EFFECTS OF VIEWING ALCOHOL-RELATED SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT SHARED BY IMPORTANT FRIENDS ON COLLEGE DRINKING: A LONGITUDINAL EXAMINATION

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Introduction

Peer influence is a robust predictor of college drinking; it may occur through both in-person observations of peer drinking and online via exposure to alcohol-related content (ARC) on social media. Both sharing of and exposure to ARC are associated with greater alcohol use over time. Most research examining exposure uses a general norms (friends as a whole) versus social network approach (specific friends). The current study examined how sharing/exposure to ARC from specific friends is linked to alcohol outcomes over time (aims 1 and 2). We also examined specific qualities of the content (format of posts) shared (aim 3).

Method

Participants
- *N* = 383 college students
- Mean age = 20.04, *SD* = 1.27; 74.4% female; 79.5% White
- Inclusion criteria: 1) ages 18-25, 2) at least one social media account, 3) consumed alcohol at least 2 days (in the past 30 days), and either 4a) consumed 4+/5+ (for women/men) drinks on one occasion in the past 30 days, or 4b) reported at least 1 alcohol-related consequence in the past 30 days

Materials
Sharing ARC
- Participants were asked whether they had ever shared ARC (1 = *yes* and 0 = *no*)
- If yes, they were asked how often they share ARC (1 = *Never* to 7 = *Daily or almost daily*)

Egocentric Social Network
- Brief Important People Interview (BIPI; DeMartini et al., 2013; Zywiak & Longabaugh, 2002)
- Identified 5 friends who had been important to them and were in contact with regularly for past 30 days, with follow-up questions about each friend:
  - E.g., if they post alcohol-related content (ARC) on social media (1 = *yes, 0 = no*), how often they share alcohol posts on social media (1 = *Never* to 7 = *Daily or almost daily*), if the posts were usually "photos (with or without text)", "videos (with or without text)", or "text-only status updates"

Alcohol Consumption/Consequences
- Daily Drinking Questionnaire (DDQ; Collins et al., 1985)
  - Total number of standard drinks consumed in a typical week in the past 30 days
- Brief Young Adult Alcohol Consequences Questionnaire (B-YAACQ; Kahler et al., 2005)
 - Total number of consequences in the past 30 days

Procedure
- Online surveys at baseline (T1) and 1-month later (T2)
- Choice of raffle entry for $10 or $50 Amazon gift card or direct payment of a $5 Amazon gift card for each survey

