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## The Role of Personality Factors in Young Adults' Motives for Sharing Alcohol References on Social Networking Sites

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### Abstract

*Sharing alcohol-related content on social media has been linked to young adults' alcohol use. Therefore, it is important to understand why these references are shared in the first place. As such, the first aim of this study was to identify the motives (social, entertainment, information/identification) that predict the sharing of alcohol references through an online survey of young Dutch adults (N = 339, M<sub>age</sub> = 22.67 years, SD<sub>age</sub> = 3.04 years, 69.4% women). The second aim was to investigate individual differences in motives by examining whether motives mediate the relationship between personality traits (agreeableness, neuroticism, extroversion) and internal states (need for popularity) and sharing alcohol-related content. Our findings showed that identification/information (and not social or entertainment) motives and extroversion directly predicted the sharing of alcohol-related content. Moreover, respondents with a great need for popularity scored higher on all sharing motives, but only identification/information motives mediated the relationship between the need for popularity and sharing alcohol-related content. Thus, extroverted and popularity-oriented individuals are highly likely to post alcohol-related content. Overall, our findings show that certain motives predict the sharing of alcohol references on social media and that certain groups of individuals may be particularly prone to sharing such content, which makes them potential targets for interventions.*

**Keywords:** alcohol; social media; uses and gratifications; personality; Big Five; young adults

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### Introduction

Excessive alcohol use may lead to severe consequences, such as brain damage or alcohol addiction, and is linked to risky behaviors, such as reckless driving (de Goede et al., 2021; Patrick et al., 2020; Skrzynski & Creswell, 2020). Although the negative consequences of excessive alcohol use are well known, young adults (18–30 years old; Tanner & Arnett, 2016) may still exhibit this behavior. For example, in a study by Hendriks et al. (2020), young adults had the highest scores on all drinking patterns, ranging from moderate and occasional drinking to excessive

and frequent drinking. Alcohol consumption usually takes place in social contexts (e.g., drinks with friends), which can be explained by young adults' need to experience a sense of (social) belonging (Demant & Järvinen, 2006). To fit in with a peer group, young adults behave alike (Chung & Rimal, 2016). For instance, research has shown that an increase in the number of classmates who drink affects the likelihood and frequency of individuals' participation in drinking events (Ali & Dwyer, 2010).

One factor playing an important role in social contexts and social acceptance are Social Networking Sites (SNSs) (Litt & Stock, 2011), which have become increasingly popular among young adults during the past decade (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Research shows that 78–90% of individuals aged between 16 and 34 years use at least one SNS daily (Vandendriessche et al., 2020). SNSs are frequently used for the portrayal of young adults' leisure activities, including alcohol consumption. Beullens and Schepers (2013) found that alcohol posts appeared in 96% of young adults' SNS profiles. These posts usually portray drinking events as positive social contexts (Hendriks, van den Putte, et al., 2018), which is problematic because posting and being exposed to alcohol-related content leads to an increase in actual drinking behavior (Boyle et al., 2016; Geusens & Beullens, 2017; Litt & Stock, 2011). For this reason, some studies have examined the motives for posting alcohol references to SNSs (Geusens & Beullens, 2021; Hendriks et al., 2017). Hendriks et al. (2017) focused on four sharing motives—social, identification, information, and entertainment—and found that entertainment motives were the most important for sharing alcohol-related content. They also found age- and gender-related differences in sharing motives. Men were more frequently characterized by all sharing motives, and social, information, and identification motives became more relevant with older age (Hendriks et al., 2017). Despite these interesting results, however, Hendriks et al. (2017) examined sharing motives only on a descriptive level. Therefore, the first aim of our research was to identify the motives that actually predict the sharing of alcohol-related content. The second aim of our study was to extend previous knowledge to differences in motives by examining whether personality traits (i.e., agreeableness, extroversion, neuroticism) and states (need for popularity) might also be linked with different sharing motives. For example, research has shown that more outgoing people have different motives for posting content on SNSs than more introverted people (Błachnio et al., 2013; Ross et al., 2009). Therefore, this study aimed to examine whether this is also the case for sharing alcohol-related content. Thus, our study contributes to the literature by examining whether certain motives mediate the relationship between different personality traits and states and sharing alcohol-related content. Our study also has practical implications, as it may provide insights into the motives of individuals who are more likely to post alcohol-related content and could indicate directions for reducing the visibility of alcohol-related posts. For example, people who are more prone to sharing alcohol references might form target groups for interventions.

## **Motives for Sharing Alcohol-Related Content**

An important step toward revealing the motives behind sharing alcohol-related content on SNSs is to identify the reasons for posting and the ways in which these motives are construed. A theoretical framework useful for this purpose is uses and gratifications (U&G) theory (Katz et al., 1974), which attempts to understand why and how people actively use specific media to meet their needs. By emphasizing “actively,” this theory acknowledges that media users are active and powerful rather than passive media consumers. As such, they make deliberate choices to use specific media to obtain specific gratifications. The gratifications obtained from a particular medium subsequently influence the frequency and intensity of using that medium (Kircaburun et al., 2020). Although this theory was proposed long before the rise of SNSs, it has also been applied frequently to the modern SNS context (Hendriks et al., 2017; Smock et al., 2011). As follows, building on this framework, we aimed to understand what gratifications people obtain from sharing alcohol-related content on SNS platforms, which might influence the frequency and intensity of sharing.

Hendriks et al. (2017) identified four motives for sharing alcohol-related content on SNSs: information, identification, social, and entertainment motives. First, with the rise of SNSs, users feel the need to actively share general or personal content to inform others of their preferences and activities (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2010; Smock et al., 2011). Building on U&G research, this can be considered an information motive for using SNSs. In our case, it means sharing alcohol-related information (e.g., having a drink with friends or checking in at a bar; Hendriks et al., 2017).

