

Change in Mumbai Suburban Middle Class Family's Perception Towards Alcohol Consumption

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Abstract: *This study focuses on the middle class in Mumbai's suburbs, particularly in the late 20th century. The middle class plays a pivotal role in the economy of any country, and with a significant middle-class population, Mumbai is no exception. Since, Alcohol consumption is not typically a topic of discussion in middle-class families, the primary objectives were to observe the sensitivity of alcohol within middle-class families in Mumbai's suburbs and to assess the virtues and drawbacks of alcohol. Additionally, the research aimed to investigate whether changes in income have prejudiced alcohol consumption and if alcohol is still forbidden in certain communities within the Mumbai middle class.*

This research employed a quantitative methodology to gather and test hypotheses. The sources utilized were both primary and secondary, including questionnaires, interviews, research papers, journals, articles, and blogs. The results indicate an overall improvement in awareness regarding alcohol consumption compared to the late 20th century. Middle-class families in Mumbai suburbs are progressively accepting positive changes in the context of healthy drinking. Social media has been found to play a noteworthy role in prompting alcohol-consuming behaviour

Keywords: Alcohol consumption, Alcohol, Middle class, Mumbai suburban, Responsible Drinking, Merits and demerits of alcohol

I. INTRODUCTION

Alcohol – a word that evokes varied thoughts, a lot of us have experienced it, while some may have not. Still, it's undeniable that alcohol is something humans can love, hate, but never ignore. Those who partake in it regularly may be well-versed in various brands and types of alcohol. In contrast, teetotalers may perceive alcohol as solely harmful to health, influenced by societal norms.

We often hear of cases linked to domestic abuse and family disputes with alcohol as the underlying reason. But are the residents of Mumbai truly aware of concepts like 'responsible drinking' and 'moderation'? Many consume alcohol with limited knowledge, potentially leading to alcoholism. While we recognize that drinking culture differs significantly in Western countries, we must also grasp the logical and practical aspects of alcohol consumption.

Even in the early 1980s, the upper class and upper-middle class had the privilege of education and resources, but the middle-class families, unable to afford such luxuries, remained largely unaware. Alcohol was primarily viewed as a stress reliever, with excessive consumption posing health problems.

Fast forward to 2020, and the landscape has changed radically. People across all social sections have become more open-minded, aligning their values, resources, and understandings. Alcohol trends have evolved, with access to the internet and, more specifically, social media playing a key role. Platforms like YouTube and Instagram now feature sommeliers, bartenders, and hospitality professionals sharing knowledge about various cocktails and spirits.

As someone coming from a middle-class family, I have had limited exposure to alcohol throughout my life. While my father refrains from alcohol, my grandfather used to partake. For various reasons, alcohol has not held a positive image in my household. As a Teacher of Hotel Management and based on my life experiences and the company I've kept, I have developed a particular perspective on alcohol. I've experimented with a few alcoholic beverages and remain open to trying more in the future. However, I'm uncertain about my family's response.

This uncertainty prompted me to choose this topic, to explore the attitudes within other middle-class families. Have we, over the years, advanced to a point where we can socially accept alcohol consumption? Have we successfully normalized drinking in our circles? Have communities that once viewed alcohol as taboo evolved in their thinking? Or do conservative viewpoints still hinder progress?

Objectives:

To analyze whether there is any change in perception towards Alcohol consumption amongst Mumbai's middle-class family from last 40 years.

To understand whether change in income has any role in changing perception towards alcohol consumption.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

(Antonia Abbey, 1993) Exploring the intricacies of the relationship between motivations for alcohol consumption and actual drinking behavior, "*The relationship between reasons for drinking alcohol and alcohol consumption: an interactional approach*" by Antonia Abbey, Mary Jo Smith, and Richard O. Scott, delves into a nuanced inquiry. This research's identified two main categories: negative reinforcement (coping with distressing emotions) and positive reinforcement (social engagement and enjoyment). While social motives are common, heavy drinkers tend to have more coping-related motives. Heavy drinking for social reasons can lead to alcohol-related problems, but coping motives are even more likely to result in problematic consumption. Longitudinal studies on college students found that heavy drinkers who consume alcohol for social reasons are more prone to alcohol-related problems compared to those using it for coping. Both motive categories can contribute to problematic drinking behavior.

(Hisatomi S, 1997) Seiko Hisatomi and Ryukichi Kumashiro in their article "*Gender difference in alcoholic liver disease in Japan—an analysis based on histological findings*" suggests that Alcohol consumption not only affects the people but also their relations get affected in a way. The person in intoxicated state might show affinity towards violence, troubled relations with family members; might exhaust the savings of the family, which might have negative impact on their kids' education.

(Derek Iwamoto, 2012) Derek Iwamoto and Stephanie Takamatsu in their research article "*Binge Drinking and Alcohol-Related Problems among U.S-Born Asian Americans*" suggested that targeted alcohol promotion ended up in people developing positive beliefs concerning drinking, and creating environment where alcohol use is socially acceptable and inspired. These factors may result in the onset of drinking and binge drinking and inflated alcohol consumption. Since the introduction of tasteful alcoholic beverages in the Nineteen Eighties, the alcohol business has engaged in targeted promoting efforts toward youth, particularly young girls. Merchandise with sweet fruity flavours, vibrant look, and packaging, also as lower alcohol content area unit designed to charm young girls. Fruity drinks mask the style of ancient alcoholic beverages with the candied flavours of sentimental drinks, creating them a lot of palatable for this client market. Though the alcohol business claims that its promoting methods target adults ages 21–29, merchandise like tasteful alcoholic beverages stays engaging to younger drinkers.

