



Drinking motives moderate the relationship between virtual happy hours held with close friends and alcohol consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Introduction

In the United States, 48% of college students have reported engaging in at least one virtual gathering with friends or family since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (Vogels, 2020). Among adolescents, higher self-report ratings of popularity among peers were significantly associated with increased substance use (e.g., alcohol, cannabis) via online drinking events (i.e., virtual happy hours via Zoom) during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dumas et al., 2020). Although close peer influence and drinking motives are risk factors for problematic drinking among college students (Borsari & Carey, 2003; Bresin & Mekawi, 2021), the moderating effect of drinking motives on the relationship between virtual happy hours with close friends and alcohol outcomes is not known. The current study examined if having virtual happy hours with a larger proportion of close friends would be associated with increased consumption and problems, and which drinking motives strengthen this relationship.

Method

Participants

- $N = 129$ college students
- Mean age = 23.42, $SD = 5.64$; 86.8% female
- 56.6% White, 23.3% Black
- Cross-sectional online survey for course credit, collected May through December 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic

Materials

Social Media Usage

- Questions about how they use social media and if/what kinds of content they personally share depicting alcohol use (Boyle et al., 2016; Huang et al., 2014; Nesi et al., 2017)

Egocentric Social Network

- Brief Important People Interview (BIPI; DeMartini et al., 2013; Zywiak et al., 2002)
- Identified 10 people important to them since the start of the school year, with follow-up questions about each person and qualities of their relationship to the individual
- Calculated the proportion of individuals in their social network they had virtual happy hours with (i.e., when both social network member and individual were drinking)

Alcohol Consumption

- Daily Drinking Questionnaire (DDQ; Collins et al., 1985)
- Enter standard drinks consumed each day of a typical week for the past 30 days

Alcohol Problems

- Brief Young Adult Alcohol Consequences Questionnaire (B-YAACQ; Kahler et al., 2005)
- Selected "yes" if they had experienced a particular consequence in the past 30 days (24 items; $\alpha = 0.87$)

Drinking Motives

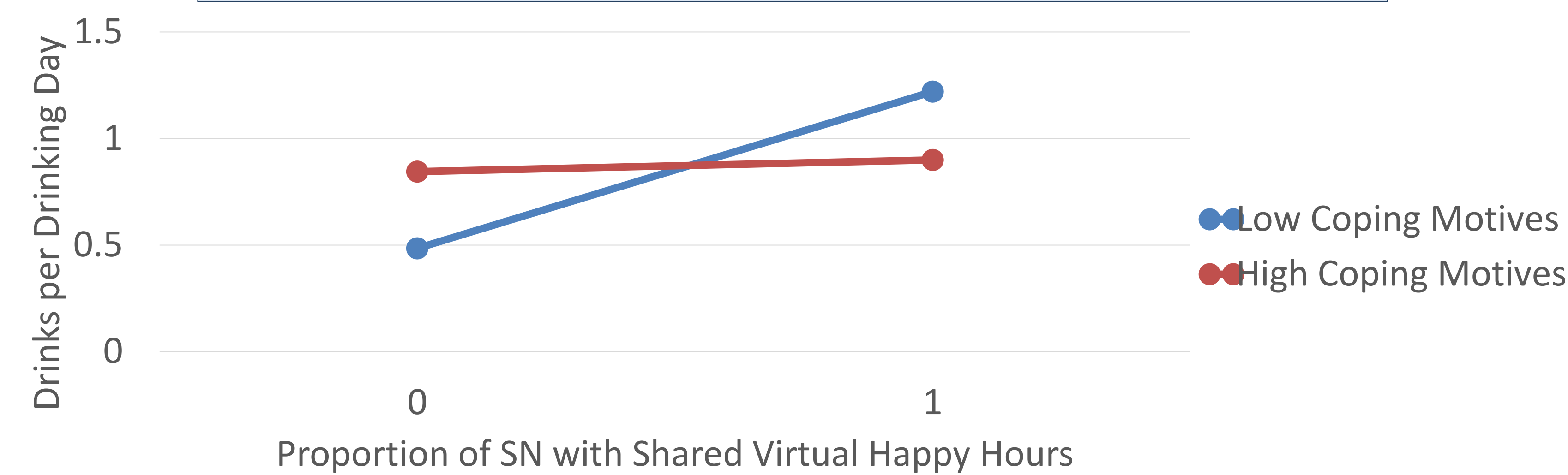
- Drinking Motives Questionnaire (DMQ; Cooper, 1994)
- Four subscales with 5 items each: Social ($\alpha = 0.90$), Coping ($\alpha = 0.91$), Enhancement ($\alpha = 0.88$), Conformity ($\alpha = 0.92$)
- Response options: 1 = *almost never/never* to 5 = *almost always/always*