Second, users may not only wish to inform others but also feel the need to show a socially desirable identity by selectively displaying certain information (Smock et al., 2011; Zhao et al., 2008). According to U&G research, this can be considered an identification motive for using SNSs (Smock et al., 2011; Zhao et al., 2008). This motive also

seems to apply to sharing alcohol-related content. For instance, substantial evidence suggests that young people actively try to build an alcohol identity by displaying both glamorized and transgressive alcohol references “to fit into the drunk fun” (Atkinson et al., 2014; Hebden et al., 2015; Niland et al., 2014, p. 886). Hendriks et al. (2017) explained identification motives for sharing alcohol-related content as attempts to show that alcohol is part of who one is as a person.

Third, people also feel the need to show that they fit in with others, which U&G research labels as a social motive for sharing content online (Smock et al., 2011; Zhao et al., 2008). This motive is related to sharing content to obtain gratifications such as interacting with others, attracting the attention of others, or complying with the social norms of a specific group (Smock et al., 2011). Adapted to alcohol-related content, it means sharing alcohol references to stay socially connected with others, to receive likes and comments, and/or to appear popular and fit in with others (Hendriks et al., 2017). This social aspect is often reflected in the content itself, as drinking events are regularly portrayed as positive social contexts (e.g., friends holding drinks; Hendriks, van den Putte, et al., 2018; Niland et al., 2014).

Fourth, SNS users may post alcohol-related content to entertain themselves and others. Hendriks et al. (2017) found that entertainment motives, such as showing that one was present at a fun event or sharing a positive feeling, were the most relevant for posting alcohol-related content. However, their study had two limitations. First, it examined sharing motives only on a descriptive level. Thus, it remains uncertain whether individuals’ motives might actually predict the sharing of alcohol-related content. Nevertheless, building on Geusens and Beullens (2021), it seems that the motives proposed by Hendriks et al. (2017) are associated with different sharing patterns. Therefore, it is important to further investigate this matter because revealing users’ posting motives might be an important step toward reducing the frequency and intensity of sharing alcohol-related content, which has been shown to influence both the poster and the viewer (Boyle et al., 2016; Geusens & Beullens, 2017). Thus, this study attempted to examine the link between these motives and sharing alcohol-related content by addressing the following research question:

**RQ1:** What motives predict the sharing of alcohol-related content?

The second limitation of Hendriks et al.’s (2017) study and other research on sharing motives (Thompson & Romo, 2016) is that they considered motives separately. However, evidence suggests that motives for sharing alcohol-related content might be intertwined. For example, although Hendriks et al. (2017) underlined the importance of entertainment motives for sharing alcohol-related content, Niland et al. (2014) found that among heavy drinkers, alcohol-related content was predominantly posted for friendship group belonging—in other words, posting alcohol references had social motives. These conflicting findings might be explained by previous research (Utz, 2015) suggesting that entertaining posts, which are prevalent on SNSs, are mainly aimed at relationship maintenance. Sharing entertaining content may trigger humorous interactions, thereby strengthening group bonding. This may also apply to alcohol-related content: Alcohol posts usually receive positive and humorous feedback within groups of friends (Beullens & Schepers, 2013; Wolfer, 2014). Thus, social and entertainment motives appear to intermingle. Social motives may also intertwine with information and identification motives. Atkinson et al. (2014) found that online alcohol identities were often created because of the desire to fit in with a peer group. As such, sharing alcohol-related content might be driven by the desire to interact with others, rather than by the wish to solely provide alcohol-related information. Based on these insights, our study aimed to examine the covariations between posting motives based on the following hypothesis:

**H1:** Social motives positively correlate with entertainment, information, and identification motives.

## **Personality Factors**

Because diverse motives for sharing content on SNSs have been identified (Smock et al., 2011), research has focused on the factors that could predict these differences in motives, particularly individual differences between SNS users (Błachnio et al., 2013; Seidman, 2013). A framework used to study these individual differences is the five-factor model (FFM) of personality, or “Big Five” (Costa & McCrae, 1999), which holds that personality consists of five dimensions: neuroticism, agreeableness, extroversion, conscientiousness, and openness. Evidence suggests that individuals’ motives for using SNSs depend on these personality traits. For example, extroverted people use SNSs more often for self-disclosure, whereas agreeable people use them to fulfill their need to belong (Błachnio et al., 2013; Ross et al., 2009; Seidman, 2013). Hence, the importance of personality differences associated with the motives for using SNSs should not be overlooked.

Building on these insights and a systematic review (Adan et al., 2017) indicating that people with certain personality traits seem to be more prone to heavy alcohol consumption, it might also be interesting to examine what types of people are more prone to sharing their offline drinking practices online. This is particularly important because research suggests that self-sharing alcohol content is related to an increase in one's own drinking behavior (Geusens & Beullens, 2017). However, studies on alcohol-related SNS use have only examined how personality traits moderate the link between posting and viewing alcohol-related content and alcohol use (Geusens et al., 2019; Scott & Barber, 2020). Research on how these personality traits might differentially predict the sharing of alcohol-related content and its motives is currently lacking. Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by examining which motives (information, identification, social, entertainment) mediate the relationship between personality traits and sharing alcohol-related content.

Three of the Big Five personality traits, namely extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism, were considered because several studies have shown that these in particular are linked to both SNS and alcohol use (Błachnio et al., 2013; Hakulinen et al., 2015; Ross et al., 2009), while this was not the case for conscientiousness and openness. Research, for example, has indicated that conscientiousness was either not or negatively related to diverse forms of SNS use and alcohol use (Adan et al., 2017; Malouff et al., 2007) and openness, which was rarely studied in the context of alcohol use, was mainly a predictor for social media use among more mature participants, thereby making this less interesting to include among our sample of young adults (Correa et al., 2010).