Analysis Approach
- Cross-lagged panel models were conducted
- **Covariates included**: sex, frequency of social media checking, compensation chosen, semester survey was completed, and quantity (for consequences outcome only)
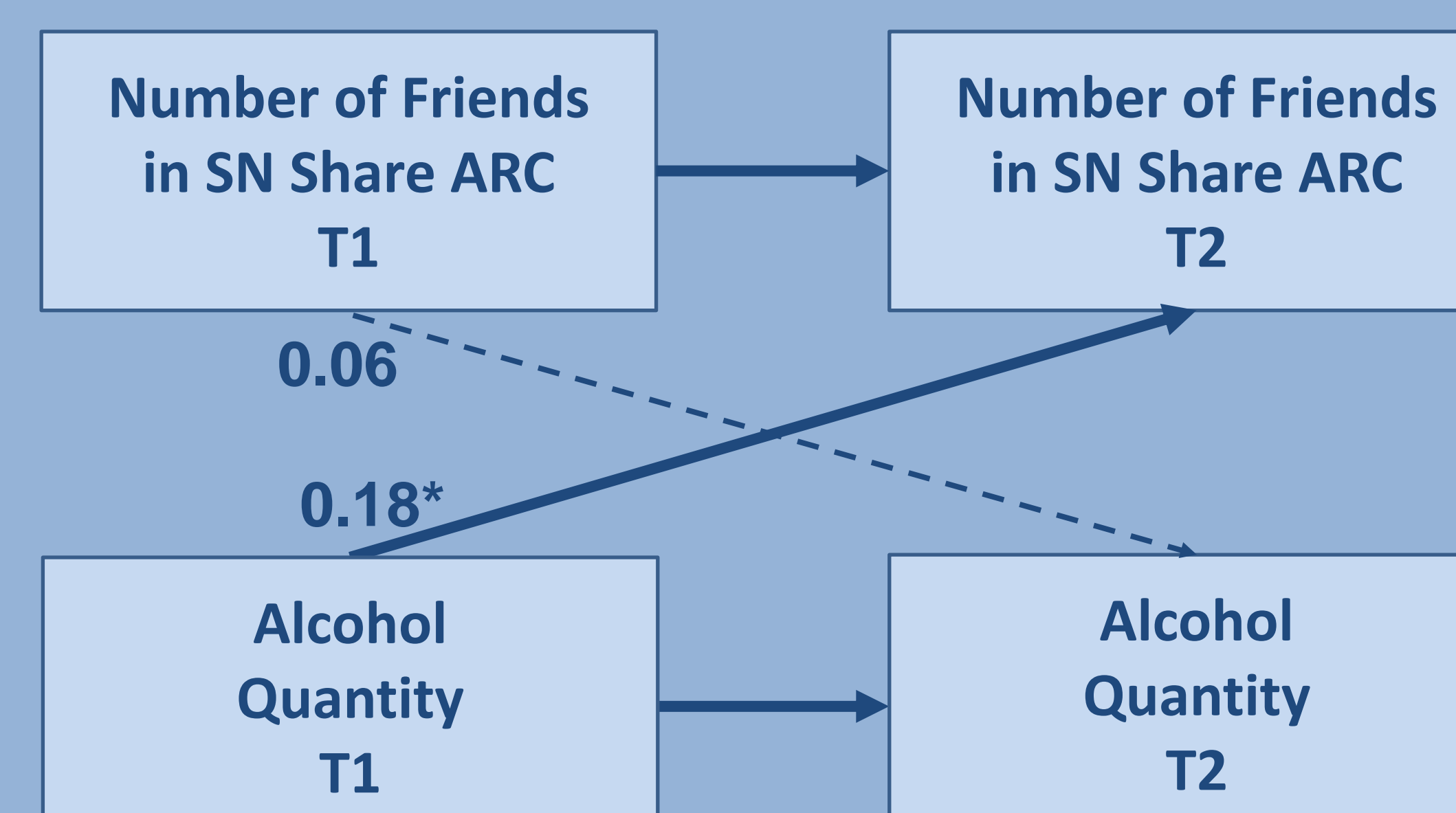
Aim 1: Alcohol quantity at baseline was positively associated with <u>likelihood</u> of participants sharing ARC 1-month later
