

*The*  
**ALCOHOL**  
ISSUE  
PART ONE  
**JUNE**  
2019



from

# HYPE

COLLECTIVE

and



# YESMORE

ALCOHOL MARKETING FROM GRAIN TO GLASS

And other things about  
why students buy alcohol

BRAND (DIS)LOYALTY



Hype Collective is a student marketing agency. But it's run by two people whose student days are, sadly, long behind them.

So, every couple of months, we conduct research into what students actually want, to prevent the agency from working on the assumptions of the past.

This time, we looked at alcohol.

We teamed up with alcohol experts and all-round lovely people, YesMore. They specialise in marketing for alcohol brands, and work with brands, bars and retailers in the drinks industry.

Between the two agencies, we conducted six focus groups of students across the UK, discussing everything from how much they drink, to what they look for in a night out, to what drinks they're loyal to (spoiler alert: the cheap ones). These are the results.



# The sober student?

Students are drinking less. According to the NUS, one in five students don't drink, and the students who do are drinking a lower volume, and less often.

It's a pretty well-documented trend, and one we expect to continue.

But we wanted to ask: how is this affecting student culture? Ten years ago, the student union bar, or a nearby pub, was the epicentre of most students' social lives.

Is this still the case? Or has the decline in drinking led to the student union bar becoming irrelevant?

## What did we find?

If you read about this trend in the *Mail* or the *Express*, you could be forgiven for thinking that most students are sober vegans who prefer yoga to clubbing and

think drinking is uncool. Many of the traditional media outlets paint today's students as snowflakes who can't handle their drink. And then you have the likes of Piers Morgan absolutely revelling in the idea that younger generations 'just don't know how to have fun'.

But the problem – in a disappointment to everyone but especially Piers Morgan – is that this is, frankly, bullsh\*t.

Yes, students are drinking less. Yet the vast majority of students in the focus groups said that the student union bar or a nearby pub was the most common location for socialising with friends.

They are still drinking regularly and they are still drinking a lot.

"But the data!" we hear you cry. "Students *are* drinking less!" However, the problem with the coverage of this



trend is that it misses – perhaps intentionally – a vital point: it is falling, but from a very high base. Yes, students are drinking less than students from ten years ago, but they're still drinking a lot.

No, the local boozer isn't being replaced by ice cream parlours or yoga studios, although they are getting some competition from coffee shops. But then,

this isn't new. Coffee shops have been muscling in on pubs' turf ever since Central Perk first opened its fictional, friendly doors.

There *have*, though, been some nuanced changes in the way students drink. And that's what we'll explore in this issue.



*What students consider  
important in a venue when  
planning a group night out*

*"Style of music  
played and the  
general vibe"*

*"Music, prices,  
atmosphere"*

*"Price"*

*"The music"*

*"Atmosphere"*

*"Price of drinks/  
music choice"*

*"Balance between atmosphere  
and pricing, also usually choose  
places with a good beer garden"*

*"Price"*

*"The atmosphere"*

*"The music  
and company"*

*"Location, price and  
reviews from other  
people, if it's highly  
rated or not"*

*"The music and  
atmosphere of the  
venue are important"*

*"Pricing"*

*"Type of music"*

*"Price and  
venue distance"*

*"Music"*

*"Price, convenience,  
music, atmosphere"*

*"Atmosphere/music"*

*"Usually cost"*

*"The prices"*

DANCE  
AGAIN



# Brand (dis)loyalty

They're a fickle bunch, students. Or at least they are when it comes to alcohol.

Most students in our focus groups said they didn't consider themselves loyal to any particular brand. However, around two-thirds did consider themselves loyal to a category, whether that's lager or IPA; rosé or gin.

They would very rarely have a go-to brand – and when they did, it largely boiled down to value for money. “I guess I'm loyal to Captain Morgan, but that's because it's quite cheap and it's decent,” said Tom, 19, from Leeds. This was quite a common answer: most students who were loyal to a brand were loyal purely for practical reasons. “It's cheap and it's not terrible” was a common theme.

**In fact, within categories, many students were disloyal to brands.** That is, they would actively try brands they had never heard of, because well-known brands were associated with low quality.

Around two-thirds of the focus group attendees said they would be drawn to a brand they hadn't heard of, with most saying they associated it with higher quality. ‘Supporting local businesses’ and ‘being adventurous’ were also common reasons given for actively avoiding big brands.

So, if no one has heard of your brand, or if you can create an air of discovery around it in your marketing, you may actually have an edge in this market.



# What's the point of alcohol-free beer?

Students like beer. Students are drinking less. So, alcohol-free beer should be a hit, right?

Actually, no.

Only a third of the students we interviewed had tried an alcohol-free beer – and a lot of those were either samples or trying a bit of someone else's. In other words, very few had actually purchased one. The same was true of mocktails and other 'alcohol replacement' drinks.