Analysis Approach: Multiple Regressions

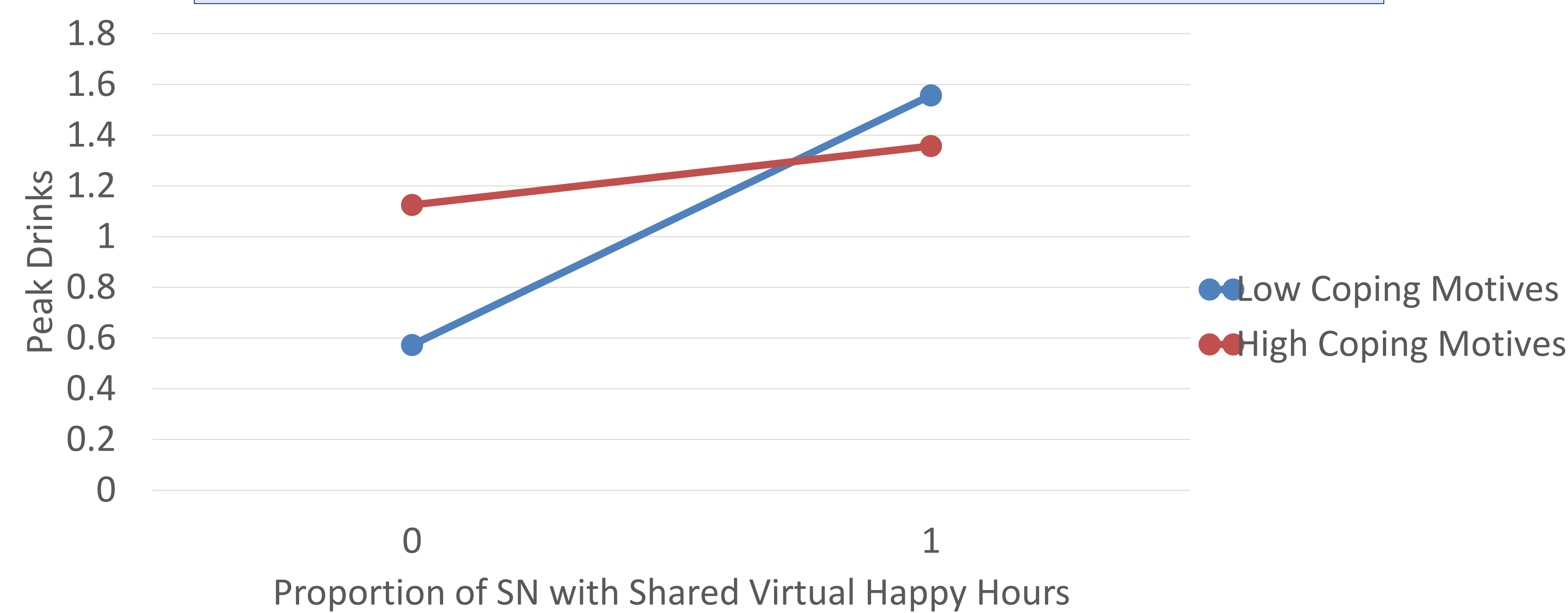
- Outcomes = 5 alcohol indicators (separate model for each)
- Covariates = gender, frequency of social media checking, alcohol quantity (only for alcohol problems model)
- Main predictor = Proportion of individuals in their social network they had virtual happy hours with
- Moderators = Drinking motives (4 separate models)