A first important personality trait to consider in relation to SNS and alcohol use is neuroticism, which Costa and McCrae (1999) described as experiencing anxiety, moodiness, pessimistic attitudes, and emotional instability, and is associated with risky alcohol consumption (Adan et al., 2017). Neurotic individuals are also known to experience psychological distress when being socially exposed (Costa & McCrae, 1999). Thus, while they may avoid socializing offline, they may turn to SNSs to fulfill the need to belong (Ross et al., 2009). The controllable nature of SNS interactions, which provides the opportunity to think before communicating, appears to be helpful in this respect (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Neurotic individuals thus tend to maintain control by using SNSs passively (e.g., scrolling through Facebook timeline) rather than actively sharing photographs of themselves (Ross et al., 2009; Smock et al., 2011). Based on these insights, it is conceivable that neurotic individuals share alcohol-related content for specific reasons. First, given their need to belong, they share such content to fit in with others (i.e., social motives). Second, given their passive use of SNSs, they are more likely to share some alcohol-related information (i.e., information motives) but less likely to create an explicit alcohol identity (i.e., identification motives). Third, given their pessimistic disposition, they may be less likely to share alcohol-related content for entertainment (i.e., entertainment motives; Ross et al., 2009). Accordingly, we formulated the following hypothesis:

**H2:** The higher people score on neuroticism, the more likely they are to have social and information motives for sharing alcohol-related content, and the less likely they are to have identification and entertainment motives.

Extroversion, which is related to being talkative, being assertive, and experiencing pleasure from social interactions, has also been linked to SNS and alcohol use (Błachnio et al., 2013; Costa & McCrae, 1999). Extroverted people are known for their social skills, which earn them numerous friendships both offline and online (Costa & McCrae, 1999). Ross et al. (2009) found that extroverted people were members of more Facebook groups than introverted people, which can be explained by the tendency of the former to intensively engage in social activities. These social activities are often associated with alcohol use or even misuse (Finlay et al., 2012). For instance, Kuntsche et al. (2017) found that binge drinkers mostly tend to be extroverts. Consequently, it is conceivable that extroverted people also share alcohol-related content for specific reasons. First, given their tendency to engage in offline social drinking activities, they may also wish to share their activities online (i.e., social motives). Second, these social drinking activities often reconstruct positive and pleasurable moments and may also be shared to entertain others (i.e., entertainment motives). Third, given that extroverted people also use SNSs for self-disclosure (Ross et al., 2009), they may deliberately share alcohol-related information (i.e., information motives) and create alcohol-related self-presentations (i.e., identification motives). Based on these insights, we hence formulated the following hypothesis:

**H3:** The higher people score on extroversion, the more likely they are to have social, entertainment, information, and identification motives for sharing alcohol-related content.

Agreeableness, or the tendency to be cooperative, sympathetic, and considerate (Costa & McCrae, 1999), is also linked to SNS and alcohol use. Agreeable people are known to less likely use SNSs for self-status needs (Lin et al., 2017) but rather use SNSs to fulfill their need to belong by forming and maintaining social relationships (Błachnio et al., 2013; Seidman, 2013). In addition, high scores on agreeableness are associated with low levels of alcohol

use and even increased odds of transitioning from moderate consumption to abstinence (Hakulinen et al., 2015; Malouff et al., 2007). Accordingly, based on these insights, we expected that agreeable people, known for their altruistic behavior, would have more other-directed motives for sharing alcohol-related content, such as social (e.g., being connected to others) and entertainment motives (e.g., having fun with others), than self-directed motives, such as information (e.g., showing you are attending an event) and identification motives (e.g., showing that alcohol is part of who they are). Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

**H4:** The higher people score on agreeableness, the more likely they are to have social and entertainment motives for sharing alcohol-related content, and the less likely they are to have information and identification motives.

## Need for Popularity

Although previous research has focused on the Big Five personality traits to explain SNS use, the need for popularity, which is regarded as a personal and dynamic state rather than an enduring trait (Chen et al., 2015) and as a motive or urge to do things to be viewed as popular with friends (Santor et al., 2000), has been found to be a better predictor of SNS use (Utz et al., 2012). Moreover, evidence suggests that need for popularity is directly associated with risky behavior and that popularity-driven individuals often emulate popular peers' drinking behaviors to obtain a higher status (Balsa et al., 2011).

Although need for popularity has been examined as a direct predictor of alcohol or SNS use in general, no studies have investigated its role in users' motives for sharing alcohol-related content. It is conceivable that the desire to be popular is linked to all relevant motives. People who wish to be popular in a group may try to gain approval by showing that they were present at a fun event (entertainment), that they are hip/cool (social), that they are fans of alcohol (identification), and that they like to share information about alcohol online, such as indicating they are going to a party (information; Hendriks et al., 2017). Following Utz et al. (2012), this study included need for popularity as a predictor of sharing motives in addition to the three Big Five personality traits of agreeableness, extroversion, and neuroticism. This choice was based on previous suggestions that combining trait and state concepts may allow more accurate predictions of behavior (Chen et al., 2015). Based on the literature, we hence came to the following hypothesis:

**H5:** The higher people score on need for popularity, the more likely they are to have entertainment, social, information, and identification motives for sharing alcohol-related content.

## Method

### Sample and Procedure

This study was part of a larger data collection and built upon a previous study of Hendriks et al. (2017). Prospective respondents were approached by research company I & O Research, an ISO-certified research firm for social issues. Participants were approached using an online existing representative research panel (approximately 35,000 members). Members of this panel were actively recruited by I&O Research through random sampling. The respondents received invitations to participate in the study via e-mail. After providing informed consent, they filled out an online questionnaire. The variables relevant to this study were personality factors, sharing motives, posting behavior, and alcohol consumption. The entire questionnaire took around 20 minutes to complete. Upon completion, the participants were thanked and rewarded with five euros. The study was approved by the university's ethics committee.