(Jadhav, 2016) This study by Sudhir Jadhav "*Consumer Buying Behavior for Alcoholic Beverages*" explored the sample size of 100 alcohol consumers in and around the Kanhai Village in Gurgaon District. Independent variables were price, type of alcoholic beverage, reasons for buying, place, companion, etc. which led to determine the "Consumer Buying Behavior" which formed the dependent variable. Alcohol purchasing decisions were influenced by personal factors (background, values, culture), psychological factors (motivation, perception, learning), and situational factors (time, location, occasion). Word of mouth is important when evaluating options and these factors collectively shaped the decision-making process for buying alcohol.

Max, K. (2020, June 26). The notion of the "middle class" has progressed over time and no longer merely relates to those in the middle income range. Today's middle-class families are characterized by factors like homeownership, schooling, superannuation savings, and flexible spending. Originally associated with small business owners by Karl Marx, the definition now spans a broader range of income levels, reflecting increased income inequality. In Mumbai, the middle class has seen substantial changes, with refining monetary stability despite homeownership remaining a challenge for many. Changing income parameters for the middle class are influenced by inflation, regional disparities, and varying costs of living.

III. RESEARCH GAP

While broad research has been carried out on the use, benefits, and disadvantages of alcohol, there remains a prominent gap in understanding the awareness of alcohol within Mumbai's middle-class families. Furthermore, there is dearth of studies focusing on promoting awareness and fostering healthy drinking habits among individuals from middle-class backgrounds.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this research, primary data collection was done with an online survey and interview with professional who has been working in the hospitality industry.

Further questions were divided into 3 sections

People who consume Alcohol.

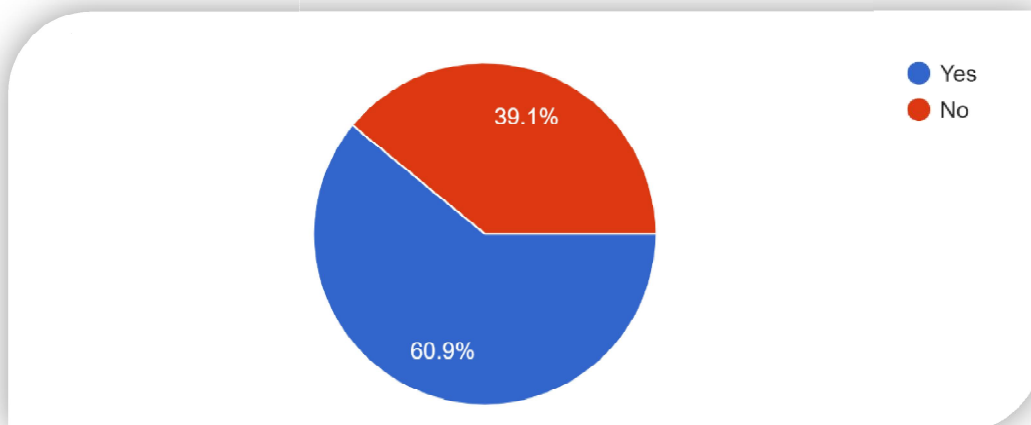
People who do not consume Alcohol.

General Questions.

First, let us see the data collected through Questionnaire.

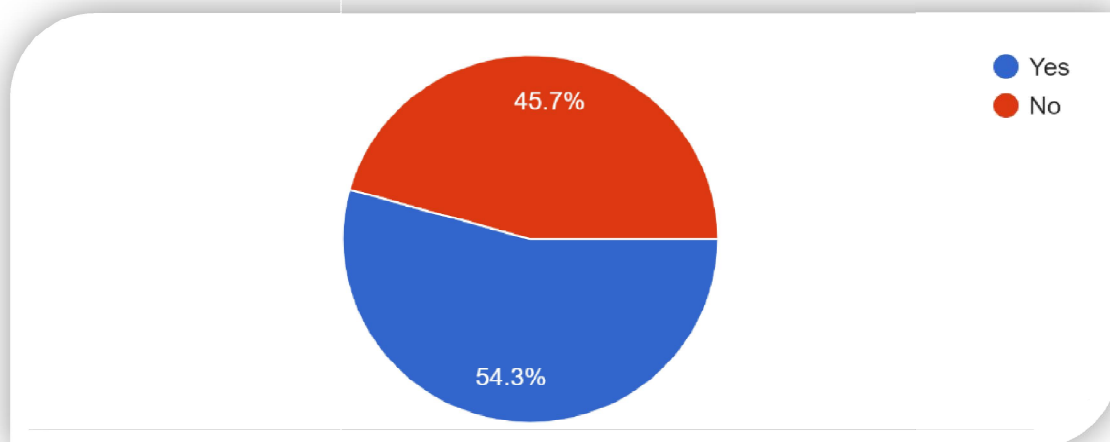
The online survey consisted of 19 multiple choice questions. Total 128 respondents filled the form and the data is as follows.

Q.1 Do you consume alcohol?



Out of all Participants, 60.9% consume Alcohol whereas 39.1% do not consume any alcoholic drinks.