A lot of students would choose not to drink on a night out from time to time

– but in these scenarios, they would opt for water or a soft drink.

"I see them and think, 'What's the point?'" said Sally from Cardiff. "If I'm not drinking, I just won't drink." This type of answer was quite common.

Our theory – and it's very much a theory at this stage – is that staying sober has been normalised, so there's no need to fill any social gap created by not having a pint in your hand while socialising. There's also the fact that most students don't feel peer pressure to drink, which brings us nicely onto our next trend...





# *Students on alcohol-free beer, alcohol-free spirits and mocktails*

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They're too expensive so there's no point – I would rather drink water for free.

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*Megan, 20*

Would rather not waste the calories if not drinking.

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*Emma, 22*

If I wasn't drinking I would drink water or cola – mocktails seem overpriced and childish.

---

*Phoebe, 21*

They are often too expensive for what they are. I would prefer a soft drink.

---

*Emily, 19*

If I was driving then yeah but only one. Feel a slight placebo effect and enjoy the taste of beer but would not continuously go to the bar and drink them – bit pointless for the price.

---

*Tom, 20*





# The death of peer pressure?

Most of the students we spoke to who drank regularly said they had skipped drinking at some point in the last semester. The main reasons for this were exams, deadlines and lectures.

They would still go on nights out, but they'd have only one or two drinks, or none at all.

We asked them how they would feel about asking for a water or a Diet Coke on a round when the rest of their friends chose an alcoholic option.

The overwhelming majority – around 80% – said they wouldn't feel self-conscious about requesting

a non-alcoholic drink. A similar number said they wouldn't feel any peer pressure to drink, either.

Most of them rejected the very notion that there's something to be conscious of when it comes to not drinking. It's just normal.

There were exceptions, of course. Most of the focus group attendees said they would feel peer pressure in a similar scenario if they were on a sports team social.

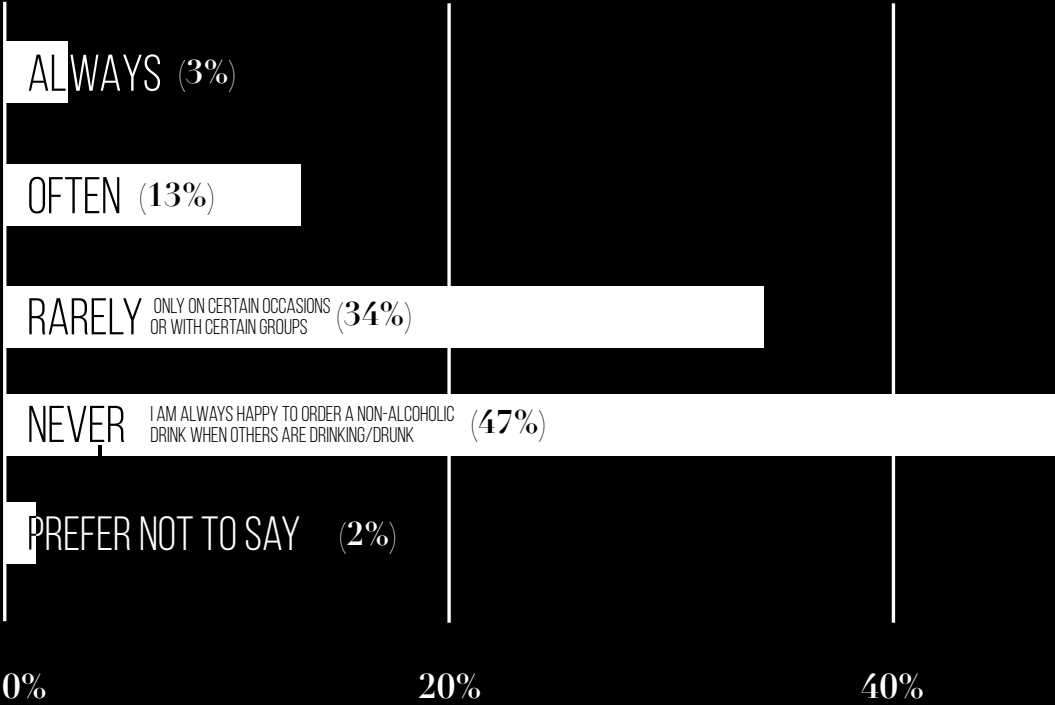
Peer pressure isn't gone from society altogether, then. But its role in consumer buying habits certainly is diminishing.