A total of 724 young Dutch people participated in the online survey that was conducted in May/June 2016. However, 163 participants were excluded from the analysis because of incorrect answers to attention check questions, impossibly quick answers, and ages outside the studied age range (18–30 years old). This resulted in a dataset of 561 respondents. However, because the aim was to explore the motives for posting alcohol-related content, only respondents who had posted such content to SNSs over the previous year were included, resulting in a final sample of 339 respondents ( $M_{\text{age}} = 22.67$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 3.04$  years, range = 18–30 years, 69.4% women, 56% higher professional education and 42.2% university students). In this sample, 97.9% of the respondents were born in the Netherlands, and most (76.1%) were not religious.

## Measures

### *Posting Motives*

To measure the motives for sharing alcohol-related content, this study built on Hendriks et al.'s (2017) research, in which respondents were asked to indicate on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *completely disagree*; 7 = *completely agree*) the extent to which 21 sharing motives were factors for posting such content. However, contrary to Hendriks et al. (2017), who identified four motives, an exploratory factor analysis (results in the Appendix) based on our data yielded only three factors. First, social motives were measured by nine items, in which the participants were asked to indicate why they posted alcohol-related content, including *To feel socially engaged with others* and *To attract attention from others* ( $\alpha = .92$ ). Second, entertainment motives were measured using the mean of six items, including *To enjoy myself and others* and *To show that I was present at a (fun) event* ( $\alpha = .81$ ). Lastly, identification motives and information motives, which Hendriks et al. (2017) measured using three items for each, were grouped into one factor, labeled identification/information motives, consisting of six items ( $\alpha = .81$ ), including *To show that I belong to a group of alcohol drinkers*, *To show that drinking alcohol is part of who I am* (identification items), *To share personal information* and *To share my experiences* (information items).

### *Dependent Variable: Posting Behavior*

The participants were asked about their posting behaviors related to four types of alcohol posts. In line with Hendriks, van den Putte, and Gebhardt (2018), an example of each type was presented. The first type consisted of photographs or videos in which alcohol was present more or less coincidentally—for instance, because someone was holding a drink at a party. The second type consisted of photographs or videos in which an alcoholic beverage was the center of attention. The third type consisted of photographs or videos in which the posters or others were intoxicated. The fourth type consisted of photographs or videos related to drinking games. Participants who reported having posted these types of content in the past (*yes/no*) were then asked how often they had posted such content on Instagram and/or Facebook over the previous year (1 = *once a year or less*; 12 = *10 or more times a day*). These two platforms were selected because they were the most popular with young adults at the time of the study and the most commonly used for alcohol portrayals (Hendriks, van den Putte, and Gebhardt, 2018; van der Veer et al., 2018). Many participants reported having posted type 1 ( $n = 314$ ) and 2 ( $n = 185$ ) content. Conversely, few indicated type 3 ( $n = 25$ ) or 4 ( $n = 50$ ) content. Due to this lack of variation in the data, the decision was made to merge the four types. Accordingly, the mean posting frequency (*How often have you posted this type of content over the past year?*) of all four types was calculated.

### *Independent Variables: Personality Factors*

Personality traits were measured using the Mini-IPIP scale (Donnellan et al., 2006). Twelve items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *does not apply to me*; 5 = *completely applies to me*) were used to measure the participants' personality traits, namely neuroticism, extroversion, and agreeableness. Neuroticism was measured using the mean score of four items, including *I get upset easily* and *I often have mood swings* (principal components; eigenvalue = 2.27, explained variance = 56.67,  $\alpha = .74$ ). Extroversion was also measured using the mean score of four items, including *I am the life of the party* and *I talk to many people at parties* (principal components; eigenvalue = 2.46, explained variance = 61.55,  $\alpha = .79$ ). Likewise, agreeableness was measured using the mean score of four items, including *I empathize with other people's feelings* and *I am interested in other people's problems* (principal components; eigenvalue = 2.45, explained variance = 61.27,  $\alpha = .79$ ).

The internal state of need for popularity was measured based on the popularity scale developed by Santor et al. (2000). The participants indicated on a 7-point Likert scale the degree to which they agreed (1 = *completely disagree*; 7 = *completely agree*) with statements such as *I would do almost anything to avoid being seen as a "loser"* and *Occasionally, I have gone out with people just because they were popular*. The mean score of the seven items was calculated to measure need for popularity (principal components; eigenvalue = 3.82, explained variance = 54.56,  $\alpha = .85$ ).

## ***Control Variables***

The demographic variables of age and gender (male = 1; female = 2) and SNS and alcohol use were included in the analyses as control variables to examine whether the explained variance could be attributed to the variables of interest only. Average SNS use was calculated by combining participants' Facebook and Instagram using the MEAN() command in SPSS. Both were measured by asking how often they used the two platforms (0 = *never*; 12 = *10 or more times a day*). Alcohol consumption was measured using a quantity–frequency measure, which provides more accurate estimates of alcohol consumption than other methods (Grant et al., 1995; Sobell & Sobell, 1995). The participants indicated how often they consumed alcohol (0 = *never*; 4 = *four or more times a week*) and how many glasses of alcoholic drinks they usually drank (1 = *one or two glasses*; 5 = *10 or more glasses*). To derive the alcohol consumption measure, the frequency score was multiplied by the quantity score.

## **Statistical Analyses**

IBM SPSS Statistics 27 was used for descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients to examine the correlations between posting motives (H1; Table 1). PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) was then used to identify the motives that directly predicted the sharing of alcohol-related content (RQ1) and to examine whether they mediated the relationship between personality factors and sharing alcohol-related content (H2–H5). A bootstrapped (5,000 samples) multiple mediation model was constructed to account for possible violations (e.g., normal distribution of the data) (Efron & Tibshirani, 1986; Rascati et al., 2001; Russell & Dean, 2000). This model consisted of the four control variables (age, gender, SNS use, and alcohol consumption), the four independent variables (neuroticism, extroversion, agreeableness, and need for popularity), the three mediators (social, entertainment, and information/identification motives), and the outcome variable (sharing alcohol-related content). Integrating all three mediators into a single model allowed us to analyze their mediating roles in the effect of personality factors on sharing alcohol-related content simultaneously (Hayes, 2013), which made it possible to compare the indirect effects of the three motives. However, given that PROCESS cannot handle multiple independent variables, we ran the model 4 times with each independent variable in the X variable and the others in the covariate section. In this way, it was possible to obtain the total and indirect effects of each independent variable. All 4 times, the model rendered the same coefficients and model summaries but thus different total and indirect effects for each independent variable.

