

## Christmas Anti- Drinking Campaigns do not Deter Young People

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Christmas anti-drinking campaigns may not be working, according to research carried out by the Birmingham Business School in a major UK study into young people and alcohol.

The study has discovered that extreme consumption of heavily marketed alcohol brands plays a key part in identity formation and social bonding for young people. In light of these findings the researchers suggest that a radical rethink of national alcohol policy is needed, which takes into account the social character of alcohol consumption and identity implications for young people.

The research revealed that tales of alcohol-related mishaps and escapades were key markers for young people's social identity. These 'drinking stories' deepen bonds of friendship and cement group membership. Not only does being in a friendship group legitimise being very drunk – being the subject of an extreme drinking story can raise esteem within the group.

The researchers found that inebriation within a friendship group is often part of a social bonding ritual that is viewed positively and linked with fun, friendship and good times, although some young people can be the target of humiliating or risky activities.

One implication of these findings is that some anti-drinking campaigns, such as the current Diageo 'the choice is yours' campaign, may be misconceived. Adverts which portray drunken incidents such as being thrown out of a club, being carried home by a friend, passing out in a doorway or vomiting in public can be seen in terms of a typical story of a 'fun' night out rather than as a cautionary tale.

Professor Isabelle Szmigin, from the Birmingham Business School, says, 'These adverts imply that being very drunk with friends carries a penalty of social disapproval, when in fact, for many young people, the opposite is often the case. Extreme inebriation is seen as a source of personal esteem and social affirmation within a friendship group when it results in becoming the subject of a story of a night out.'

The researchers suggest that, in developing future anti-drinking campaigns, new thinking is needed in the battle against extreme alcohol consumption. Professor Szmigin continues, 'Whilst many young people recognise the damage that drinking too much can do to their health and the associated risks of physical and sexual assault, few view these as more than short term problems.'

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Notes to Editors

1. The research study was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and entitled 'Branded consumption and social identification: Young people and alcohol' (ESRC Ref: RES-148-25-0021) Principal Investigator: Prof Christine Griffin, Psychology, University of Bath; Prof Isabelle Szmigin, The Business School, University of Birmingham; Dr Willm Mistral, Mental Health Research & Development Unit, University of Bath; Professor Chris Hackley, School of Management, Royal Holloway University of London; Research Assistants: Dr Andrew Bengry-Howell, Psychology, University of Bath; Dr David Clarke, The Business School, University of Birmingham. Placement Students, Louise Weale and Danielle Tynan, University of Bath.

2. The secondary aspect of the study involved gathering extensive information about brand alcohol marketing and advertising practices in the UK. The primary phase involved depth interviews and focus groups with 94 males and females aged between 18 and 24 over a three year period in three UK regions. The overall aim of the study was to understand the role alcohol played in the lives of young people particularly in relation to their senses of self and social identity.

3. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is the UK's largest funding agency for research and postgraduate training relating to social and economic issues. It supports independent, high quality research relevant to business, the public sector and voluntary organisations. The ESRC's planned total expenditure in 2007/08 is £181 million. At any one time the ESRC supports over 4,000 researchers and postgraduate students in academic institutions and research policy institutes. More at <http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk>

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