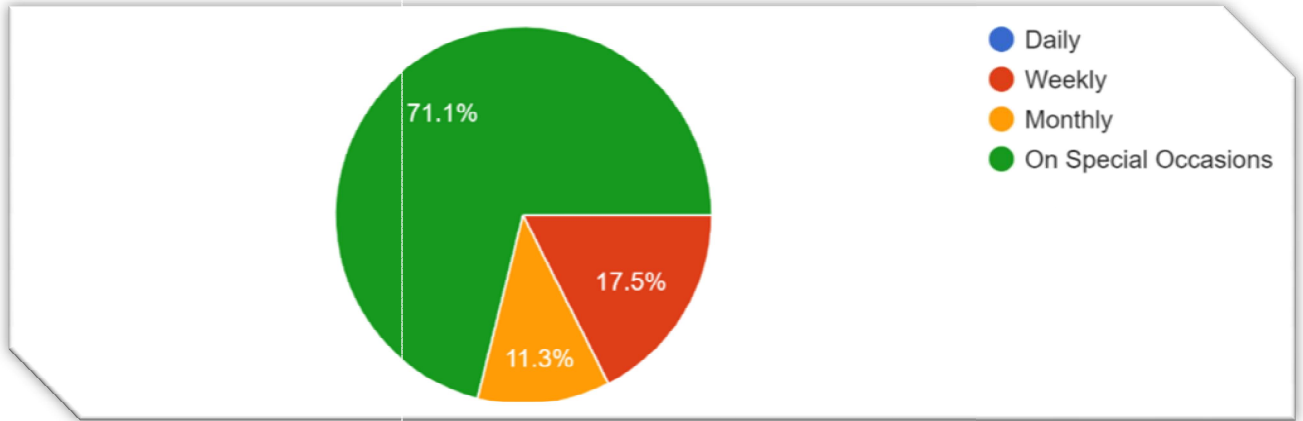
Q.2 Does your father or any elder in your family consume or used to consume alcohol?



In 54.3% participants households, their parents or elders used to consume alcohol, whereas in rest 45.7% of families no elders consumed Alcohol.

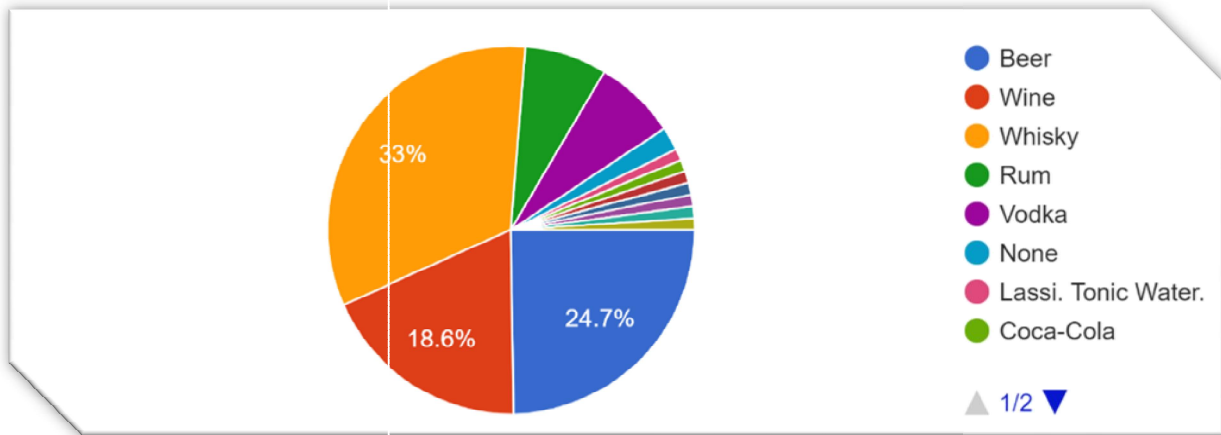
SECTION 1:

Q.3 how often do you consume Alcohol?



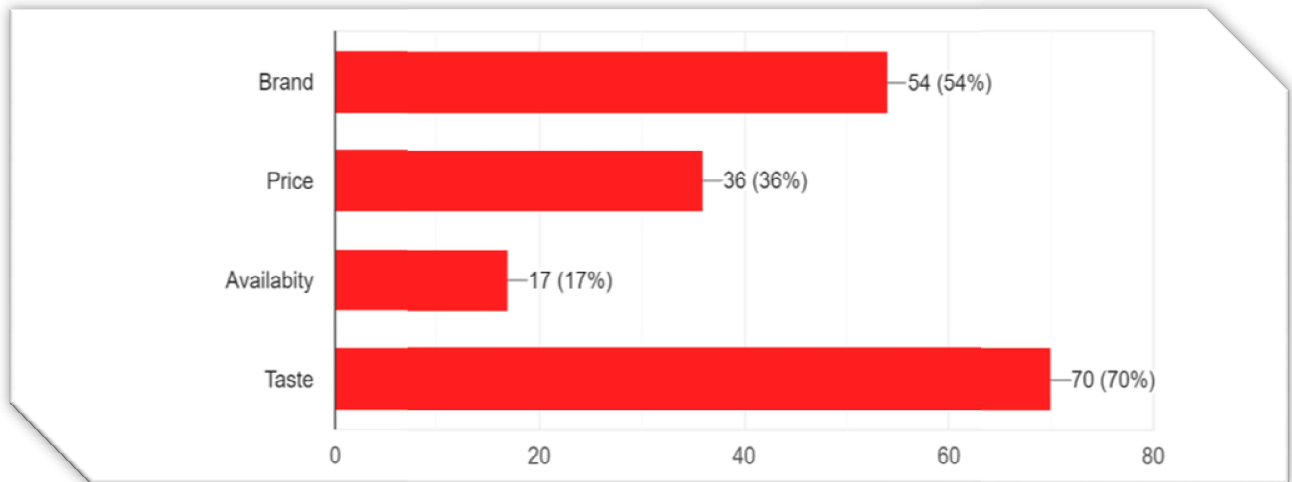
71.1% of people drink on special occasions, rest 17.5% and 11.3% consume on weekly and monthly basis respectively.

Q.4 Which is your regularly preferred drink?