## **Results**

### **Descriptive Statistics and Correlations**

In terms of personality traits, the participants scored highest on agreeableness, followed by extroversion and neuroticism. Agreeableness negatively correlated with neuroticism and positively correlated with extroversion (Table 1). Moreover, the participants scored lower on need for popularity than on personality traits (Table 1). Need for popularity was positively associated with neuroticism and negatively associated with agreeableness, suggesting that people who experience psychological distress when being socially exposed may be more likely to strive to be popular, while agreeable people may not exhibit this tendency, as they are known to be other-oriented and altruistic. Moreover, contrary to what one might expect, need for popularity was not associated with extroversion, which may be explained by the fact that extroverted people have social skills that make being popular natural and effortless.

The frequency of sharing alcohol-related content ranged from once a year or less to about once every six months. Sharing such content positively correlated with extroversion, need for popularity, and alcohol consumption and negatively correlated with agreeableness (Table 1).

### **Relationship Between Sharing Motives and Sharing Alcohol-Related Content**

When looking at the means, the participants scored on average highest on entertainment motives, followed by identification/information and social motives (Table 1). However, when examining RQ1, the mediation model (Table 2) only showed a significant association between identification/information motives and posting behavior



( $B = 0.32, p < .001$ ), indicating that people with information/identification motives posted alcohol-related content more frequently (Figure 1).

## Associations Between Posting Motives

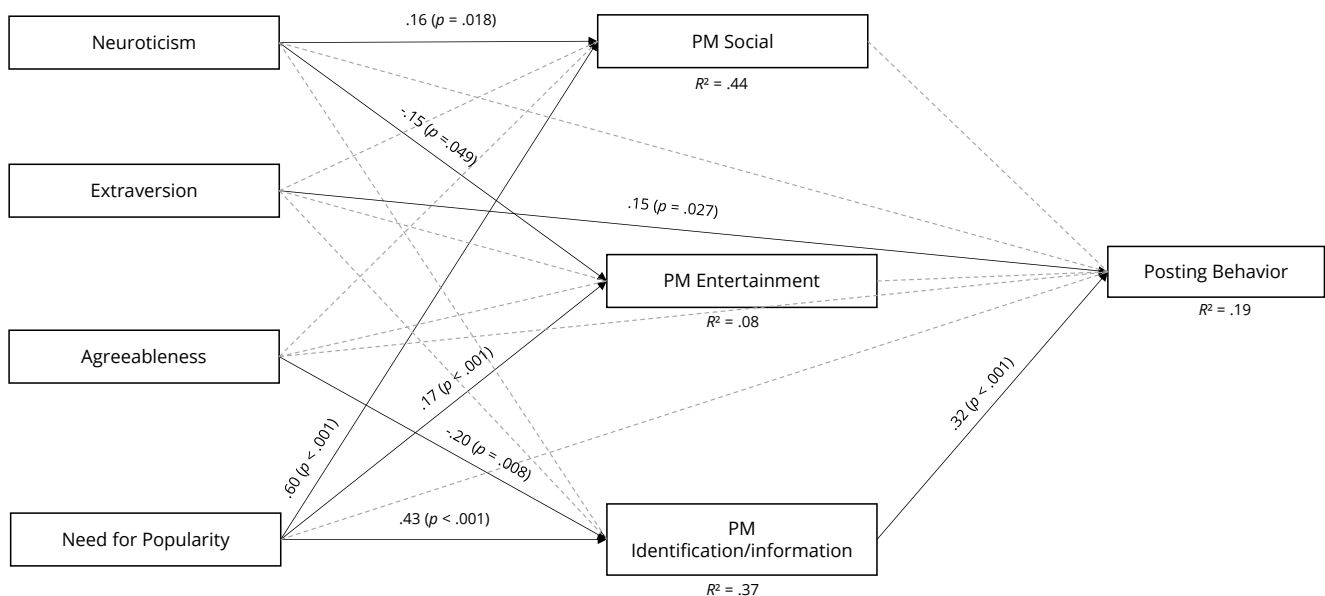
Regarding H1, in line with our expectations, social motives positively correlated with entertainment ( $r = .32, p < .001$ ) and identification/information motives ( $r = .77, p < .001$ ). Furthermore, entertainment motives positively correlated with identification/information motives ( $r = .36, p < .001$ ). The correlation between social motives and identification/information motives was quite strong (Table 1) but lower than the cutoff value of .80, suggesting significant multicollinearity (Berry & Feldman, 1985). Moreover, in multicollinearity tests using the Variance Inflation Factor, all values were below 3, indicating that multicollinearity was not a major issue (O'Brien, 2007), allowing us to proceed with our mediation model.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	
1. Neuroticism	1												$M = 2.78,$ $SD = 0.84$
2. Extraversion	-.28**	1											$M = 3.19,$ $SD = 0.85$
3. Agreeableness	-.04	.18**	1										$M = 4.06,$ $SD = 0.69$
4. Need for popularity	.12*	-.04	-.24**	1									$M = 2.68,$ $SD = 1.17$
5. PM Entertain	-.15**	.09	.01	.17**	1								$M = 4.94,$ $SD = 1.09$
6. PM Infor/ident	.07	.04	-.30**	.52**	.36**	1							$M = 2.66,$ $SD = 1.09$
7. PM Social	.13*	.00	-.21**	.63**	.32**	.77**	1						$M = 2.55,$ $SD = 1.19$
8. Alcohol Consumption	-.15**	.18**	-.11*	.09	.16**	.23**	.15**	1					$M = 4.52,$ $SD = 3.41$
9. Post behavior	-.009	.14**	-.13*	.25**	.14**	.40**	.32**	.17**	1				$M = 1.89,$ $SD = 1.06$
10. Gender	.33**	-.04	.26**	-.21**	-.14**	-.22**	-.20**	-.26**	-.08	1			$M = 1.70,$ $SD = 0.46$
11. Age	-.12*	.02	-.22**	.04	.06	.23**	.16**	.02	.12*	-.25**	1		$M = 22.62,$ $SD = 3.05$
12. SNS use	.08	.09	.06	.00	-.07	.02	.05	.05	.08	.15**	-.10	1	$M = 8.83,$ $SD = 1.77$

Note.  $N = 331, *p < .05, **p < .01, PM =$  Posting Motive.

