



Smile, photo! alcohol consumption and technology use by young people in a Spanish rural area

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ABSTRACT

The lifestyles and consumption of today are marked by increasingly global cultural patterns, and rural young people share the aspirations and needs of the postmodern western world. Rural spaces are not oblivious to the neoliberal leisure model of alcohol consumption that is the trend in cities, nor to the massive, connective use of modern networks. The principal objective of the present study is to find out how rural young men and women construct their social identity through their use and abuse of alcohol, as well as through their portrayal online in social networking sites. To this end, a qualitative methodology is used, by means of in-depth interviews (N=40) of young people (22 women and 18 men) between the ages of 18 and 24 who live in rural areas in the north of Extremadura (Spain). The results show how these practices become important identitarian elements for the young men and women, which contribute to their social inclusion in rural life, characterized by a blend of signs of today's markedly global society mixed with the weight of traditional gender roles and strong social control.

1. Introduction

1.1. Nightlife for rural young people

In the last two decades, there has been an increase in scientific research into young people in rural settings in Spain (see Camarero and Sampedro 2008; Gómez and Méndez, 2009; Pérez and Sánchez-Oro, 2007). However, much of this growing interest is focused on their emigration from rural areas, as they are considered to be an essential population for these areas' viability and vitality (Nugin 2014; Pedersen and Gram, 2018; Terman, 2020). Few studies look into the daily lifestyle of young people who remain in their towns and villages, nor are there many that analyse their free time and leisure. From the studies available on leisure in rural Spain (Camarero, 2000; Gastón, 2016), it emerges that rural young people prefer to go out partying with their peers on weekends and public holidays (Baigorri and Chaves, 2006; Rodríguez et al., 2002).

In order to understand the current leisure patterns of young people, it is important to look at the transformations of leisure spaces that have

occurred in parallel with the economic and sociocultural changes that have taken place in Transition Spain. In this regard, taking as a reference the study by Pallarés and Feixa (2000), who conduct a historical overview of Spain from the 1970s to the 2000s, analysing the changes of young people's partying in spatio-temporal terms, two main ideas emerge for consideration. The first is the transition to a large variety of private spaces of the night-time economy for young people, through which they make varied itineraries and routes. The stroll or private party gave way to pubs and discos, with, at the beginning of the 1980s, the popularization of leisure establishments in Spain and the emergence of club culture in the 1990s, accompanied by the heavy consumption of alcohol and other drugs. Secondly, in relation to time, a reassessment of the night takes place and youth identity acquires a nocturnal tone, as a space for socialization and learning with other peers. Furthermore, weekend culture starts to grow in importance, particularly Friday and Saturday, when most going out takes place, a practice that has lasted down to today,¹ gaining great weight in youth symbology and in their patterns of socialization.

However, it is worth mentioning the gregarious nature of the

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¹ Three out of every four young Spanish people, to a greater or lesser degree, normally go out at night on the weekend, according to the data from the INJUVE survey (2014). *Jóvenes, Economía, noche y fin de semana, Salud*. Observatorio de la Juventud en España: Madrid. Available in: <http://www.injuve.es/observatorio/economia-consumo-y-estilos-de-vida/jovenes-economia-noche-y-fin-de-semana-salud-injuve-2013-2a-encuesta>

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behaviours and patterns of young people in nightlife. They go out, they socialize and they experience the passing into adulthood as a group (Pallarés and Feixa, 2000). Thus, young women and men go to places where they can find more young people coming together and differentiating themselves according to age, gender, social class, geographical area and other socio-structural variables (Berthet et al., 2016; Lazzano and Madariaga, 2016). In this regard, the comparative research conducted on the leisure of young people in Spanish rural and urban areas (e.g. Berrio-Otxoa et al., 2002) has demonstrated how young people who live in rural settings assert that: they live their friendships in a tighter and closer manner than their urban counterparts; they have a greater feeling of calmness and freedom, which generally leads to less control over them and their activities; they know the reality of their environment in detail, along with the means and possibilities that it provides them with; and they are influenced by trends originating in urban cultures.

We must also bear in mind the variations in leisure according to the season or climate, which are particularly visible in rural areas, where what is available in the rural night-time economy expands in summer, with an increase in open-air *botellones*² due to the presence of young people on holiday, and the towns' festivals make them centres of attraction (Baigorri and Chaves, 2006; Berthet et al., 2016). In fact, studies suggest that certain types of young people's nightlife behaviour could have begun there and been transferred to the cities (Pallarés and Feixa, 2000), such as the phenomenon of the *botellón*, which had its origins in the organizatory processes of youth groups during the annual fairs of many Spanish towns, in which youth organizations are self-managed (Baigorri and Chaves, 2006). Along the same lines, a recent study on young people who summer in rural areas of Barcelona (Mecca, 2019) highlights the role of the town as a place of trust, safety and social control both for young people and for their families, and also shows how the large festivals facilitate young people's first outings with friends.