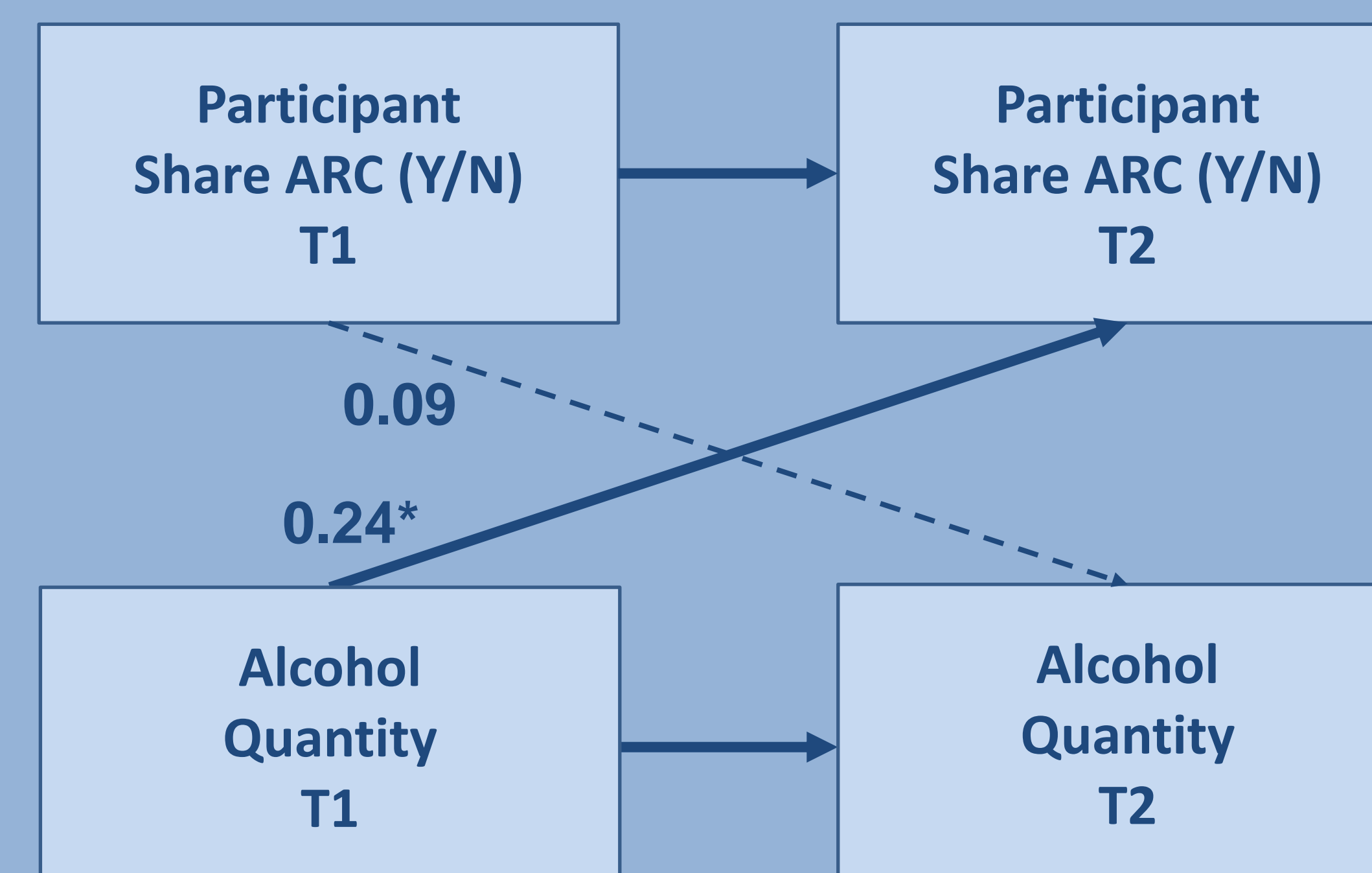
Aim 1: Alcohol quantity at baseline was positively associated with <u>frequency</u> of participants sharing ARC 1-month later
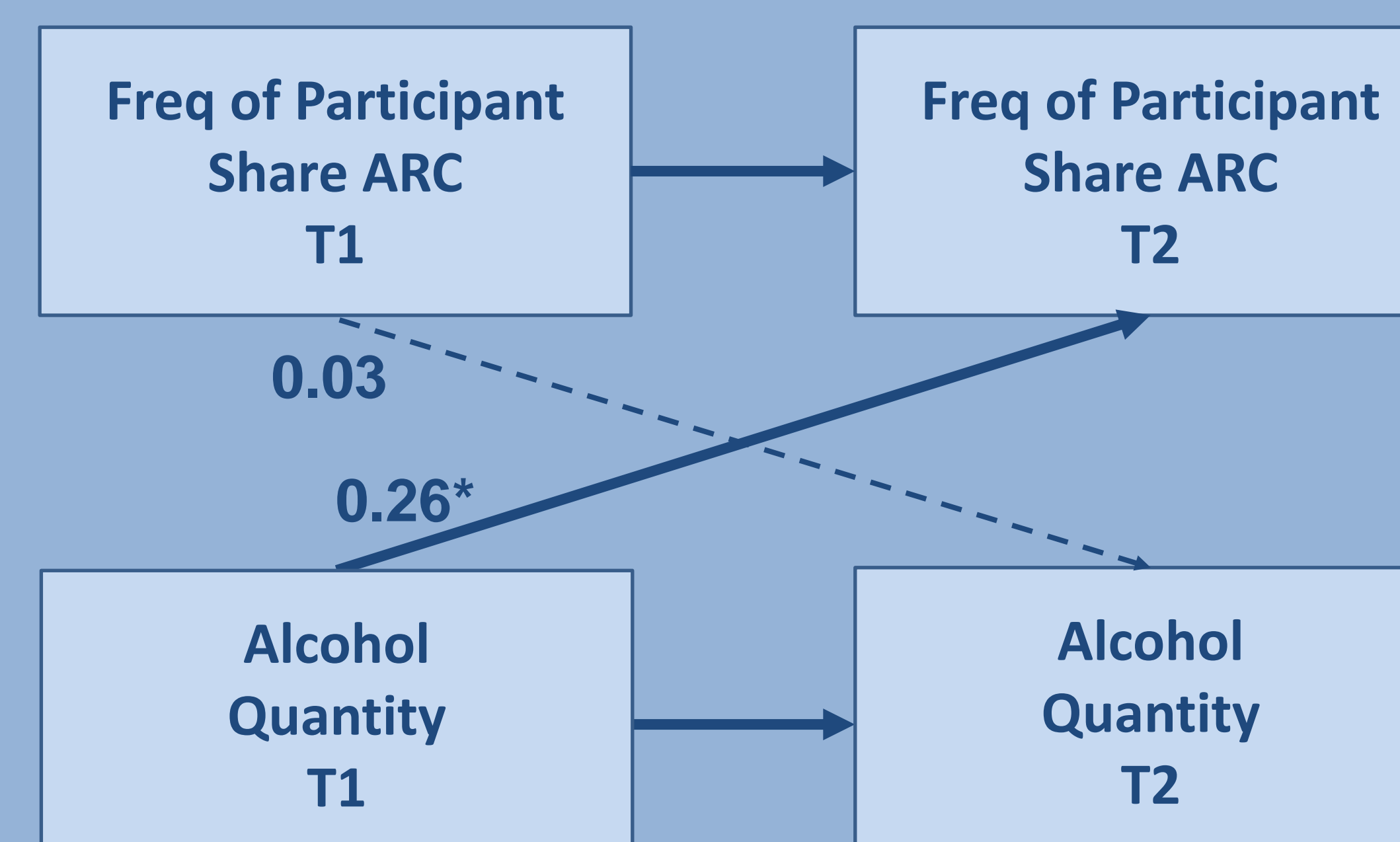
Aim 2: Alcohol quantity at baseline was positively associated with having more friends sharing ARC 1-month later

