

Exploring No and Low Alcohol (NoLo) Beverages: A Summary of Current and Future Research Projects

Background and Rationale

In 2021, nearly 20% of adults in England were drinking at 'increasing' or 'higher' risk levels (Brown et al., 2021).

The economic and social burden of alcohol harm in the UK was estimated at 1.3-2.7% of GDP (£21-£52 billion) in 2016 (Burton et al., 2016).

In 2023, 9,473 deaths from alcohol-specific causes were registered in the UK alone, the highest number on record (Office for National Statistics, 2025), linking alcohol to over 100 illnesses and 42% of violent crime, and urging government action to reduce alcohol consumption (Gov.uk, 2023).

No- and low-alcohol (nolo) beverages have increasingly come into focus as potential tools within public health strategies aimed at reducing overall alcohol consumption across different populations (WHO, 2023; Nicholls, 2023; Sasso et al., 2022; University of Sheffield, 2025).

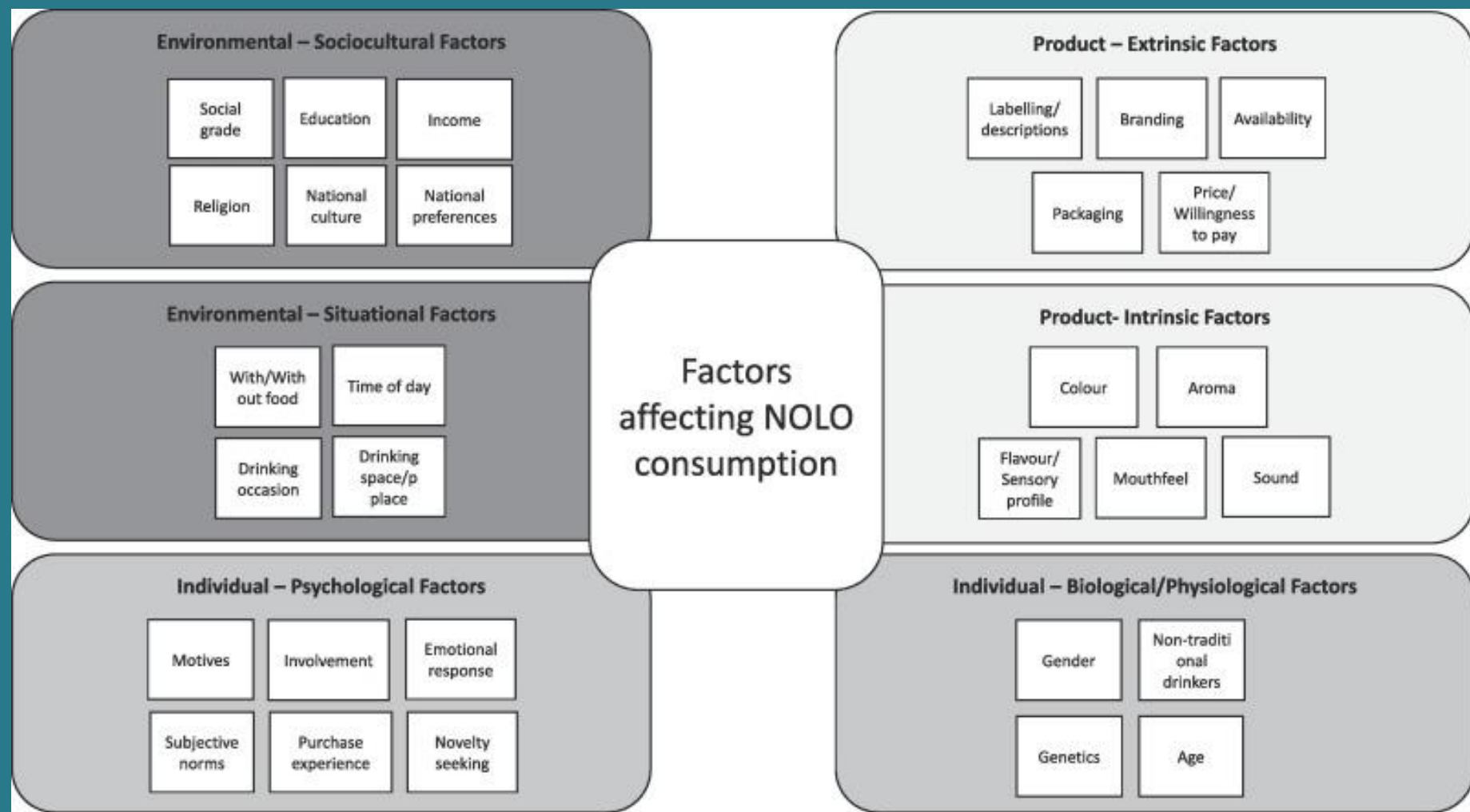


UK sales of nolo reached £278 million in 2023 and retail sales value doubled between 2018 and 2023 (Mintel, 2023) with this upward trend expected to continue (Wilson et al, 2025).



Beer has been the most popular drink within nolo accounting for 69% by volume in the UK (Mintel, 2023).

Project 1 (Published – Waehning and Wells (2024)): An application of the Mojet Model (Köster, 2009) to examine the current literature on nolo consumer behaviour.



“Over one third of UK drinkers now consume nolo products regularly” (Portman Group, 2025).



“...people are choosing it over maybe a soft drink.... instead of having Diet Coke ...they'd have a pint of that.” (Project 2)

Project 2: Pub Field Experiments (with Franziska Sohns, Anglia Ruskin University)

- Examined nolo sales in pubs;
- Used a beer brewed for the project which was made available in cans (intervention 1), with accompanying posters (intervention 2) and on tap (intervention 3) in three pubs.



- Canned AF beer emerged as a substitute for higher-alcohol beverages (wine, spirits).
- AF beer on tap emerged as a substitute for soft drinks.