1.2. Drinking culture of rural young people

Currently, the neoliberal consumption model in the night-time economy is replete with heavy drinking and binge drinking. Kavanaugh and Anderson (2017) have shown how the homogenization of nightlife culture promoted by neoliberal governance models has affected substance use among young adults in such a way that the patterns and risks associated with intoxication become normalized, in particular the heavy episodic alcohol use that increasingly defines nightlife, and in which drinking means "lubricating ties and solidarities" (Pallarés and Feixa, 2000). Nevertheless, the analysis of these practices has been geographically biased towards urban environments under the paradigm of "urbanormativity" (Fulkerson and Thomas, 2019), that symbolic system where the urban world and the city are the normative reference: anything rural is simplified and considered stagnant, associated with backwardness, traditional gender roles and scant educational possibilities (Little and Panelli, 2003; Pedersen and Gram, 2018). Furthermore, most national and transcultural studies on drinking in Europe are quantitative and epidemiological in nature, focused on the risks and consequences of alcohol consumption by the young for public health (Fox and Marsh, 1998).

Similarly, the comparative literature of the study of these practices suggests that rural young people begin drinking earlier than their urban counterparts, they drink more and have a higher risk of alcohol abuse (Chan et al., 2016; Coomber et al., 2011; Lambert et al., 2008). The following associated factors are highlighted: the expectations of drinking, drinking among peers and in the family environment, as well as the time they get home or the money they have available, among other

² Colloquial term used in Spain to refer to the street gatherings of young people binge-drinking alcohol.

aspects (Golpe et al., 2017; Obradors-Rial et al., 2014). Rolando et al. (2012), meanwhile, note the influence of wine production in the alcohol consumption patterns of drinking cultures, where the principle values of the use of alcohol were socialization, cohabitation or as a foodstuff.

Although there is a lack of data at the municipal level for the analysis of alcohol consumption in Spain, according to the figures from the report analysing the 2017–2018 EDADES Survey in the autonomous community of Extremadura – to which the rural area under study belongs – the starting age for alcohol consumption is slightly lower than the national average in the population surveyed of 15–65 year-olds (16.1 compared to 16.6). Alcohol is the foremost substance consumed in Spain, and in recent decades we have witnessed what has been called the "culture of intoxication", a trend that young rural Spaniards have also joined in. Regarding the consumption rates of the younger population of 15–30 year-olds in Extremadura, there is a greater prevalence of alcohol than in all other age groups. By gender, young people between the ages of 15 and 30 present the highest values of experimental (87% men, 85.9% women), sporadic (79.7% men, 68.8% women), habitual (61.8% men, 49.2% women), and daily use (1.4% men, 0% women). Yet if we focus more closely on the youngest, one observes a greater prevalence in alcohol consumption, particularly by young women (SES: Servicio Extremeño de Salud, 2019).

However, it is clear that the moral panic over excessive drinking is implicitly producing a monolithic image of this drinking in urban areas, which does not recognize the socio-spatially differentiated nature of the practice (Valentine et al., 2008). We know that place and space are key components in alcohol consumption (Ander et al., 2015; Jaime et al., 2016; Trell et al., 2014). In this regard, there are studies, albeit few, that suggest how the formations of identity in rural drinking contexts, far from needing an urban example, function to strengthen the sense of belonging to the place and are related to locally embedded drinking practices (Antonsich, 2010; Herold et al., 2019).

Furthermore, as well as the starting age and the role of place in alcohol consumption, one must take gender into account as an important variable in the analysis of the uses and abuses of alcohol. Courtenay (2000) and Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) explain how some risk behaviours are culturally defined as "masculine", and that men use unhealthy behaviours to define their virility, such as consuming excessive amounts of alcohol to demonstrate their loyalty to the male companion group. Thus, the category "man" depends to a large extent on collective practices and performative acts (Marcos-Marcos et al., 2013). Similarly, various studies have shown the persistence of gender double standards, whereby the drinking behaviours of women are more socio-culturally penalized than those of men (De Visser and McDonnell, 2012; Lyons and Willott, 2008; Romo-Avilés et al., 2019).

Within the context under study, Campbell (2000), who examined alcohol consumption in rural bars by young men in New Zealand, employs the idea of hegemonic masculinity, incorporating theoretical ideas of gender performativity in order to reflect the "conversational cock-fighting" and the "disciplines of drinking" for young men so as to guarantee a particular version of masculinity. In addition, Leyshon (2008) analysed how, in rural areas of England, young women used several strategies to move between spaces, such as experimenting with alcohol and alternative femininities, thus questioning the roles and acceptable expectations of gender. The study revealed how this experimentation affects their sense of belonging to the countryside.