# Do you feel peer pressure to drink alcohol when in a group?

YouthSight poll of 1,000 students who live in the UK



*Note: the above graph only adds up to 99% due to rounding of individual answers*


# Quotes from focus group on the same question:

Not really but sometimes, depends on the people in the group / Nope / Not really, I usually am drinking but if i wasn't, my friends would jokingly try to get me to, but i wouldn't feel pressured. / Sometimes / No, not usually / No / No / no / no / No / no if people judge me for drinking water i probably wouldn't hang out with them / No as I enjoy drinking / Only if I didn't know the group too well / No it's pretty normal / Often / No / Sometimes / No because it's normal / Yes / No / Only occasionally, say on a big night out if I don't feel on the same level as everyone else I will sometimes drink more than I want to. / No / sometimes when I'm out with my netball team / Not peer pressure, but fear of missing out / Only in circumstances where people are drinking a lot because I don't want to be the only sober person amongst really drunk people / Not usually, especially if it's a calmer environment such as a smaller house party or a pub / not unless I'm out with my rugby team / no / not normally / nah / sometimes a little / not often / rarely / no / No / no / depends on the people I'm drinking with / not normally but if it was an occasion (eg someone's birthday) / no / no because a lot of people do it / no if I had a good reason / only if it was with my rugby team / not normally / don't think so / I don't drink and it's never been a problem / no / rarely / don't think so / I normally drink so no, but wouldn't judge others / no / no / rarely / no / sometimes / no / No / I don't drink sometimes but no one judges me / only if I'm on a night out with certain people / in certain situations / no / rarely



# The living room: competition for the pub



 Adam Bruderer

It's not a great time to run a pub. In the UK, one closes every 12 hours, according to figures from earlier this year.

And thanks to the likes of Netflix and Deliveroo, pubs now have yet more competition in the shape of the humble living room.

But what we wanted to dig into is whether a night in is seen as a legitimate alternative to a night out, or whether it fulfils a different set of needs entirely.

Responses were mixed. Around a third of students said they'd plan a night out and that was that. The options were: pub or club – but once the decision had been made to go out, there was no going back (in). The living room could not compete.

However, approximately half of the attendees had a different approach, saying they would know what type of night they were looking for but then all

options were on the table. “You know whether you want a big night or a quiet one, but you can do both of those out or in,” said Sarah, 20, from Manchester.

“There’s an alternative for most nights out,” said 19-year-old Eddie in Glasgow. “For a pub, you can just have a few cans at home. For a night club, house party. Cinema, Netflix. They’re different but they offer the same.”

The range of options was important, because a night in can mean different things to different people.

“Movie nights, video games, nights of drinking in the flat... all of these are enjoyable, cheaper and leave you less tired the next day,” explained Tom, 20, from Glasgow.

So, if you run a pub, the good news is that stories about students going sober are overblown. The bad news? There are more ways to drink than ever before.



# Alcohol and mental health

For the past decade, mental health charities have rightly been telling us that we should talk more about our mental health.

The majority of students, it appears, have listened.

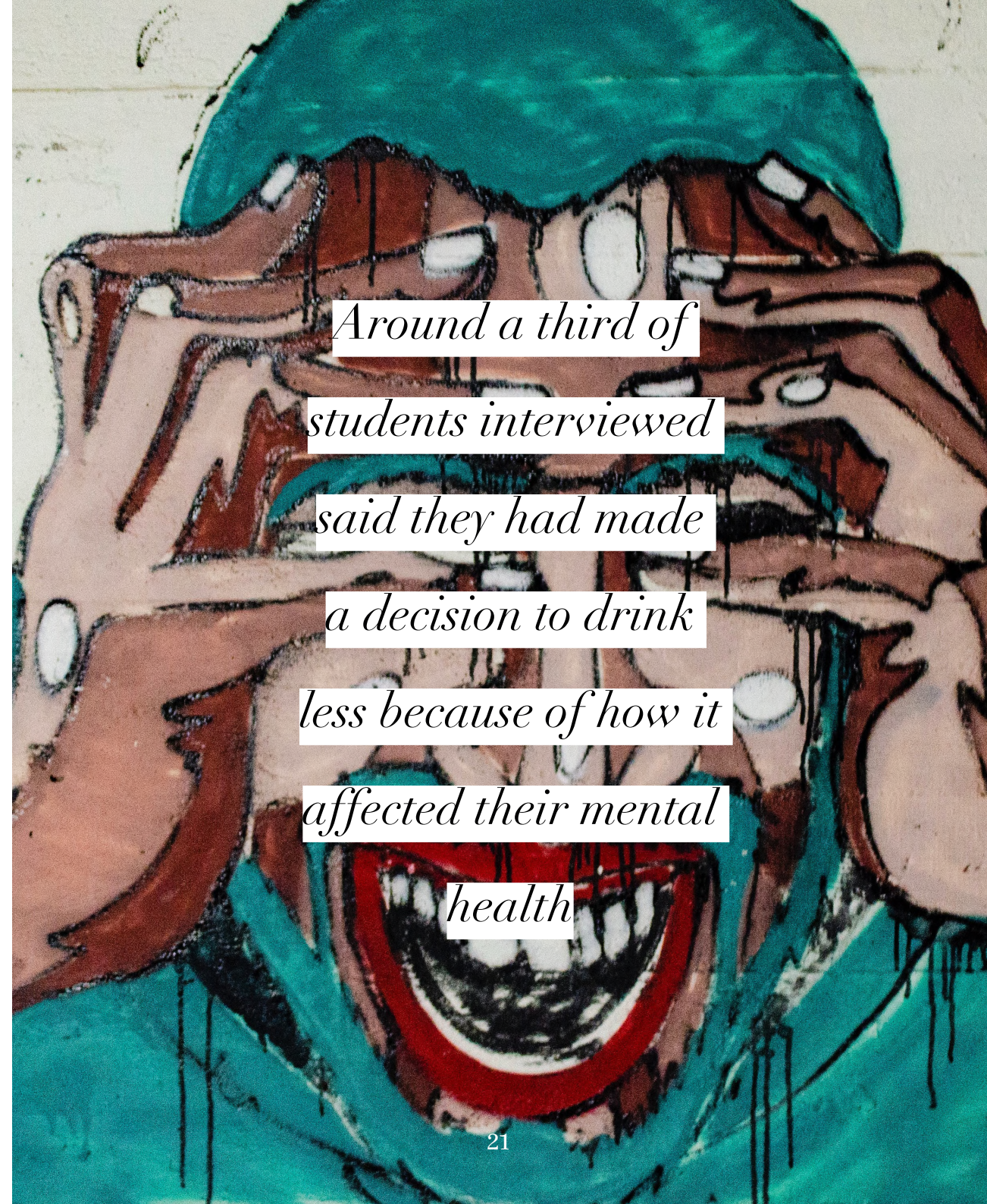
The vast majority of our focus group attendees said that they were comfortable talking about their mental health.