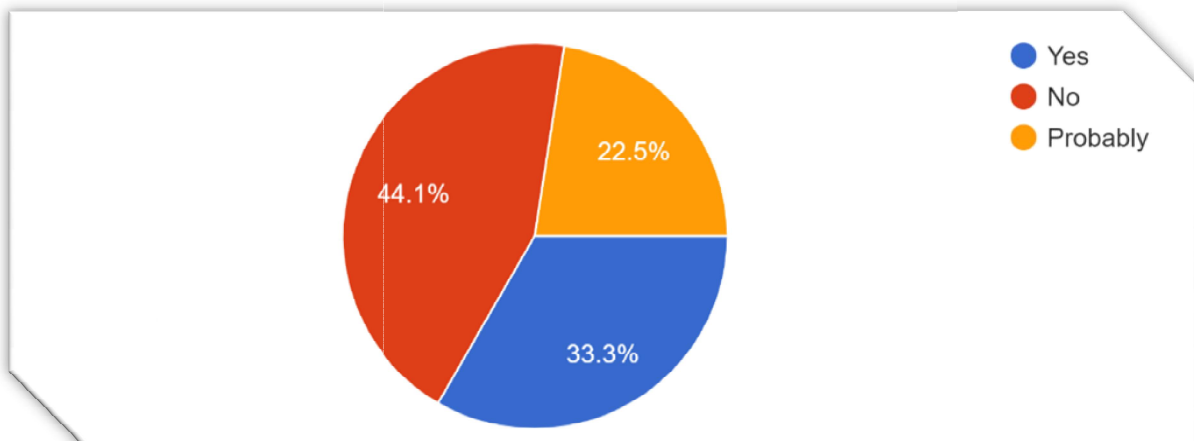
Considering this question had freedom to put answer apart from the options given, we will focus on 3 major percentiles. The result shows Whisky is most preferred drink with 33% voting followed by Beer with 24.7% and Wine being the next with 18.6%. The rest 23.7% includes other Alcoholic as well as Non-alcoholic drinks.

Q.5 which of the following factors are important to you while purchasing your favorite alcohol?



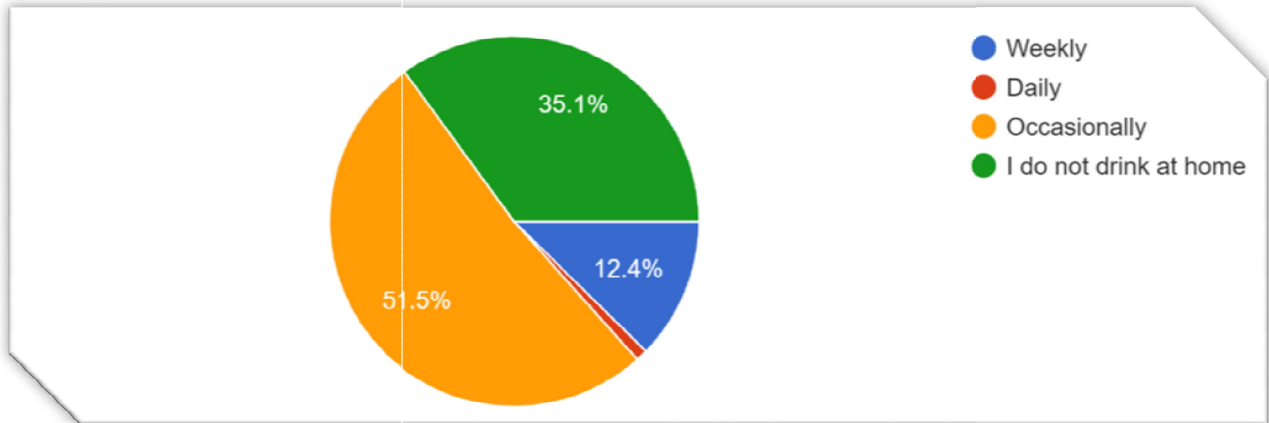
Majority of participants consuming Alcohol i.e., 70% of them prefer taste over Brand, Price and Availability which has 54%, 36% and 17% votes respectively.

Q.6 Is drinking Alcohol considered normal at your household?



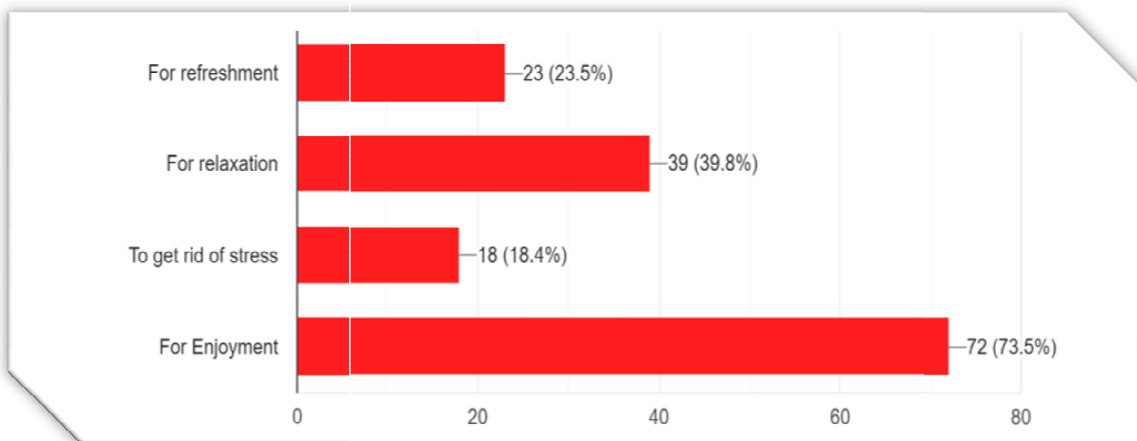
At majority of households i.e., 44.1% drinking is not considered normal whereas 33.3% presumed to have a normal drinking environment. Rest 22.5% are not sure which implies Alcohol consumption is something seldom discussed.

Q.7 How often do you drink at your 'home'?