1.3. Technology and social networks in dynamic rural spaces

Currently, lifestyles and consumption habits are framed by cultural patterns that are increasingly global, and rural young people share the aspirations and needs of the postmodern western world. Therefore, rural spaces are not far removed from the neoliberal leisure model of consumption imposed in cities. Neither are they untouched by the massive use of and connection to current networks. Adopting Woods' concept (2007) of the "global countryside", this is a hypothetical space where the

characteristics of globalization are more or less settled into the processes of transformation of the space (Argent and Tonts, 2013), through politics of negotiation and configuration, producing new forms of local-global relations and hybridisation, and causing local institutions of governance to be limited in their capacity to regulate the processes and consequences of globalisation (Wood, 2007). The rural, therefore, is conceived as “a social setting that is simultaneously a conditioning substratum and a product of processes of action leading to its construction and social change” (Entrena, 1998: 19).

According to the latest data, in the region under study 94.2% of households had internet access in 2020 (in Spain as a whole, the figure is 95.4%). Of all the people who connect to the internet, 84.8% did so daily or at least five days a week (89.1% in the country as a whole) and 95.9% had used instant messaging, the most used form of internet service (the national average being 96%) (IEEX, 2020). According to the latest data published in Spain, WhatsApp was the most used network in 2020, with 85% of those surveyed stating that they use it. This is followed by Facebook, with 81%, YouTube (70%), Instagram (59%), and Twitter (51%) (IAB, 2020).

As a central component in the lives of young men and women, social networking sites (SNS) play a role in the construction and maintenance of social relations, being communication tools that reinforce existing ties, both with friends and romantic partners (Subrahmanyam and Greenfield, 2008). Connected young people live their experiences of socialization and identity construction in the internet in a complex way (Rodríguez and Pequeño, 2017), through the elements they share there, aligning their behaviours with other members of their social group to demonstrate, proclaim and maintain their social identity (Pegg et al., 2018). In the context under study, Waite and Bourke (2015), who researched the online experience of young people who live in rural communities of Australia, highlight the use of SNS for shaping representative images of themselves and interacting with their friends. However, some studies (Awan and Gauntlett, 2013; Harris and Wyn, 2009; Valentine and Holloway, 2001) suggest that, far from transcending their geography through the expansive window offered by technology, young people remain embedded in their local contexts and family virtual environments.

Among other uses, recent studies have shown how young people share contents from parties that include practices of heavy drinking (see Lennox et al., 2018; Lyons et al., 2016; Moewaka et al., 2015), revealing that sharing images of drinking online creates a site of pleasure, leisure and self-exhibition for young people, where double standards of gender persist (Lennox et al., 2018). However, we know little of these types of digital behaviour carried out by young people in rural environments.

The aim of this study is to learn how rural young women and men construct their social identity through their uses and abuses of alcohol, as well as through their online profile on SNS. To do so, other important questions arise that need answering: what meanings do rural young people attribute to their alcohol practices and their representation online? What relation occurs between the uses and abuses of alcohol of rural young people and their uses of smartphone technology and SNS? In what way do a rural environment's relationships of closeness and familiarity affect the uses of alcohol and of technology?

2. Materials and methods

This paper presents qualitative research involving 40 in-depth interviews of young people between the ages of 18 and 24, residing in rural areas of the region of La Vera, located to the northeast of the province of Cáceres, Extremadura (Spain). A series of sociodemographic variables were established in the chosen sample to ensure the heterogeneity of profiles and the discourse of this group, for the purpose of discovering, analysing and interpreting different perspectives: age (mean age: 19.5); sex (55% women, 45% men); municipality of residence (22.5% < 1000 inhabitants, 20% 1000–5000, 57.5% 5000–10000); place of birth (85% in Extremadura, 7.5% another

Spanish region, 7.5% another country); occupation (97.5% students: vocational training, certificates of professionalism and employment workshops; work: 32.5% in the primary or tertiary sectors; or study and work, 30%); partner (52.5% with partner); belonging to an ethnic minority (15%). It is important to stress that the sample is made up of those young people who, unlike the majority, stay in their rural communities, those who have not migrated. This could provide the keys to understanding embeddedness in these areas, those who can most faithfully portray the forms of young rural life today.

The region of La Vera comprises 19 municipalities covering 888 km² of land, with a population density of 26,06 inhabitants/km² (INE: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2019). This area has a series of particular characteristics and specific imbalances that must be borne in mind. The lack of generational renewal, the ageing and masculinization of the population along with depopulation are still the longest shadows cast over rural Spain in general, known as “España vacía” (“empty Spain”), affecting rural Extremadura in particular (Leco et al., 2017). Likewise, and regarding the rural young population, the Youth Council of CJEX: Consejo de la Juventud de Extremadura (2016) has revealed its ongoing state of abandonment. The lack of opportunities for work or training, possibilities for emancipation and the absence of leisure and cultural activities are stated as the main reasons for deciding to emigrate to urban environments (CJEX, 2016). According to the data from INE (2019), young people between the ages of 16 and 29 make up 15.86% of the population of Extremadura, totalling 169,404. Extremadura has the highest unemployment rate in Spain among 16–24 year-olds, estimated at 46.31% (compared to the national rate of 30.5%). Regarding education, 20.5% of 18–24 year-olds have neither completed compulsory education nor have employment (the national average is 17.3%, compared to the European Union average of 10.6%) (INE, 2019).