**Around 80% of the attendees said that they were also aware of the negative link between alcohol and mental health.** Most of them pointed to the fact that hangovers alone can be a trigger for certain

mental health issues - largely anxiety and depression.

Around a third said that, because of this, they had made the decision to drink less due to the impact it had on their mental health. Most of these hadn't done this dramatically, but had chosen to skip a night every now and then to improve their mental health.

So, while the next generation isn't 'killing the alcohol industry' - as the *Mail* or *Express* will probably claim sooner or later - they are significantly more aware of how drinking impacts them, both physically and mentally.



*Around a third of  
students interviewed  
said they had made  
a decision to drink  
less because of how it  
affected their mental  
health*



# That's your lot.

*(For now.)*

Thanks for reading – we hope you enjoyed it. (No, really, we do. We hate dull industry research papers and we always try to make something a bit more interesting.)

We will be running two more sets of focus groups later this year about travel and the student home.

If you've got any burning questions or bright ideas about either of those areas, we'd love to chat. Drop our MD, Simon Lucey, a line on [simon@hypecollective.co.uk](mailto:simon@hypecollective.co.uk).

If you've got any questions for YesMore, you can reach Tom Harvey on [tom@yesmore.co.uk](mailto:tom@yesmore.co.uk).

For media enquiries, it's Claire Foss you want: [claire@waterfallpr.com](mailto:claire@waterfallpr.com).



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# HYPE

COLLECTIVE

Hype Collective is a student marketing agency. We work primarily across experiential, content and research.

We're made up of a small team of marketers and creatives, working out of the Biscuit Factory in Bermondsey, London.

We work with a mix of consumer and corporate brands, including Co-op, StudentUniverse, Student.com, Shell and Abercrombie & Fitch.

*[hypecollective.co.uk](http://hypecollective.co.uk)*



YesMore is an agency specialising in alcohol marketing for brands, bars and retailers throughout the drinks industry.

Our expert teams deliver brand design, websites, social media, image and video content, influencers, events and print design.

We are on a mission to inspire a positive change in society's relationship with alcohol. We develop marketing campaigns for forward-thinking brands such as Aperol Spritz, Bacardi, Be At One, Balblair, New Zealand Wine, Regal Rogue, the Portman Group and Carluccio's.

*[yesmore.co.uk](http://yesmore.co.uk)*

# The numbers

This report was written following a three-month research project which involved focus groups, industry interviews and a nationwide survey of students.



## Focus groups

Number of focus groups: 7

Nationwide attendees: 61

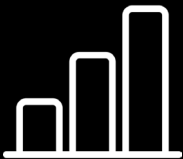
Focus group locations: *London (mix of universities), Aston University, Cardiff University, University of Glasgow, University of Leeds, University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University*



## Industry interviews

Number of interviews: 9

Who we interviewed: *A mix of alcohol brands, including on-trade and off-trade, as well as industry bodies*



## Survey

Number of respondents: *1,000 qualified students in the UK*

Research company: *YouthSight*