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THE REPRESENTATION OF ALCOHOL IN POPULAR MUSIC IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO AND IMPLICATIONS FOR HEALTH: A CONTENT ANALYSIS

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INTRODUCTION

Alcohol is a carcinogenic, psychoactive compound with addictive properties^[1]. Addiction has negative impacts on people's physical and mental health, relationships, and overall quality of life, with profound implications on public health. Alcohol consumption can result in many negative consequences through the development of alcohol-related diseases, such as cancer, liver cirrhosis or pancreatitis; mental health problems such as depression, and alcohol use disorders^[2].

Music is a form of marketing since it influences consumer behaviour, including alcohol consumption^[3]. Music forms an integral part of Trinidad and Tobago's culture with the four most popular local musical genres being Soca, Chutney, Calypso and Parang. The songs are infectious, many with lyrics that promote dancing, partying and alcohol consumption. Therefore, it is important to investigate the representation of alcohol in these musical genres that are listened to regularly by the population since popular culture influences society, such that people learn not only through firsthand experience, but also through exposure to modelled behaviour^[4].

OBJECTIVES

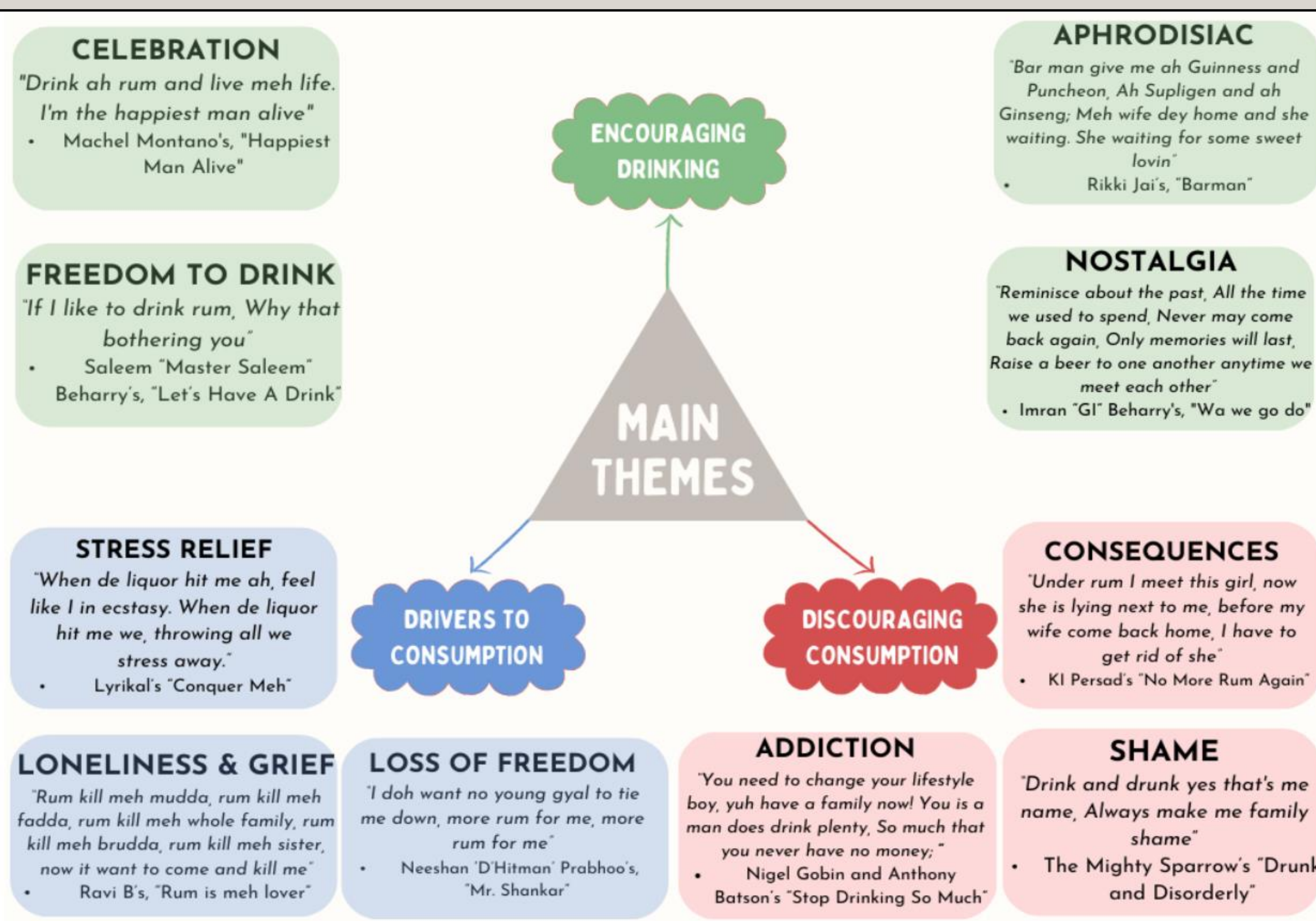
- To explore how alcohol is represented in popular music in T&T.
- To identify the underlying messages and what they revealed about the writers, Trinbagonian population and culture and possible implications for public health.

METHODOLOGY

- The lyrical content of popular music genres in T&T (Soca, Chutney/Chutney Soca, Calypso and Parang) which referenced alcohol were included in this qualitative study.
- Songs from the aforementioned genres were sourced from online searches, discussion with friends, family and local DJs, and personal knowledge. The lyrics were either obtained online or transcribed by the researchers.
- A database of songs was created, with the songs being coded for references for alcohol such as 'rum', 'liquor', 'drinking', etc. Through thorough immersion in the lyrics, utterances (key lyrics in the songs related to alcohol) were identified.
- Data collection was done until saturation was achieved (when no new messages/utterances were identified in additional songs found).
- Utterances were analysed to determine the concepts and themes of the songs with respect to alcohol representation.

RESULTS

Upon analysis, three (3) themes and ten (10) concepts were identified as seen in the diagram below:



DISCUSSION

- ❑ Most of the songs portrayed alcohol in a positive light and these messages were well-received by the population as throughout the years, these 'rum songs' became popular and more plentiful.
- ❑ Notably, Calypso had limited representation of alcohol but when mentioned, the genre addressed social issues which showcased it in a negative light.
- ❑ Culturally, the Chutney genre boasts a larger number of popular songs portraying alcoholism than the other three genres.
- ❑ The Soca genre portrayed alcohol as an expression of freedom and celebration and its link to T&T's Carnival season.
- ❑ The Parang genre links the Christmas season and alcohol as an expression of enjoyment and socialisation.
- ❑ The lyrical analysis shows that this country's culture of drinking alcohol is accepted as a societal norm in times of both grief and celebration or for socialisation and freedom of choice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Our study reported that many of the songs glamorised and propagated alcohol consumption. We recommend that there be a national discourse as to whether or not the youth and general public should be exposed to these kinds of music.
- Future studies should examine the behaviours and consequences of listening to these songs and the impact on public health, family life, mental health and physical health, non-communicable diseases and financial health.

CONCLUSION

International evidence suggested that the representation of alcohol in music can lead to increased alcohol consumption, whilst our study found that there continues to be a wide representation of alcohol in popular Trinbagonian music. Although many of the themes suggest that the songs do in fact encourage alcohol consumption, some evidence was found to the contrary.

REFERENCES

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