**Figure 1.** Mediation Model With Unstandardized Coefficients and (Non)Significant Relationships.



Note. Control variables (age, gender, SNS use, alcohol consumption) were included in the analysis but are not included in the figure for the sake of simplicity. The dotted lines represent nonsignificant relationships. PM = posting motives.

## Mediating Roles of Posting Motives

Regarding H2, the effect sizes showed that the total effect between neuroticism and sharing alcohol-related content was not significant (total effect = 0.02,  $t = 0.32$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ , LLCI/ULCI = -0.12/0.17,  $p = .747$ ), nor was the direct effect of this predictor (direct effect = -0.01,  $t = -0.18$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ , LLCI/ULCI = -0.15/0.13,  $p = .860$ ). Contrary to our expectations, none of the four motives mediated this association. Nevertheless, neuroticism was positively related to social motives ( $B = 0.16$ ,  $p = .018$ ) and negatively associated with entertainment motives ( $B = -0.15$ ,  $p = .049$ ), suggesting that the higher people score on neuroticism, the more likely they are to have social motives for posting alcohol-related content (e.g., to fit in or to become popular) and less likely to have entertainment motives (e.g., to share positive feelings). However, these motives did not significantly predict the actual sharing of alcohol-related content. Thus, H2 was partially rejected.

Regarding H3, the total effect between extroversion and sharing alcohol-related content was 0.18 ( $t = 2.55$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ , LLCI/ULCI = 0.04/0.31,  $p = .011$ ). The direct effect of this predictor was 0.15 ( $t = 2.22$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ , LLCI/ULCI = 0.02/0.28,  $p = .027$ ). This relationship was not mediated by any of the motives. Thus, it seems that being extroverted directly predicts the sharing of alcohol-related content regardless of sharing motives. Therefore, H3 was rejected.

Regarding H4, the total effect between agreeableness and sharing alcohol-related content was not significant (total effect = -0.11,  $t = -1.24$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ , LLCI/ULCI = -0.28/0.06,  $p = .216$ ), nor was the direct effect of this predictor (direct effect = -0.04,  $t = -0.50$ ,  $SE = -0.09$ , LLCI/ULCI = -0.21/0.13,  $p = .617$ ). Moreover, no mediation effects were found (Table 2). However, in line with H4, agreeableness was negatively associated with identification/information motives (Table 2), suggesting that the higher people score on agreeableness, the less likely they are to have identification/information motives for sharing alcohol-related content. Conversely, in contrast to H4, agreeableness did not significantly predict social or entertainment motives. Therefore, H4 was largely rejected.

Regarding H5, the total effect between need for popularity and sharing alcohol-related content was 0.21 ( $t = 4.26$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ , LLCI/ULCI = 0.11/0.31,  $p < .001$ ). The direct effect of this predictor was not significant (direct effect = 0.08,  $t = 1.32$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ , LLCI/ULCI = -0.04/0.20,  $p = .189$ ). Moreover, in line with H5, need for popularity was directly associated with all posting motives, suggesting that the higher people score on need for popularity, the more likely they are to have social, entertainment, and identification/information motives for sharing alcohol-related content (Table 2). However, only information/identification motives fully and significantly mediated the relationship between need for popularity and sharing (indirect effect = 0.14,  $SE = 0.04$ , LLCI/ULCI = 0.06/0.22) and were thus the only predictors of the actual sharing of alcohol-related content. Therefore, H5 was fully confirmed regarding the direct associations between need for popularity and motives but only partially confirmed in terms of the mediating effects of motives.

**Table 2.** Mediation of the Relation Between Personality Factors and the Sharing of Alcohol Posts Through Sharing Motives.

	Social Motives				Entertainment Motives				Information/identification Motives				Sharing Alcohol Posts			
	Coeff.	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Boot LLCI/ULCI	Coeff.	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Boot LLCI/ULCI	Coeff.	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Boot LLCI/ULCI	Coeff.	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Boot LLCI/ULCI
Constant	-0.80	-1.17	.245	-2.15/0.55	4.27	5.36	< .001	2.70/5.84	0.04	0.06	.951	-1.26/1.34	-0.32	-0.41	.679	-1.85/1.21
Neuroticism	0.16	2.39	.018	0.03/0.29	-0.15	-1.97	.049	-0.30/-0.00	0.11	1.76	.079	-0.01/0.23	-0.01	-0.18	.860	-0.15/0.13
Extraversion	0.03	0.55	.581	-0.09/0.16	0.04	0.57	.570	-0.10/0.18	0.09	1.47	.143	-0.03/0.21	0.15	2.22	.027	0.02/0.28
Agreeableness	-0.03	-0.41	.684	-0.19/0.12	0.12	1.34	.181	-0.06/0.30	-0.20	-2.66	.008	-0.35/-0.05	-0.04	-0.50	.617	-0.21/0.13
Need for popularity	0.60	13.46	< .001	0.51/0.69	0.17	3.23	.001	0.07/0.27	0.43	9.97	< .001	0.34/0.51	0.08	1.32	.189	-0.04/0.20
Age	0.05	2.98	.003	0.02/0.08	0.01	0.71	.480	-0.02/0.05	0.06	3.93	< .001	0.03/0.10	0.02	0.92	.358	-0.02/0.05
Gender	-0.17	-1.38	.168	-0.42/0.07	-0.08	-0.56	.575	-0.37/0.21	-0.09	-0.77	.444	-0.33/0.15	0.08	0.56	.573	-0.19/0.34
Alcohol use	0.03	2.10	.037	0.00/0.06	0.04	2.18	.030	0.00/0.07	0.05	3.59	< .001	0.02/0.08	0.02	1.19	.235	-0.01/0.05
SNS use	0.04	1.41	.159	-0.02/0.10	-0.04	-1.18	.241	-0.10/0.03	0.02	0.77	.443	-0.03/0.07	0.04	1.23	.219	-0.02/0.10
Social Motives													0.00	-0.04	.962	-0.16/0.15
Entertainment Motives													-0.01	-0.16	.872	-0.11/0.10
Information /identification Motives													0.32	3.89	< .001	0.16/0.48
	$R = .66, R^2 = .44, F(8, 337) = 32.47, p < .001$				$R = .28, R^2 = .08, F(8, 337) = 3.70, p < .001$				$R = .61, R^2 = .37, F(8, 337) = 25.07, p < .001$				$R = .43, R^2 = .19, F(11, 334) = 7.02, p < .001$			