2.1. Fieldwork

Our fieldwork began in November 2018. The in-depth interviews of participants were carried out in three phases from November 2018 to February 2019. The interview questions were designed around five thematic blocks in accordance with the research aims: youth identity; rural life; consumption of alcohol and other drugs; uses of information technology and SNS; and digital violence. Using snowball non-probability sampling, the participants were selected in educational centres, local organizations and youth associations in different municipalities of the region of La Vera, Cáceres (Extremadura). The general inclusion criteria consisted of men and women between 18 and 24 years of age with normalized profiles, who lived in small towns of Extremadura, were consumers of alcohol and other drugs, and were users of information and communication technology and SNS.

Fieldwork access was arranged by one of the researchers who was native to the rural area under study. This fact was one of the most notable advantages for the study thanks to her knowledge both of the area and key sociocultural agents, which facilitated movement between the different municipalities of the region in order to conduct the interviews. The contacts were made gradually, and one major inconvenience that arose during this process was the difficulty in finding young people who fit the research profile, because at that age most leave town to study or work elsewhere. One of the researchers went to libraries, adult education centres, youth leisure centres of the region, at the same time as meeting with local professionals who worked with young people. Through these, trusted connections were established with young people, which made it possible to look for places to conduct the interviews in a sincere environment.

The interviews were transcribed literally. For the data analysis, we performed a summative content analysis. After the first general reading of the transcripts, we made the first identification of codes and categories. Gavira and Osuna (2015) propose five different triangulation methods in studies: source (data), investigator, theory, methodological and multiple triangulation. We used methodological triangulation,

which enabled us to test the consistency level and to resolve discrepancies. After codification, the most significant analysis units were extracted, and the interrelations between the different themes were identified. This analysis was developed with the aid of ATLAS.ti software.

2.2. Ethical considerations

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Granada (757/CEIH/2018). All the participants were adults and voluntarily agreed to being interviewed, receiving information about the study through a letter of commitment to confidentiality signed by the researchers. The participants also signed a consent form so that the interviews could proceed.

It should be highlighted, furthermore, that because this is a rural environment where everyone knows each other and can identify people and their behaviour, throughout the research process the confidentiality of the interviewees was ensured by concealing all personal data in the transcripts and using pseudonyms to safeguard anonymity.

3. Results

3.1. Festive rural atmosphere: social dynamics and relations, characterization of the context

In the rural towns, going out on weekends to bars, pubs (normally located on town squares) and rural nightclubs (on the outskirts) are shown to be the main activity for leisure and socialization for the young men and women we interviewed. However, not all the towns in this Spanish rural area have this type of night-time economy venue, which means that many young people choose to go to the larger municipalities where more people of their age gather together at fashionable establishments. Communications and the proximity between some towns and others make this mobility possible. We can see this reflected in the following accounts, some of which bemoan the lack of other leisure options in their municipalities:

there's no place for young people to meet up, and then the bars we do have close early, so we have to come here to Jaraíz or somewhere else ... there are more young people, and if they open the nightclub or something, then we come (Beatriz, 18 years old)

here it's what's typical, it's that it's a [small] town, there's nothing else, you know? Here on a normal weekend you've got to go to another town, to Jaraíz and Plasencia or someplace ... people like me say: where one goes, the others follow ... they don't stay, maybe we'd go to Naval Moral or wherever (Yolanda, 20 years old)

In this rural area, one must also take into account an important factor in whether there is a greater or lesser festive atmosphere for young people: seasonality. This determines the flow of people, what sociocultural events are on offer, and mobility. For most of the year, and particularly in winter, the towns are characterized by reduced populations, except on festive days and holiday periods. However, this dynamic changes in summer. Weekend partying, in which rural pubs and nightclubs are visited, switches to open-air *botellones* in the rural spaces prepared for the purpose, normally on the outskirts of towns near sports grounds, cemeteries or morgues, and the party is continued in nightclubs (some outdoor). Rural tourism and the return of students from urban environments greatly revitalizes the area and encourages higher concentrations of young people. Likewise, the local summer festivals of the different towns are an unmissable attraction, according to the interviewees. They group together into clubs, and give themselves a name that identifies them over the years. They tend to go to the festivals of all the region's towns, wearing t-shirts bearing their club name. This leads to opportunities to form relationships with other people and escape the routine they are accustomed to:

maybe people who say: let's go partying to another town, for example, Jaraíz, but it's one of those rainy weekends, when you go out on Saturday, you can go out and have a beer ... in summer it's much more lively ... later, too, more partying, there are parties in all the towns, if you don't go to one town, you go to another ... if they don't open the dancefloor here [open-air disco], it's different. (Félix, 19 years old)

I try to go out to the other towns, I find it very tedious ... and so, there are parties in Cuacos, I go to Cuacos, there are parties in Aldenueva, I go to Aldenueva for a bit of a change of scene, because always the same and, what's more, the people are always the same. (Abel, 18 years old)