Results

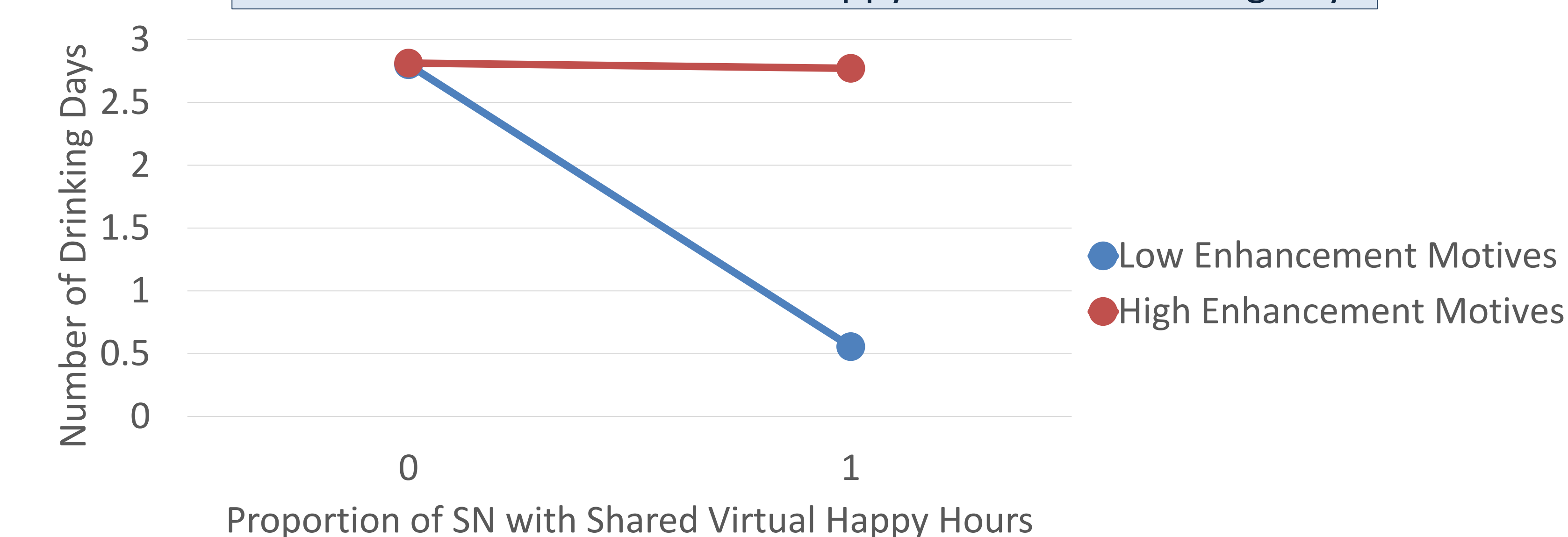
Coping Motives Moderate Proportion of Social Network Members with Shared Virtual Happy Hours and Drinks per Drinking Day



Coping Motives Moderate Proportion of Social Network Members with Shared Virtual Happy Hours and Peak Drinks



Enhancement Motives Moderate Proportion of Social Network Members with Shared Virtual Happy Hours and Drinking Days