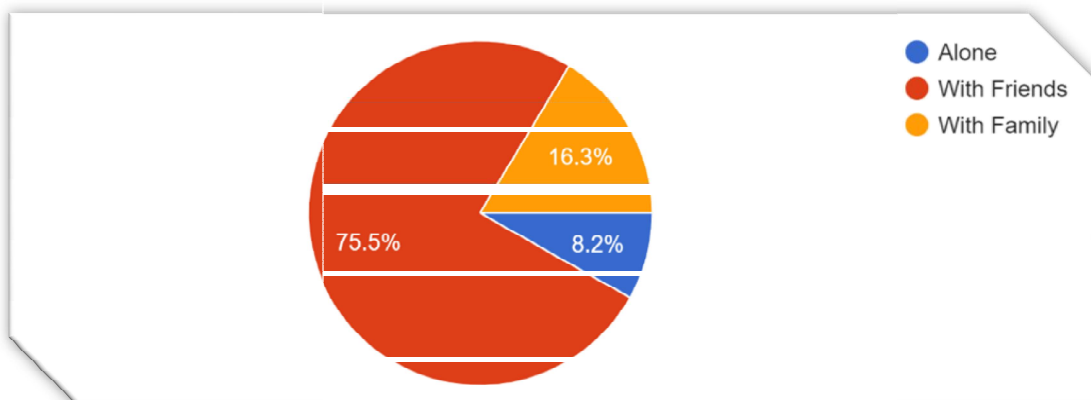
Nearly half of Alcohol consumers 51.5%, drink occasionally at their Home. 35.1% of them do not drink at home. And rest 12.4% drink weekly.

Q.8 Why do you consume Alcohol?



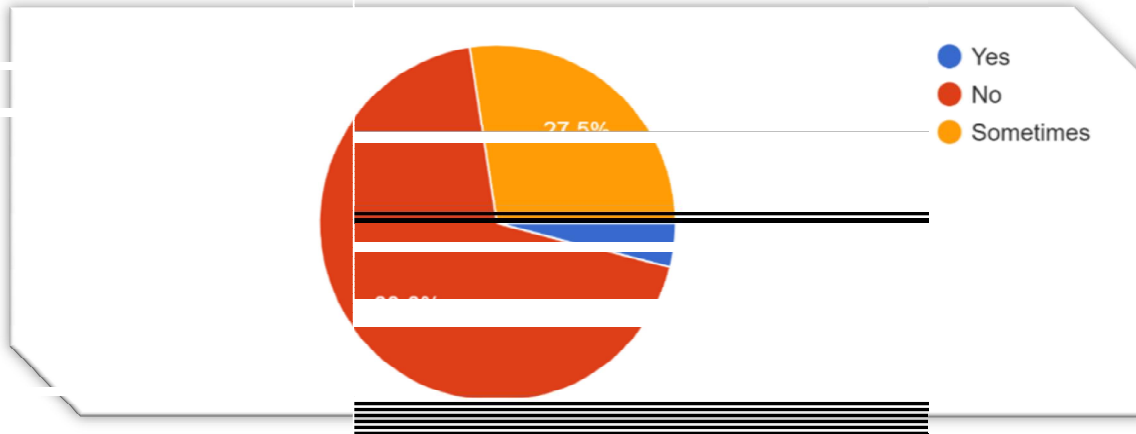
Majority of people have voted 'For Enjoyment' as their reason of drinking with 73.5%. For relaxation 39 people have voted, 23 people chose refreshment as option whereas 18 of them drink to get rid of Stress.

Q.9 How do you prefer to drink Alcohol?



As we can see, literally 3/4th i.e., 75.5% of people prefer to drink Alcohol with friends. Rest 16.3% and 8.2% of them prefer to drink with family and alone respectively.

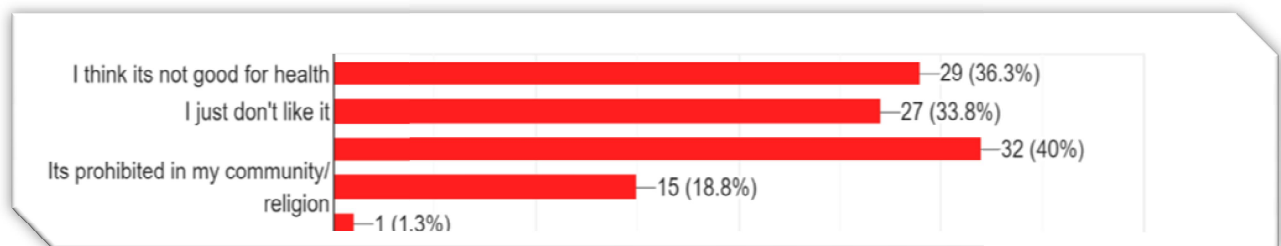
Q.10 Do you feel you consume alcohol in excess?



68.6% of them responded they do not consume Alcohol in excess and 3.9% agree with Yes for excess Alcohol consumption.

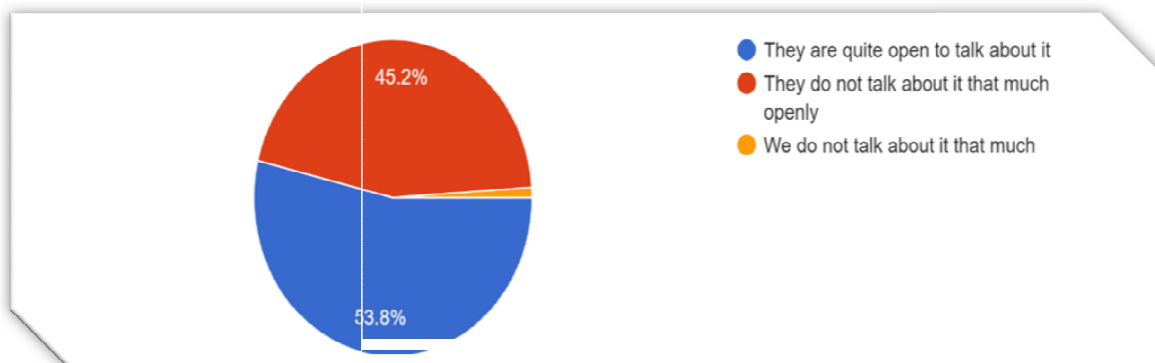
SECTION 2:

Q.11 What are your reasons for not consuming Alcohol?



