations to do to encourage you and people your age to explore a more sober lifestyle?

P: I think organising events that are not focused on alcohol and music. These two usually go together and even if they don't officially sell it, people still show up drunk. So organising events that are focused on something else. Like art activities, sports, etc. But it'd be good having them in the evening as well because usually they're happening during the day. And then people end up drinking in the evening anyway. So maybe events that are engaging people somehow without alcohol. Dancing is a good example, usually you don't want to have a drink because you're getting that happiness and stimuli from what you're doing. It makes you happy and you don't need to drink. This could be a good direction. I also like the idea of just going out and having drinks, just not alcoholic ones. People like having something to drink and something to hold in their hands. You can do so many cocktails without alcohol that taste the same, like mojito. It'd be really encouraging and I bet most people wouldn't even notice they're non-alcoholic. Also alcohol packaging. They're so beautiful and colourful, they look like or better than juices. So I think it should be more restricted. The current cans are really encouraging, they look super cool. They taste okay but they're just cool to have. It's very small, convenient to have one. Maybe sometimes the prices are discouraging. But yeah, restrictions with design, just like with cigarettes, you have pictures of diseases and plain coloured packaging. So strict rules to make them less appealing.

R: And what do you think might make sobriety feel like a more appealing or normal choice?

P: As I said, doing more creative activities when you meet with people. I have a feeling that crafts and board games, etc., are getting more popular. Even in the culture you don't see as many movies where drinking or smoking is cool. And it has a huge impact on people. Culture and media in general are very strong mediums to influence people's choices and lifestyles. And if you're someone who's interested in a more sober lifestyle, it's good to have sober events to go to and meet more likeminded people. Then you can organise more things like that yourself, discover new activities, hobbies, etc.

R: So, what sober event have you attended?

P: When I was younger, I attended a sober festival where you couldn't drink. We still drank before the entrance or hiding somewhere. So forbidding stuff and searching bags didn't really encourage us to oblige.

R: And how was your experience attending this or any other sober event? What did you find potentially challenging or enjoyable?

P: It's really my attitude and people attending that really affect me. When you're around friends whom you feel comfortable around, you won't probably even notice you're not drinking. But I guess if you're at a party where you don't know that many people, alcohol might make you feel more relaxed.

R: What would encourage you from the past at the time of that sober festival to decide to not drink?

P: Seeing people not doing it for sure. There was a concert, people were dancing to techno and I knew they weren't even drunk, they were just dancing. With they own energy, it was just amazing.

R: Nice. And did attending this or any sober event make you feel differently about drinking in any way?

P: It was very inspiring for sure. This thought that WOW it's actually possible and people are doing it. And so can you.

R: And what kind of sober events would you like to see an increase of in your city?

P: I'd love something like a techno dancing event, maybe even outside? Somewhere where I know that people are not drunk or on drugs, they're just being themselves, in the moment. That would be really nice.

I've never seen anything like that in Edinburgh, I'm not sure about the rest of Scotland. But it'd be nice to have them and know you can actually have conversations with people because they're not intoxicated.

R: Nice. And would you like to add anything else?

P: No.

R: Perfect. That's us. Thank you so much.

Appendix F

Participant Consent Form

Edinburgh Napier University (ENU) Research Consent Form

The Impacts of Sober Events on Young Adults' Attitudes Toward Sobriety in Scotland

Edinburgh Napier University requires that all persons who participate in research studies give their written consent to do so. Please read the following and sign it if you agree with what it says.

1. I freely and voluntarily consent to be a participant in the research project on the topic of the impact of sober events on young adults' attitudes towards sobriety in Scotland to be conducted by Ewa Miko who is an undergraduate student at Edinburgh Napier University Business School.
2. The broad goal of this research study is to examine how attending sober events influences attitudes towards sobriety among young adults (18 – 28) in Scotland, and assess their potential as a positive social initiative to encourage alcohol consumption reduction. Specifically, I have been asked to share my views by participating in a semi-structured interview, which should take no longer than an hour to complete.
3. I have been told that my responses will be anonymised. Specifically, I will be allocated a pseudonym and all identifiable features (including where I refer to others) will be removed from the data. My name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in any report subsequently produced by the researcher.
4. The researcher has confirmed that personal data and anonymised data will be stored securely in separate password protected folders on the researcher's ENU H-drive and all data will be destroyed immediately after the end of the examination/assessment process – usually within three months of the completion of the project.
5. I also understand that if at any time during the interview I feel unable or unwilling to continue, I am free to leave. That is, my participation in this study is completely voluntary, and I may withdraw from it without negative consequences. However, after data has been anonymised or after publication of results it will not be possible for my data to be removed as it would be untraceable at this point.
6. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
7. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the interview and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

8. I have read and understand the above and consent to participate in this study. My signature is not a waiver of any legal rights. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to keep a copy of the informed consent form for my records.

Participant's Signature

Date

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the respondent has consented to participate. Furthermore, I will retain one copy of the informed consent form for my records.

Ewa Katarzyna Miko

25.02.2025

Researcher's Signature

Date