

# Youth Policy Survey: Alcohol Results Briefing

## Topline Summary

This survey reveals that most young people have their first alcoholic beverage before 18 and frequently encounter alcohol-related posts on social media. Despite this, many prefer not to see such content and believe more should be done by companies and the government to restrict underage exposure.

## Introduction

Cancer cases in the UK are thought to rise by a third by 2040<sup>1</sup>, but four in ten cancers can be prevented. Smoking, overweight and obesity, and alcohol all increase cancer risk<sup>2</sup>. E-cigarettes are less harmful than smoking and are used to help people quit, but their long-term effects aren't known<sup>3</sup> and there are concerns about their increased uptake by young people<sup>4</sup>.



## Why alcohol matters

Alcohol use is associated with other 200 medical conditions, including at least seven types of cancer<sup>5</sup>. Alcohol use during adolescence in particular is also associated with numerous physiological and psychological consequences, including increased likelihood of dependence in adulthood and early death<sup>6</sup>.

## Survey aims

We have developed a new survey to explore in detail how and to what extent young people are exposed to, and interact with, marketing related to tobacco, e-cigarettes, high fat, salt, and sugar (HFSS) food/drink, and alcohol on social media apps.

The survey set out to investigate:

- How young people engage with, and report exposure to, marketing on social media for tobacco, e-cigarettes, HFSS products and alcohol.
- Young people's intentions to use these products, and how this might relate to their social media use.
- If young people are okay with the marketing of these products on social media and what they think about potential policy options.

## Methods



The survey collected responses from 4049 young people aged 11-21-years-old across England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.



This brief will focus on the results relating to alcohol, including:

1. Drinking habits
2. Alcohol on social media
3. Alcohol policies

## 1. Drinking habits

### *Alcohol consumption*

Almost half of our survey respondents (47%) have drunk an alcoholic beverage – not just a sip – before.

Of those who have had an alcoholic beverage before, almost 69% have drunk one in the last month.

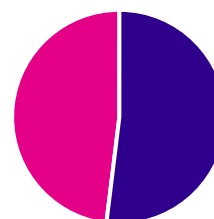
Looking at age, we can see that most respondents (83%) had their first alcoholic beverage under 18, and one third (33%) were 13 or younger.

11% of young people who have never drunk before think they probably or definitely will have an alcoholic beverage in the next year, and 10% would probably or definitely have a drink if their friend offered it to them. There is a strong correlation between those who answered probably or definitely for both questions.

### *Why do young people buy alcohol?*

When buying alcohol, price is influential when choosing a drink: over two thirds (68%) of respondents said it was an important factor when buying alcohol. Price is closely followed by product quality (62%), brand appeal (47%) and new flavours and products (40%). One fifth (20%) of young people thought seeing alcohol products posted on social media was an important factor when deciding what alcohol to buy.

Have you ever had an alcohol beverage before?



■ Yes ■ No

## Low/no alcohol

One third (33%) of young people stated they have drunk a no/low alcohol drink before.

Drinking no/low alcohol was much more popular in people who have also drunk alcohol before. Over half (55%) of ever-drinkers have had a no/low drink compared to 14% of never-drinkers.

Just over a quarter (26%) of under 18s have tried a no/low alcohol drink before compared to just under half (46%) of those ages 18 and over.