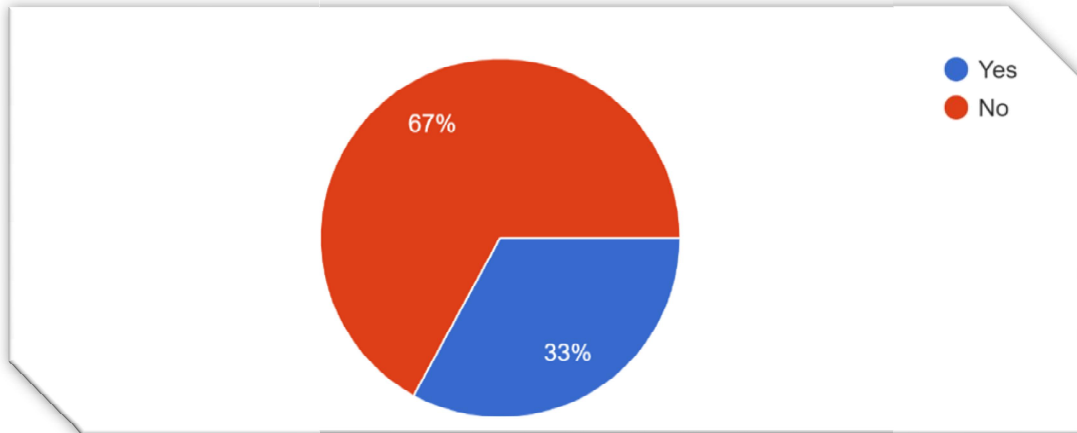
Amongst Nondrinkers, 36.3% don't drink because they think it's not good for health. 33.8% just don't like it for anonymous reasons. Majority of them (40%) voted for 'I have seen how it has affected adversely on other people' which implies there have been adverse effects as well which prohibited other to not drink. 18.8% of Nondrinkers said Alcohol consumption is prohibited in their community/religion.

Q.12 How open is your family to talk about Alcohol?



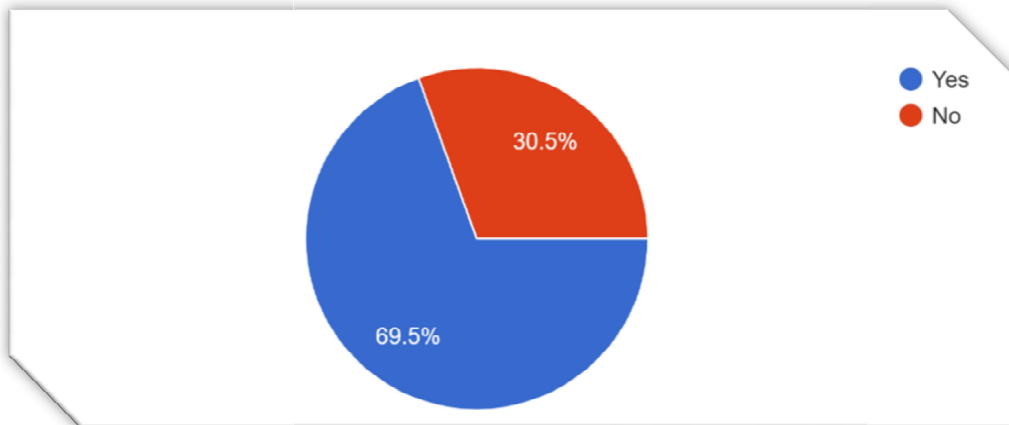
53.8% participants' families are open to discuss about Alcohol and rest 46.2% participants' families are still not comfortable to talk about Alcohol consumption.

Q. 13 Do you keep Alcohol at home for Guests?



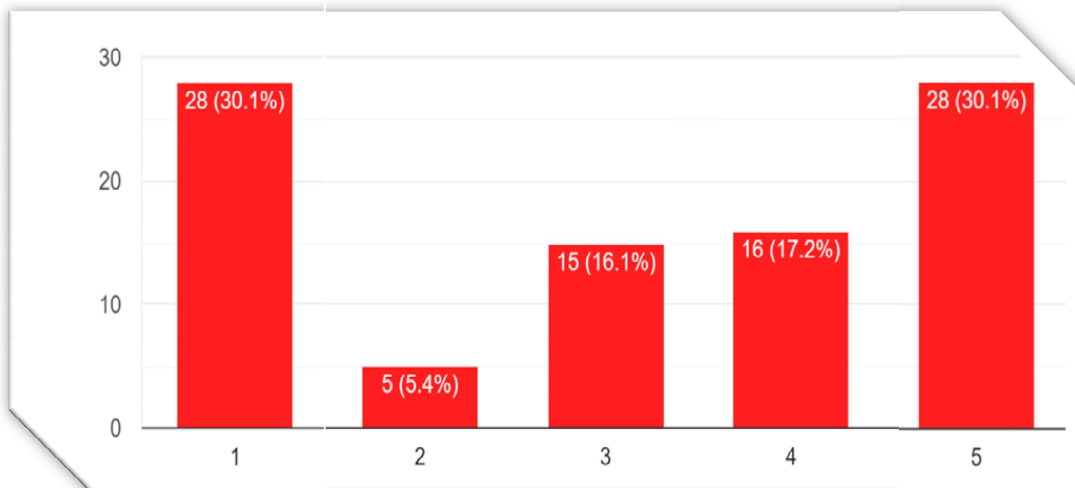
67% of Nondrinkers do not keep Alcohol at their home whereas 33% of them do store for their guests who like to drink.