## Discussion

Building on U&G theory (Katz et al., 1974) and the FFM (Costa & McCrae, 1999), our study provides insights into sharing alcohol-related content by examining (1) what motives are associated with sharing such content and (2) what motives mediate the relationship between different personality traits and states and sharing alcohol-related content.

Our results show that information/identification motives—in other words, the urge to share information about alcohol and create an alcohol identity—were the only significant motives for sharing alcohol-related content. This is worrisome because it suggests that SNS users may actively engage in creating a drinking identity rather than sharing alcohol-related content for fun (Atkinson et al., 2014; Thompson & Romo, 2016). Moreover, it may be an attempt to fit into the broader drinking identity of a peer group (Atkinson et al., 2014). SNS platforms are ideal environments for aligning drinking identities because they offer users the possibility to observe content posted by others that is socially accepted by the peer group, as well as to share personal information about alcohol (Utz, 2015). Sharing alcohol-related information is thus often motivated by the desire to display their drinking identities to others. This is supported by our finding that social motives (e.g., the desire to fit in) correlated with all other motives, including information/identification motives. Therefore, we encourage future research to further investigate the correlations between users' motives for sharing alcohol-related content. Moreover, given the social context of media platforms, it may be beneficial for U&G-based research on SNSs to consider a social need inherent in all motives.

Our findings suggest that people seek different gratifications and thus have different motives for sharing alcohol-related content on SNSs. Personality factors seem to play a crucial role. Moreover, need for popularity is a personal state worth considering in future research because it appears to play a role in all posting motives. This can be explained by the principles of social learning theory (Bandura, 2002). In certain groups, alcohol is considered a status symbol, and its consumption is often seen as an effective popularity-enhancing behavior. For example, it has been shown that individuals associate alcohol with being a student and consume alcohol to facilitate social integration (Brown & Murphy, 2020). To fit in and gain popularity within a group, individuals often adopt popular peers' drinking behaviors (Balsa et al., 2011). This also seems to occur online, as evidenced by the sharing of images depicting drinking behaviors on SNSs (Beullens & Schepers, 2013; Boyle et al., 2017). It is conceivable that popularity-oriented individuals are particularly prone to sharing such content, especially since SNSs offer them the possibility to control the information that they share, such as showing that they were present at a fun event, to create the drinking identity necessary to appear popular and attract attention (Hendriks et al., 2017).

Apart from need for popularity, personality traits also seem to play a role in obtaining gratification from sharing alcohol-related content (Costa & McCrae, 1999). In this study, some personality traits were positively related to posting motives, whereas others showed negative associations. This may provide insights into which personality traits are more strongly associated with actual alcohol-related posting behaviors. Neurotic people appeared to have social but not entertainment motives, which seems to be in line with the social compensation hypothesis (Williams & Karau, 1991). Socially anxious individuals may lack the confidence to express themselves and interact in offline social settings (e.g., parties), thus turning to online settings, in which they can better control their appearance—or, in this case, alcohol references—to try to fit in (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). In other words, sharing alcohol references may be driven by their need to belong rather than their need for entertainment.

In line with our expectations, agreeableness was negatively related to information/identification motives for sharing alcohol-related content. Considering previous findings (Choi et al., 2017), this seems to support the idea that agreeable people, known for their other-oriented behavior and abstinence from alcohol (Costa & McCrae, 1999; Hakulinen et al., 2015), do not use SNSs to create an identity through sharing alcohol-related content but to actively observe and interact with content posted by others.

In addition, extroversion, in contrast to the other two personality traits, directly (and not via motives) predicted the sharing of alcohol-related content and hence plays a unique role in online alcohol-related communication. In line with Stoughton et al.'s (2013) findings, substance use hence appears to be portrayed more frequently in extroverted individuals' profiles. This might be due to their active engagement in social activities, often involving alcohol, and their need to disclose personal information (Bowden-Green et al., 2020; Marshall et al., 2015). In other words, they might share more content in general, which may often contain alcohol as a reflection of their daily

social activities (Bowden-Green et al., 2020), without necessarily having specific motives. Sharing such content may subsequently increase their actual alcohol use, as it reinforces positive alcohol attitudes (Geusens & Beullens, 2017).