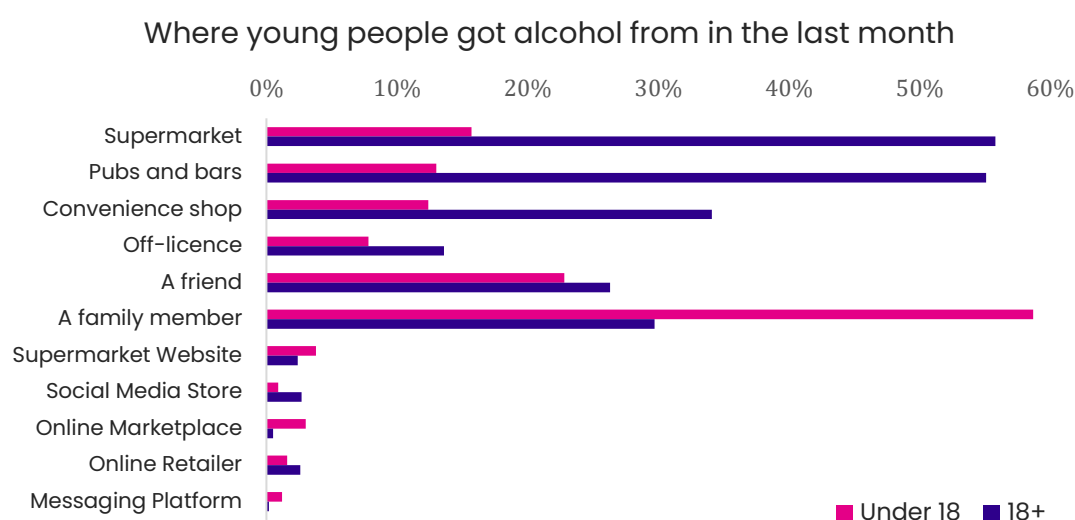
### *Where do young people buy alcohol?*

Most young people got their alcohol from the supermarket and through their family, depending on their age. Those over 18 mostly bought alcohol from large supermarkets, restaurants, pubs and bars, or convenience stores. Those under 18 mostly got their alcohol from family members and friends. Most young people (98%) did not get their alcohol online.

### *Drinking, smoking, and vaping*

Over a third (36%) of those who have ever drunk alcohol have also smoked at least once before, and 12% have smoked a cigarette at least once in the last month.

Just under half (48%) of young people in our survey who have ever drunk alcohol have vaped at least once before, and 14% have used a vape at least once in the last month.



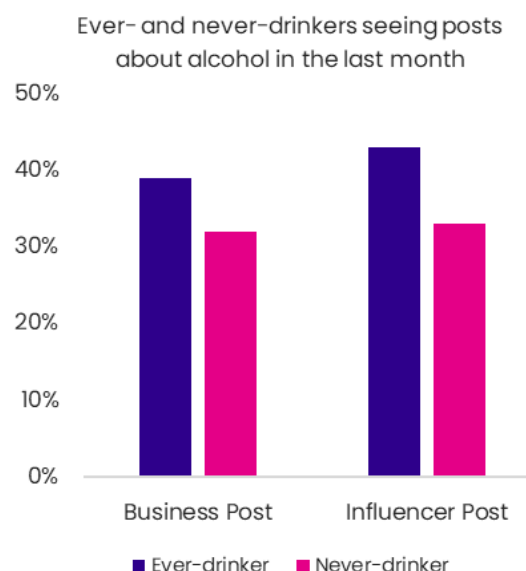
## 2. Alcohol on social media

### *Posts by businesses and influencers*

Over a third (36%) of all young people in our survey reported seeing a business post about alcohol on social media in the last month. For under 18s, this was 32%.

Equally, over a third (38%) of young people stated they saw an influencer posting about alcohol on social media in the last month. For under 18s, this was 35%.

More people who have drunk alcohol before reported seeing posts by both businesses and influencers compared to people who have never had an alcoholic beverage.



### *Engagement with social media posts*

Young people often interact with posts about alcohol that they see online. Of those who saw influencer and business posts about alcohol in the last month, one third (33%) actively engaged in at least one way. This includes liking, commenting, and sharing.

People who have drunk before were more likely to interact with alcohol posts (38%) than those who have never drunk before (27%).

## 3. Alcohol policies

Young people were presented with a range of statements and possible policies and were asked to rate how much they agreed with them.

