

Designing drunkenness: How pubs, bars and nightclubs increase alcohol sales

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Abstract

Using ethnographic data, this paper investigates the techniques used inside pubs, bars and nightclubs to solicit and sustain alcohol consumption among patrons. Focus is on venues with the majority of patrons belonging to the age group of approximately 15–35 years. The paper identifies a number of techniques, both overt and covert, including: alcohol advertising; special offers (e.g. 'Happy Hours' and 'all you can drink' specials); bartenders' use of strategic intimacy, flirtation, and encouragements to buy more; speed drinking devices (e.g. shot glasses, 'beer bongs' and large pitchers); and architectural features that hamper moderate drinking while accelerating the purchase and intake of alcohol. These techniques were used most extensively in low-priced venues with the youngest patrons (e.g. themed chain pubs) and less so in more expensive venues with more adult patrons (e.g. craft beer bars). The paper argues that youth-oriented drinking venues may be conceived as staged atmospheres of consumption where individuals are seduced and compelled into purchasing alcohol. A team of 12 researchers collected the data through interviews and observations in pubs, bars and nightclubs in four cities across Denmark.

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