- Introduction of AF/nolo to pubs does not incur any loss of revenue.

Project 3: Publicans Guide (with Anna Brown, City of York Council Public Health Team)

- Co-designed an Alcohol Free and Low Alcohol Guide for York publicans based on our research.
- Will be launched at the York Beer Festival Trade Session in September 2025 along a range of point of purchase items.



Project 4: Non-Alcoholic Beer (NAB) Q-sort

- An examination of behaviour related to and perspectives of NAB.
- Examined differences in perceptions across exclusively full strength and hybrid drinkers.

- Used a q-methodology (with a pre sort questionnaire and post sort interview)



- Exclusively full-strength drinkers did not perceive NABs to be a good compliment or substitute to full strength alternatives.
- Hybrid consumers perceived that NABs is drunk by health-conscious individuals.
- Reported NAB not visible enough in pubs and perceived as high cost.
- Being rolled out in Europe with Eline Poelmans, KU Leuven.

Current Projects

Future Projects

Project 5: Laboratory Experiments (with Paul Christiansen, University of Liverpool)

- Currently designing a series of laboratory (bar set up) experiments to test impacts of marketing strategies on nolo/nab purchase.
- Allows analysis of a number of factors within a controlled laboratory environment (the Liverpool Bar Lab).



Project 5: Macro Data Analysis (with Fergal O'Connor, University College, Cork)

- Sales data obtained and being analysed for 78 countries.
- Investigate Alcohol-Free Beer as a Replacement for Regular-Strength beer.
- Assessing potential differences between on vs off trade.



Project 5: National Survey of Nolo Behaviour and Perceptions (with Sarah Forbes)

- Large scale representative sample of UK consumers.
- Extending the analysis in Project 4 via a questionnaire.
- Using Stages of Change, Openness to Experience, Willingness to Pay.



“If you are in a social situation, you might feel happy because you have something to drink while everyone else is drinking too.”(Project 4)



References available on request!



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