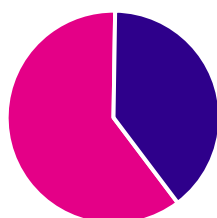
### *Private accounts*

One policy option suggested was that alcohol businesses would need to have their social media accounts set to private, so that people would have to follow them to see what they post. This would stop posts from businesses showing up in young people's algorithmic feeds, such as in Instagram or TikTok where posts appear that the app thinks you would like to see, not just from those you follow. Many young people agreed with this approach: over half (51%) agreed or strongly agreed on this idea compared to 21% who disagreed in some way. The remaining 28% said they didn't know/neither agreed nor disagreed.

Almost half (45%) of all young people also agreed or strongly agreed that if accounts cannot be made private on an app, then businesses who make and sell alcohol should not be allowed to have an account on that app. Just over a quarter (26%) disagreed in some way.

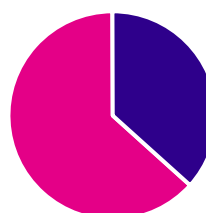
People who have never drunk alcohol were more likely to think that alcohol businesses should be regulated with private accounts than those who have drunk alcohol before.

Accounts should be private



■ Never drunk ■ Drunk before

No private option, no account



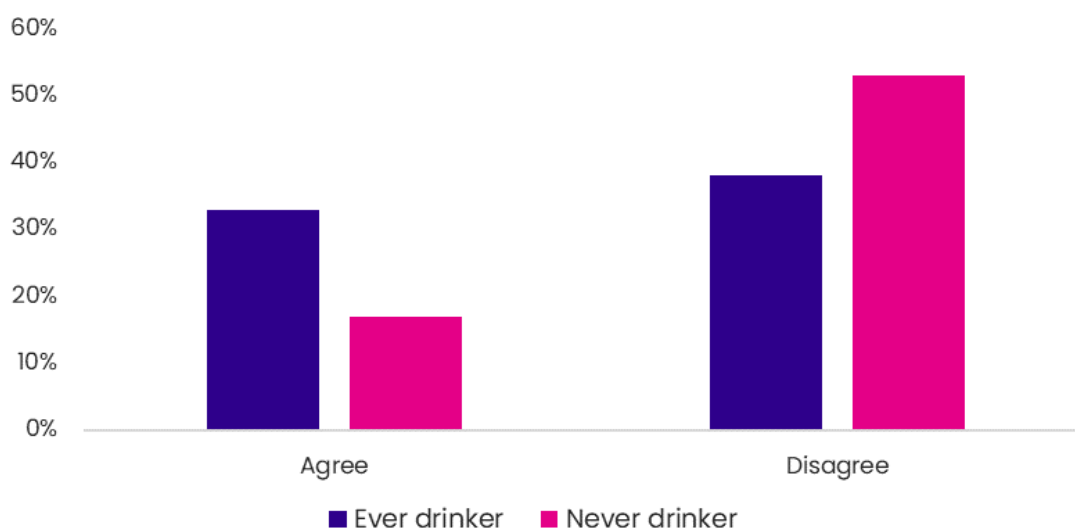
■ Never drunk ■ Drunk before

### Online promotion

In this section, young people were asked if they thought it was OK for influencers to promote alcohol on social media. Almost half (46%) of young people disagreed or strongly disagreed, compared to 25% who thought it was fine.