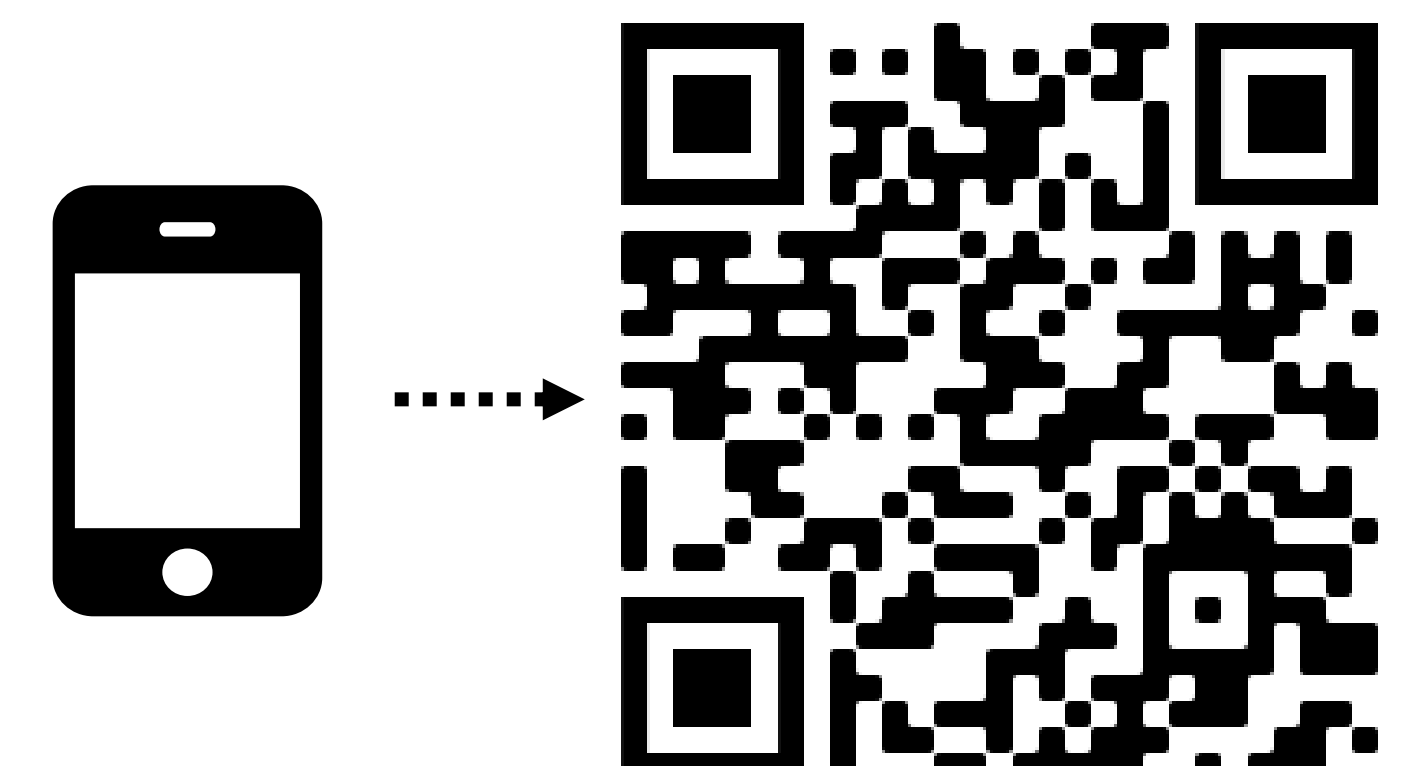
Variables	Quantity per week		Drinking days per week		Drinks per day		Peak drinks		Problems	
	β	p	β	p	β	p	β	p	β	p
Proportion of Virtual Happy Hours	0.27	.005	0.34	<.001	0.21	.025	0.28	.003	0.23	.010
Prop Virt Happy Hrs x <i>Social</i> Motives	0.06	.502	0.17	.065	-0.09	.344	-0.07	.443	-0.11	.211
Prop Virt Happy Hrs x <i>Enhancement</i> Motives	0.07	.464	0.25	.007	-0.13	.188	-0.11	.262	-0.15	.075
Prop Virt Happy Hrs x <i>Conformity</i> Motives	-0.11	.266	-0.04	.666	-0.09	.329	-0.04	.644	0.02	.839
Prop Virt Happy Hrs x <i>Coping</i> Motives	-0.08	.418	0.14	.147	-0.20	.039	-0.19	.048	0.03	.756

Note. Prop Virt Happy Hrs = Proportion of individuals in their social network they had virtual happy hours with; main effects of each motive were included in the models but omitted from the table for space.

Discussion

Overall, having virtual happy hours with a higher proportion of one's social network was associated with higher alcohol consumption and negative consequences (when controlling for alcohol quantity). Further, coping and enhancement motives significantly moderated the association between higher proportions of virtual happy hours with social network members and select alcohol outcomes. Findings indicate that enhancement drinking motives strengthen the relationship between the proportion of close friends who engage in virtual happy hours and drinking behavior whereas coping drinking motives weaken this relationship. Examining the effects of drinking motives on the relationship between having virtual happy hours with close friends and alcohol consumption at the daily level may help to elucidate which motives are protective factors in the moment.

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