It is important to stress how, in the towns, above all in the smallest of them, people know each other through their friend and family networks, often identified by the family surname or nickname, as well as through direct and close relationships. In the case of the social relations that occur in the atmosphere of the night-time economy between young people of different towns, they stand out for values such as unity, integration and openness – enjoying the rural *fiesta* all together. This meeting and socialization of young people from different towns that takes place in the larger municipalities is especially valued by the interviewees as something enriching and part of the place where they live:

the people are like one whole family, because we all know each other and you can mix more with some than others, but when you go out you get on with everyone ... I like going out here more than anywhere else ... the mood there is, the atmosphere, because you go out in a bigger place and it's like there's your group and like everyone ... it's like individual and here it's like it's all more together, when maybe in a bigger place people do their own thing more. (Noemí, 18 years old)

you see people from all the surrounding towns, the truth is that you have a good time with some people and then end up with others ... for me, the *fiestas* here, the weekends and that, I like it because you know more people, it's like you're not always with the same people, you mix with those from the next town. (Laura, 18 years old)

It is worth mentioning that the relationships that the young men and women from the area maintain can begin at primary or secondary school and continue over time. Living together in the same spaces of interaction means that defined groups are created and through these the young people live and experience their adolescence and their youth. Nonetheless, we need to distinguish how, although in the large towns they have more opportunities for grouping together and choosing friends, in the smaller towns, the groups are characterized by being a unit, without age distinction. This feeling of group belonging creates cohesion between the young people we have interviewed, who compare it to a large family, "they're from the same town":

there are fewer people, you get along better, and the people know you, you go by and they greet you ... And if I go out, I have my friends, you know? I've had them for a long time, from little, because I also knew them. (Juan, 19 years old)

everyone fits in ... also there's a lot of age variety, from 18 years old, well, I'm 22, the youngest 21, and then the oldest is 28 ... It doesn't seem to me that, if you're already very old, you don't mix with me, on the contrary, if you are older you can give the younger people more maturity. (Adriana, 22 years old)

3.2. Drinking among the young: gender, age and rurality

For the interviewees, the rural party is synonymous with drinking. Some, both young women and men, cannot even conceive of going out and not drinking. There is strong environmental and social pressure

because it is a socioculturally normalized behaviour carried out by the majority inside small contexts, including the peer group, which is so important at this stage of life. Drinking alcohol can therefore become an important demonstration of belonging to the group and to the place. This is how the interviewees saw it:

if you don't drink you're a weirdo ... here there are many people who have a group of friends, that you don't drink and don't smoke and as you're weird, they look down on you ... Most people here are like that, I think. (Iris, 20 years old)

if you don't drink you don't have a good time, you're bored and everyone there, having a good time you watching ... if I don't drink, I'm not drunk and I see my friends having a good time and I'm not, I can't be there, I have to go home. (Mateo, 20 years old)

Thus they associate alcohol consumption with having fun within the rural night-time economy environments. Their motivations regarding drink are strongly marked by the pleasurable effects of disinhibition, freedom and socialization that determine their personal and social experiences:

with the music you're drinking alcohol, I'm very timid, very embarrassed, so then for example alcohol, you start with that and then you are more outgoing or whatever, you know? (Yolanda, 20 years old)

Me when I'm drunk I say hello to everyone and speak to everyone. (Félix, 19 years old)

The interviewees emphasised that they drink a lot of alcohol in their areas of residence, and that they start consuming this psychoactive substance ever earlier in age. Through their accounts, it emerges that heavy drinking is practised above all by minors, and it is intensified at parties:

you see a lot of drinking, above all in the towns, because people my age, from very young, from twelve years old they're already starting to drink, there are many people younger than me ..., they go to the disco, to the Patín (pub), and to Run Away (nightclub) in Jaraíz. (Soraya, 19 years old)

it still shocks me to see boys and girls – it's that they are boys and girls, they'd be 12, 13 years old – drinking, drinking falling over everywhere ... I get that everybody, well, we're young, we want to try things, but to give over a weekend of which there's only kind, we're going to drink, to get drunk, to get high, we're going to smoke, we're going to so on ... it's a bit sad. (Gema, 24 years old)

Concerning the drinking patterns of the young people who participated in the study, noteworthy differences have emerged between the young women and the young men regarding traditional gender normativity in their narratives about drink. Thus, for the female interviewees, awareness and controlling limits in their uses of alcohol are apparent, with their not wishing to overdo it in order to maintain suitable femininity:

I'm not one of those girls collapsed in the street, I know my limits when I drink, my body can drink. Neither have I gone to throw up because I couldn't take anymore. (Yolanda, 20 years old)

yes, but neither drinking until ... yes drinking, you are drinking, you get tipsy and you have a good time, but not drinking like that ... I have a good time up to a point also, I, for example, I do know how to control it: up to here, in the end you don't end up not remembering a thing, and the truth is that I've never gone that far. (Marta, 22 years old)