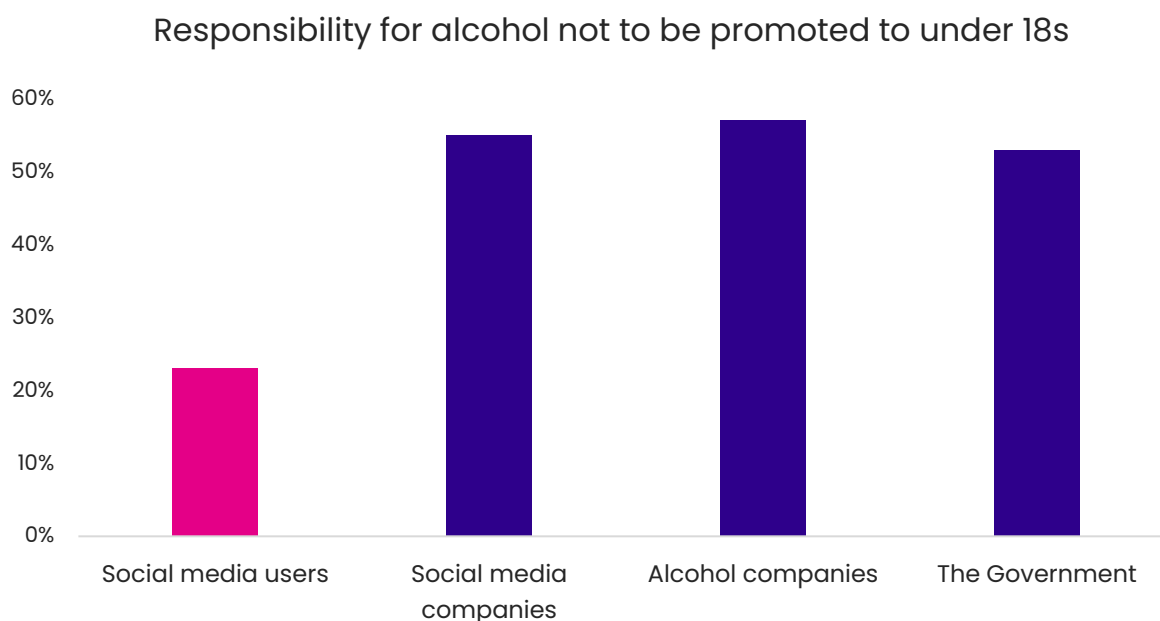
People who had never drunk were more likely to say it wasn't OK for influencers to post alcohol content compared to those who have drunk before.

'It's okay for influencers to post content about alcohol'



## Responsibility

Most young people thought the responsibility to make sure businesses don't promote alcohol to under 18s was someone else's. Over half believed it was the responsibility of the social media companies (55%), the alcohol companies (57%), and the Government (53%). Just under a quarter (23%) of young people believed that social media users were responsible.



## Conclusion

This survey shows a number of young people are drinking or have drunk alcohol before, and the majority (83%) have their first drink before they are 18. Many young people are seeing and interacting with posts for alcohol on social media by businesses and influencers at least once a month. However, a lot of them don't want to see this on their feeds and think that companies and the Government should be doing more to stop under 18s from seeing them at all.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Calculated by the Cancer Intelligence Team, Cancer Research UK. February 2023. Cancer incidence and mortality projections for UK and constituent nations, using data to 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Brown KF, Rumgay H, Dunlop C, Ryan M, Quartly F, Cox A, De as A, Elliss-Brookes L, Gavin A, Hounscome L, Huws D. The fraction of cancer attributable to modifiable risk factors in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and the United Kingdom in 2015. *British journal of cancer*. 2018 Apr 17;118(8):1130–41.

<sup>3</sup> Berry KM, Fetterman JL, Benjamin EJ, Bhatnagar A, Barrington-Trimis JL, Leventhal AM, Stokes A. Association of electronic cigarette use with subsequent initiate on of tobacco cigarettes in US youths. *JAMA network open*. 2019 Feb 1;2(2):e187794–.

<sup>4</sup> Action on Smoking and Health. 2023. Use of e-cigarettes (vapes) among young people in Great Britain 2023. Accessed July 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Bagnardi, V., Rota, M., Botteri, E., Tramacere, I., Islami, F., Fedirko, V., ... & La Vecchia, C. (2015). Alcohol consumption and site-specific cancer risk: a comprehensive dose-response meta-analysis. *British journal of cancer*, 112(3), 580-593.

<sup>6</sup> Maimaris, W., & McCambridge, J. (2014). Age of first drinking and adult alcohol problems: systematic review of prospective cohort studies. *J Epidemiol Community Health*, 68(3), 268-274.