Q.14 Do you think consuming Alcohol in moderation benefits your body?



69.5% of people think there are certain benefits to human body if Alcohol is consumed in moderation whereas 30.5% responded they are not aware about any such things.

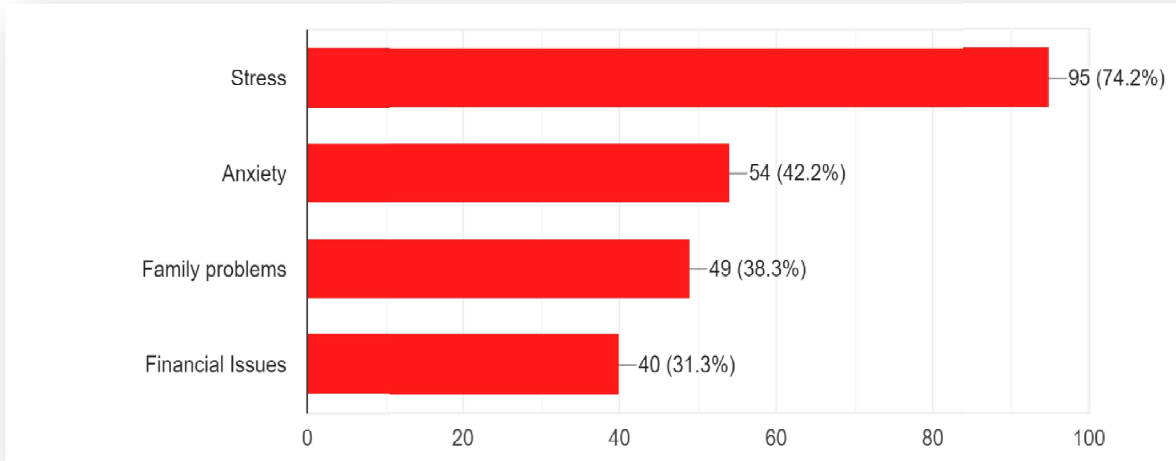
Q. 15 How likely are you to try any Alcoholic beverage?



On the scale of 'Not sure' to 'Definitely', 16.1% have been neutral about the decision of trying any Alcoholic beverage, whereas overall 35.5% are less likely to try any Alcoholic beverage in future.

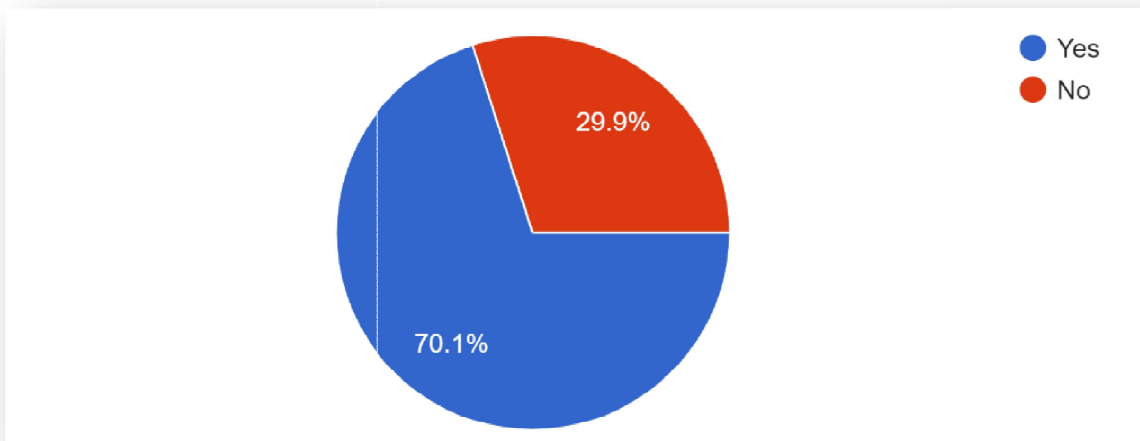
SECTION 3:

Q.16 according to you what could be the possible reasons for excessive drinking?



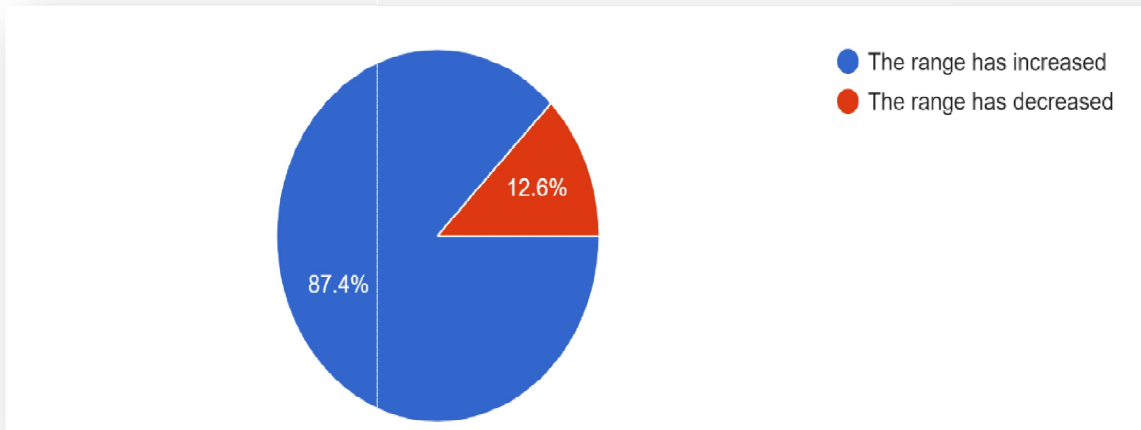
Out of all participants, about 3/4th think stress as the major the reason, 42.2% felt Anxiety, 38.3% Family problems and 31.3% felt Financial issues for excess Alcohol consumption.