Note. Only the models for quantity are depicted as the patterns of findings were similar for the alcohol consequences models. Standardized parameter estimates are shown. Bold, solid lines indicate significant paths; dashed lines indicate non-significant associations.

Results

Drinking Descriptives
- Alcohol quantity
  - Baseline: *M* = 8.94, *SD* = 6.77
  - 1-month: *M* = 7.24, *SD* = 5.66
- Alcohol consequences
  - Baseline: *M* = 4.29, *SD* = 3.13
  - 1-month: *M* = 3.16, *SD* = 3.33

- **Aim 1: To examine the longitudinal bidirectional relationship between sharing ARC (ever and frequency) and alcohol quantity and consequences**
  - Significant directional relationship between baseline alcohol quantity/consequences and both T2 sharing (any) and frequency of sharing ARC for all models
  - All models investigating the other direction (sharing → alcohol use) were non-significant

- **Aim 2: To examine the longitudinal bidirectional relationship between the proportion of friends sharing ARC and alcohol quantity or consequences**
  - Baseline alcohol quantity and consequences were associated with T2 having a higher number of friends who shared ARC
  - All models investigating the other direction (friends sharing → alcohol use/consequences) were non-significant

- **Aim 3: To examine the longitudinal bidirectional relationship between the format of ARC shared by friends and alcohol quantity and consequences**
  - No significant associations were observed between alcohol quantity or consequences and the format of ARC shared by friends in the social network in either direction.

Discussion

- Contrary to hypotheses, there was no evidence that ARC sharing, exposure to friends' ARC, or the format of the ARC influenced the alcohol consumption or consequences of participants.

- Findings suggest that alcohol quantity and consequences may be relevant factors in driving what young adults curate on their social media feed, and who they choose as friends (i.e., those who post ARC).

- Findings provide evidence that among college students the link between alcohol use and ARC (sharing, exposure) may be unidirectional.

- Given these findings, it is critically important to develop effective interventions for curbing problematic college drinking that also discuss the effects of sharing and seeing ARC on social media.

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