In the case of the male interviewees, however, the story is different. They completely and unabashedly acknowledge their drunkenness and

patterns of heavy or binge drinking, of large quantities of alcohol, and they emphasise their capacity for withstanding it, following the precepts of hegemonic masculinity and the behaviour expected of them in relation to alcohol abuse:

I do go out, I'm the first to admit how I arrive eager to drink, I go on an almighty bender ... It's that then I can really hold my drink, because I have to drink a lot, a lot, to get very drunk. (Félix, 19 years old)

I do drink alcohol, and a lot ... (laughter). On New Year's Eve I did get it, really, so come on, everything down the hatch. (Antonio, 18 years old)

Although for the young men very heavy uses of alcohol are accepted, when the young women behave the same, it represents a breach that can cause mockery, generate criticism, such as questioning their behaviour in a rural context in which everyone knows everyone and there is less space for these types of transgressions to pass unnoticed. In the following excerpts, we can see the double standards of gender present in the interviewees' accounts:

- the girl is going to make more of a fool of herself than the guy ...

INT: Is she?

-it's not the same seeing a drunk girl as a drunk guy.

INT: Isn't it the same?

-Come on, as a general rule it should be the same, because supposedly we're all equal, but it's true that you see a drunk lass and you say: look at that drunk girl, what would her father think, or that he has to think ... you see a drunk lad and maybe you also say the same, but no ...

INT: But isn't the result the same?

-Of course it isn't the same for example seeing a fifteen- or sixteen-year-old girl drunk as a fifteen- or sixteen-year-old boy drunk.

INT: And is she criticized more?

-well I think so, she can be criticized more ... (Félix, 19 years old)

I've seen lasses drunk and I've laughed at them and so on, because they've got way over-the-top wasted. (Felipe, 21 years old)

3.3. Portrayal of the rural party online

Currently, another essential element for the configuration of youth identity in the towns is constituted by the new technologies and SNS. The generalized use of the smartphone extends to the night-time economy settings of young men and women in the rural space under study. The updating of profiles and upkeep of network presence (digital identity) has become a constant along with having fun and socializing offline in the night-time economy of their towns. The purpose is essentially social in nature: that others see that you are partying, as well as communicating with other people simultaneously. Similarly, the main uses of the smartphone in the rural party that the interviewees identify are:

I use it, I don't know, to take photos, some photos or a video with my friends, uploading stories ... it's also, it depends on the night, if one night we're really into photos then we'll take 20 photos that later we like 2 but ... (Penelope, 21 years old)

I use it to take videos and photos, nothing else, with the people I'm with and in videos of the night mode, singing a song [he laughs] ... but there are times I look at my friends and say, but put down your phone already ... you're on it all day long.

INT: And what things do they tend to do?

-send photos to someone who's not at the party: look we're here or sending audios singing, and endlessly taking selfies. (Mateo, 20 years old)

Instagram is one of the digital tools for interaction and socialization preferred by the interviewees for depicting nightlife in the towns, through which they comment on photographs and update online content when they are out partying or when they get home. The image and maintenance of one's popular appearance takes priority and becomes a perfect opportunity for exhibiting oneself in front of others, carrying out embedded patterns:

It's a normalized and common trend, I've got home and maybe I open Instagram for example on Sunday and there are people who've uploaded 30 photos one night and who get home and upload the photo ... I mean, they're taking a photo, and they upload it and like that in stories that can be seen for 24 hours. (Juana, 22 years old)

yes, a lot, almost every weekend [laughing] after when people get home they upload the photos, and while partying. (Azucena, 18 years old)

In this way, excessive behaviours with alcohol are portrayed in SNS through digital photographs and videos. According to the interviewees, the reasons for doing so are to remember the party, along with showing young socialization in the rural spaces of belonging through their heavy drinking. These are socioculturally normalized behaviours, just as they are offline – a trend or fashion seeking social acknowledgement among their friends and acquaintances of the area. For the young people interviewed, the purpose of inter-peer joking predominates, and they often take charge of capturing the drunken state of their friends:

I'm out partying to have fun, and then well, if there's been some photographs then I'll look and see if they've taken a photo of me or not ... Because later they upload it online of course ... although normally you don't remember [laughs] and if you've had a good time, you don't remember. (Mateo, 20 years old)

my friend often, maybe if we go out, we're like a bit merry, as we say, we put on a song we like, and we record ourselves singing it like that, we upload it. (Beatriz, 18 years old)

The effects of alcohol have an impact on the portrayal of nightlife. The narratives of the interviewees coincide with regard to the regret or surprise felt on discovering the content that has been published and shared on SNS the day after. Drinking can drive the uploading of photos and videos that, sometimes, they would not have uploaded if sober. Nonetheless, there are occasions when it is beyond their control, as it is published on SNS by other peers or even by workers at the fashionable nightclubs.