## **Practical Implications and Interventions**

The observed associations between personality factors, sharing motives, and sharing alcohol-related content have important implications for interventions. Given that both posting and being exposed to alcohol-related content have been shown to increase alcohol consumption (Boyle et al., 2016; Geusens & Beullens, 2017), it is important to reduce the visibility of such content. Building on U&G theory (Katz et al., 1974), one way to achieve this is by reducing users' obtained gratifications from sharing alcohol-related content. For example, in this study, SNS users seemed to share alcohol-related content to fulfill information/identification needs. The fulfillment of these needs may result in the continuation of this behavior. Future interventions should therefore focus on how to confront and possibly counter these motives, which may be at the root of sharing alcohol-related content. For instance, interventions could raise individuals' awareness of how alcohol-related posts might negatively affect themselves and others (Thompson & Romo, 2016). They could further attempt to counter these information/identification motives by integrating the perspectives of individuals who deliberately create non-alcohol identities. For example, Cheers et al. (2021) already showed that nondrinkers are perceived as a self-threat for drinkers "as the presence of a non-drinker can encourage an unwanted reflection on the problematic aspects of their own drinking" (p. 384). Therefore, by gaining insights into why people abstain from alcohol (e.g., productive life or physical health), drinkers might be confronted with the problematic aspects of their alcohol use and perhaps also their sharing of this use.

Our research also shows that the gratifications sought from sharing alcohol-related content differ according to personality traits and states. In line with previous findings (Hakulinen et al., 2015), it seems that extroverted and popularity-driven individuals are more prone to using alcohol and sharing related content. Therefore, interventions should target these individuals. Previous research has highlighted the advantages of personality-targeted interventions for reducing alcohol use among young adults (Conrod, 2016). Such approaches may also be effective in reducing the tendency to share alcohol-related content. Moreover, making susceptible individuals aware of their online behaviors may help to indirectly address their drinking behaviors, which are often influenced by their SNS practices (Boyle et al., 2016; Geusens & Beullens, 2017).

## **Limitations**

Despite the significant findings of this study, several limitations should be mentioned. First, this research relied on self-reports to measure individuals' sharing of alcohol-related content on SNSs. Specifically, the participants had to recall their posting behaviors over the previous year, which may have led to underestimations or—perhaps more likely—overestimations, given that young adults have been shown to overestimate their sharing of alcohol-related content (Geusens & Beullens, 2021). More accurate measures are therefore necessary—for example, by capturing respondents' own alcohol-related content in their SNS profiles, as Geusens and Beullens (2021) did. Second, this study only focused on three of the Big Five personality factors. Although this decision was based on insights from previous literature, future research could benefit from including all five personality factors. Conscientiousness, for example, has been proven to be not or negatively associated with alcohol use and might hence be interesting when examining buffers for sharing alcohol-related content on SNS (Adan et al., 2017; Malouff et al., 2007). Third, this study addressed potentially sensitive topics, such as individuals' personalities and motives for sharing alcohol-related content. The items related to motives may have prompted socially desirable answers. For example, alcohol references are often shared to create a drinking identity aligned with social norms (Atkinson et al., 2014), which may have biased the respondents' answers. Fourth, due to the study's cross-sectional design, causal relationships could not be established. Therefore, the results should be tested in longitudinal studies. Fifth, women were overrepresented (69.4%) in our sample. Future research should aim for a balanced gender ratio. Finally, this research involved young Dutch adults. The results may not be generalizable to other age groups or contexts with different legal regulations or cultural attitudes toward alcohol.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

## Authors' Contribution

**Robyn Vanherle:** conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, software, validation, data curation, writing – original draft & editing. **Hanneke Hendriks:** conceptualization, methodology, investigation, resources, writing – review & editing, supervision, funding acquisition. **Winifred Gebhardt:** conceptualization, methodology, writing – review & editing. **Bas van den Putte:** conceptualization, methodology, writing – review & editing. **Kathleen Beullens:** conceptualization, supervision, writing – review & editing.

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## Appendix

**Table A1.** Exploratory Factor Analysis of the 21 Items for Sharing Motives.

Items	Factor			Dimension
	1	2	3	
To show I am a social person	<b>.57</b>	.40	-.07	Social Motives
To stay socially connected with others	<b>.51</b>	<b>.41</b>	-.04	
To get attention from others	<b>.71</b>	.04	.16	
To show I am hip/cool	<b>.89</b>	-.01	-.02	
To get more likes and comments from others	<b>.79</b>	-.05	.01	
Because people around me also post alcohol posts	<b>.48</b>	-.06	<b>.44</b>	
To show I am popular and have (a lot of) friends	<b>.82</b>	-.00	.06	
To be/become popular	<b>.83</b>	-.10	-.12	
To fit in	<b>.81</b>	-.09	.11	
To show that I was present at a (fun) event	.09	<b>.74</b>	-.18	
To share the “gezelligheid” of the moment	-.01	<b>.75</b>	-.06	
Because the post is fun	-.02	<b>.72</b>	-.21	
To share a positive feeling with others	-.14	<b>.75</b>	.18	
Because the post is positive	-.15	<b>.73</b>	.18	
To entertain myself and others	.12	<b>.54</b>	.28	
To show I am a fan of alcohol	.11	.07	<b>.79</b>	Identification/information Motives
To show that drinking alcohol is a part of who I am	.16	.15	<b>.70</b>	
To show that I belong to the group of alcohol drinkers	<b>.47</b>	-.18	<b>.51</b>	
To show everything I am experiencing	.21	<b>.62</b>	.04	
To share personal information about myself	.13	.33	.40	
To share information about alcohol	.03	-.11	<b>.82</b>	

*Note.* Extraction Method: Principal components, Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization, Loadings larger than .40 are in bold. The item *to show everything I am experiencing* loads high on entertainment motives but was included with the identification/information motives based on the literature of Hendriks et al. (2017) and a sufficient Cronbach's alpha (.81).

**Table A2.** Eigenvalues, Percentages of Variance and Cumulative Percentages for Factors (Based on 21 Sharing Motives Items).

Component	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	8.41	8.41	40.04
2	3.48	3.48	16.58
2	1.09	1.09	5.20

*Note.* Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

**Table A3.** Correlations Among Extracted Factors.

Factor	1	2	3
Factor 1	1		
Factor 2	.24	1	
Factor 3	.57	.11	1

*Note.* Extraction Method: Principal components, Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

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