Q.17 Are you aware of permissible limits of consuming various Alcohols?



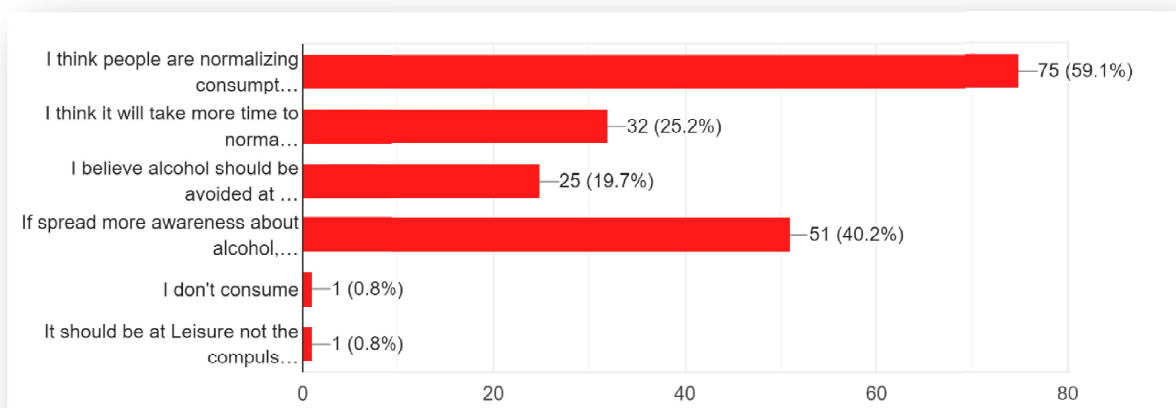
As seen above, 70.1% of participants are aware of permissible limits of consuming various Alcoholic drinks which is a positive thing.

Q.18 Do you think there is any change in income of middle-class families and whether that rise has resulted in the disposable income's share towards buying alcohol?



The majority feels there is significant increase in Middle class family's income range since 80's till now and state that there is increase in disposable income and purchase of Alcohol.

Q.19 What are your views on social acceptance of alcohol in middle class families of Mumbai.



It appears that a significant shift in societal attitudes has occurred, with 75% of participants noting the increasing normalization of alcohol consumption compared to the early 80s.

While many acknowledge the changing landscape, 25.2% of respondents believe that it will require more time for the acceptance of alcohol in middle-class families to become fully normalized.

Interestingly, a notable 19.7% still firmly uphold the belief that alcohol should be strictly avoided at all costs.

A substantial 40.2% of respondents express optimism, feeling that increased awareness about alcohol can pave the way for a future of healthier drinking habits and more responsible alcohol consumption.

IV. RESULTS

60.9% of respondents consume Alcohol in Mumbai suburban.

51.5% of Alcohol consumers drink occasionally at home.

70% of people who consume Alcohol prefer taste over price, brand, availability.

Whiskey is found to be the most preferred drink.

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75.5% people prefer to drink with friends.
27.5% drinkers admit for occasional excessive Alcohol consumption.
64.5% of Nondrinkers are willing to try Alcoholic beverages in the future.
11.8% have restrictions from their community to consume Alcohol.
53.8% are open to talk about Alcohol within their family.
87.4% participants agree with the fact that middle class income range has certainly increased since last 40 years.
Nearly 70% of participants are aware about the benefits of consuming alcohol in moderation.
Middle class income range has increased since 80's till now is proved by responses and GDP factor.
Stress is found to be major reason behind excess Alcohol consumption.
Nearly 70% of participants are aware about permissible limits of Alcohol.

V. CONCLUSION

Middle-class families in Mumbai now showed improved awareness of the merits and demerits of alcohol, compared to the 1980s. They have expanded their understanding of the appropriate ways to consume different types of spirits and the benefits of moderation. While alcohol is becoming more accepted, it is still considered taboo in certain communities due to religious factors. The rise in income and disposable income has led to a preference for higher-quality alcohol. In comparison to the late 20th century, people today have a wider understanding of alcohol consumption. The normalization of alcohol consumption within middle-class families is occurring gradually.

Limitations:

Due to COVID-19, face to face interaction and collecting opinions was not possible.
Surveys were conducted online, with less guaranteed answers and limited number of responses.
Difficulty deriving lot of conclusions due to prejudiced responses.

Disclaimer: *Consuming Alcohol* tends to have substantial effects on the human body. When alcohol is ingested, it rapidly enters the bloodstream, affecting various organs and functions. Factors like body weight, age, gender, and the type of alcohol consumed can influence the rate at which alcohol affects an individual. The liver plays an essential role in digesting alcohol, with too much drinking possibly leading to liver diseases, including alcoholic liver disease and cirrhosis. The brain is sensitive to the effects of alcohol, and continuing consumption can result in impaired brain function and increased risk of dementia. Alcohol is calorie-rich, but its impact on body weight varies with drinking habits. Reasonable alcohol consumption has been associated with reduced heart disease risk, while heavy drinking may increase the risk of heart-related issues. In summary, alcohol's effects on the body depend on various factors and can range from temporary intoxication to long-term health consequences.

Drink responsibly, Serve responsibly.

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