so maybe others' videos they've taken of me, so yes, you regret how you were, because I haven't done it myself, it's that I don't do it, and taking videos of myself ... maybe you regret what you've drunk and they've filmed you. (Mateo, 20 years old)

only the odd photo that you upload without thinking or that they upload of you in the nightclub and then when you see it you say, my God, the photo they've taken of me, after three you don't take photos anymore, mental notes you make to yourself ... as later you end up taking them when you drink, but well ... you look a bit worse and that's it, but I don't have photos of me lying on the floor or anything ... some people do, they end up bad and people take photos of them or whatever and then they send them to the group or whatever, among the group of friends ... I haven't been in that position, but there are people who do it. (Abel, 18 years old)

The day after, they check the number of views that content has had. Most leave it online, rather than deleting it, because they consider that many people they know have already seen it, and it's not problematic because everyone does it and it's the fashion, or because it becomes a way of remembering a night of fun with friends. They tend to upload it to Instagram Stories, which they know only last 24 h and then vanish:

let's see, normally you take a video and you watch it and say: I'm not going to upload this as we look really silly, but sometimes if you've had one too many drinks you don't even watch it, you upload it straightaway, and in the morning you see it and say, my God, anyone who's seen this ... and it's already been viewed 200 times, but well, then I'm not going to delete it, later it vanishes. (Penelope, 21 years old)

I've seen people who get in a photo without knowing the consequences they'll have later, that you obviously, the next day when you wake up and you see yourself in that photo surely you think: what have I done? It's happened to me, maybe taking a photo of me at night and uploading it, and saying, damn, on seeing it in the morning and saying: how many people have seen it? And maybe 150 people have seen it, you know?

INT: on [Instagram] Stories?

-yes, of course ... and then maybe they've taken a screenshot of you. (Ramiro, 18 years old)

4. Discussion

This article shows how rural young men and women regularly participate in practices of alcohol consumption with their friends and share it through digital images and videos and continuous interactions on SNS. These have been identified as the main forms of leisure of the study participants, becoming moreover important identitarian factors that contribute to their social inclusion in rural life.

Regarding alcohol use and abuse, we have considered how these play an important role in young people's socialization, as well as how they are valuable demonstrations of belonging to place and group in that search for social approval, along the same lines as shown in the study by [Herold et al. \(2019\)](#), in which leisure and alcohol exercise an influence over the young people's sense of place. Motivations for drinking are strongly connected to that feeling of embeddedness, the influence of the group and the environment, along with the hedonism and fun associated with alcohol consumption. This concurs with the results from the study by [Carey and MacGregor \(2019\)](#) on 18- to 24-year-olds from rural areas in Australia, in which drinking is acknowledged as the main activity for having fun with friends. However, it differs from this study insofar as it does not indicate peer pressure as a key factor in alcohol consumption.

In spatio-temporal terms, our data show changes in leisure and drinking patterns depending on the season, with an increase in summer months. This issue has already been identified by previous studies ([Baigorri and Chaves, 2006](#); [Berthet et al., 2016](#); [Lazcano and Madariaga 2016](#)), showing that in cities practices such as the *botellón* decrease in summer, while in rural towns it increases due to the presence of higher numbers of young people, university students and children of emigrants on holiday. Also, this study shows that the principal spaces where drinking practices take place are rural nightclubs (indoor and outdoor) and pubs, as well as authorized open-air sites on the outskirts of towns, near sports grounds, morgues or cemeteries, for holding *botellones* and thus avoid neighbours' complaints. This is in contrast to previous studies, such as [Baigorri and Chaves \(2006\)](#), who show that in some towns, *botellones* are held beside a river, chapel or picnic area, as well as in youth clubs using homes or warehouses to meet up, particularly in areas that are cold and rainy. Likewise, the study by [Ander et al. \(2015\)](#)

on small Swedish towns, which showed that adolescent drinkers had moved off the street and other open-air places for drinking and had shifted to domestic environments. Nevertheless, our study does agree with other studies (Campbell, 2000; Herold et al., 2019; Leyshon, 2008; Maye et al., 2005) that reveal how rural pubs become the heart of social life in small towns.

Likewise, typical characteristics of the rural area under study have been revealed by the interviewees, such as that young people meet up in the regional capital or other larger towns where there is a larger gathering of young, and where a good atmosphere and openness between groups predominates. In this regard, the gregarious nature of young nightlife referred to by Pallarés and Feixa (2000) is highly visible, since continuous movement occurs for coming together in fashionable places, which vary over time. With respect to local festivals, we have seen how our sample of young rural people still consider them as an important identitarian element of belonging to their places. This contrasts with the study by Gastón (2016), undertaken with young people from schools in Spain located in towns with fewer than 7000 inhabitants, which found that although the local festivals were still important events for the local people, for the young they had lost prestige, and they preferred to go to the rural pubs and nightclubs.

However, we should point out notable differences between the young people of this rural area as a function of place, age and gender. Thus, depending on the size of the towns, there are limitations in the smallest localities both in the night-time economy supply, which affects the ability to socialize with other peers in the area, but is usually solved through travelling, and in the fewer options of choice of friends. As a result, however, they state that these relationships tend to be closer and the groups more diverse in age. This is in line with the findings of Berrio-Otxoa et al. (2002), who highlighted how it is common to find more diversity in groups of friends from small towns than from cities. Similarly, being small towns with fewer young people, they feel conditioned to share their free time, and relationships between young men and women of different ages become closer, which is less common among young people in cities, whose relationships tend to be more changeable.

Regarding age, the participants allude to the greater excesses with alcohol by minors, as is confirmed in other studies (Chan et al., 2016; Coomber et al., 2011; Lambert et al., 2008). Lastly, in terms of differences according to gender, we have seen how masculinities and femininities are present in the behaviours related to drinking, determining both uses and narratives of alcohol. The young women have expressed how they stay in control, setting limits to their consumption in order not to go too far; whereas in the accounts given by the young men, we witness a lack of control, capacity for heavy drinking and acknowledgement of unfettered drunkenness. Moreover, in the towns there is greater social control over the transgressive behaviours of young women, a questioning of female behaviour of alcohol abuse, while for men it is considered amusing, particularly among peers, free of any stigma. These double standards and greater social penalization against women have already been examined in the literature devoted to the analysis of gender, place and youth, both rural (Herold, 2019; Leyshon, 2005; Jayne et al., 2011) and urban (Bailey et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2013; Romo-Avilés et al., 2016).

In addition, regarding the relation that develops between the use of technology and alcohol, the results concur with the qualitative study by Lyons et al. (2016) carried out with 18- to 25-year-olds from rural and urban localities in New Zealand, in which photos of drinking enabled valuable forms of sociability, visibility and popularity for the participants, but the preparation, taking, selection, uploading, tagging and untagging of the photos was heavily gendered. Normative masculinity has as its fundamental engine the pursuit of acknowledgement by the group and the fear of losing this approval. With gender peers, one has always to be active, no weakness can be shown, above all in adolescence and youth (Chiodi et al., 2019). Likewise, the study by Moewaka et al. (2015), in which young New Zealanders of the same age bracket consider, through focus groups, the complex relation between drinking

and SNS with expressions of caution and regret, juxtaposed with stories of fun, excitement and pleasure. A recent study carried out by Johansen and Fisker (2020) in three small towns in Denmark underlines the important role that SNS have acquired, with the opening of a new arena for social control and unprecedented external visibility of social life in the countryside. However, this role has not replaced the previous practices of rural sociability. Rather, it represents an addition that entails a gradual reconfiguration in the behaviours of rural people.

Lastly, although it is clear that rural leisure is less and less different to urban leisure in terms of models of drinking and uses of technology governed by globalizing trends that align the behaviours of young people today, it is also clear that they are conditioned by the determinants of small spaces and they maintain characteristics unique to the context in which they live. This is in agreement with Gastón (2016), in which the expectations of rural young people in the construction of leisure are less and less differentiated from that of their urban counterparts, although some characteristics persist among young people living in places with a lower population.

5. Conclusions

Sociability networks, and the social dynamics they form a part of, are a particularly important aspect in the construction of the identity of young people from this rural space, and in their ties to the territory. They are decisive factors in their daily lives. This article has shown the importance of the social both in drinking practices and in the use of ICT and social media by rural young people as an essential element of belonging and embeddedness to the place and group.

The rural context of these types of practices is characterized by less room for transgression and the effectiveness of social control mechanisms, due to the rural relationships of proximity. This means that young people can feel conditioned in their behaviours to not feel criticized or attract attention in a medium in which there is less space to go unnoticed. The importance of “what will they say” is latent and difference is disruptive, it does not integrate, hence exercising it is a way of not being out of place. With ICT and SNS, a new arena has appeared for young men and women in which boundaries are blurred, in contrast to the confines and reduced space of their rural offline environment. Therefore, the anonymity and distance given by the networks contrast with the relations of rural closeness. The contact networks of young women and men tend to be people of the area, and so the maintenance of a popular online and offline appearance is what takes precedence.

Ultimately, we emphasise that in this rural area, the signs of the markedly global society we live in are mixed together with the weight of traditional gender roles and strong social control. Rather than opposed, these trends coexist; far from backward stereotypes, we see how the rural is dynamic. These are spaces that transform and adapt to new global trends at the same time as maintaining certain traditions that affect young women and men’s identity construction.

Intervention with young people in rural contexts to reduce the harms associated with heavy alcohol consumption should include specific elements in rural settings, taking into account the intensity of friendship and family ties and other rural-urban differences that may surround consumption. The fieldwork has been carried out in the region of La Vera, so we do not know if the data correspond to what happens in other Spanish rural contexts where the spatial and social distribution may be different. Moreover, it has focused on the use of a social network and we know that these are constantly changing, especially among the youngest. Future lines of research in this sense may be interesting, in order to contrast the findings found here.

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