



University of Pittsburgh study connects Top 40 hits, binge drinking

By [Madison Mills](#) April 18, 2014 3:09 pm

Snoop Dogg's "I Drink I Smoke" suggest he's sipping on Patrón tequila 'til it tastes like water — but are these lyrics encouraging college students doing the same?

[A new study](#) from the University of Pittsburgh finds a correlation between the number of times alcohol brands are mentioned in top 40 songs and the amount of binge drinking occurring among young adults.

Surveying 2,500 young people to see if they liked a selection of ten top 40 hits that mention alcohol, the results show that those who answered yes were also found to be three times more likely than their peers to drink — and twice as likely to binge-drink.

Can a song make you drink? University of Pittsburgh researchers seem to think so.

Only 8 percent of the 2,500 studied were able to recall specific brands mentioned in songs, but these people were even more likely to drink than the others studied.

David Jernigan, the director of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, believes the number of alcohol mentions in songs are not accidental.

"Clearly companies are spending money on this kind of marketing. The most well known is P Diddy with his 100 million dollar contract with Ciroc," says Jernigan.

Although the study does not find a causal relationship between these songs and the amount of drinking occurring among young adults, Jernigan says separate research shows a connection between marketing and consumer choices.

"For younger people, the research shows that marketing exposure affects kids, so exposure to alcohol marketing leads to a greater chance of drinking more. All of this is very lightly regulated- most of it is governed by the alcohol industry which is all self regulation," Jernigan says.

So are the marketing teams for these different forms of alcohol successfully encouraging young adults to purchase more drinks?

Alcohol brands certainly don't think so.

Greg Cohen, Vice President of Corporate Communications for Patrón Spirits, says mentions of Patrón in songs are purely coincidental.

"This isn't in any way part of our marketing strategy. We're proud that musicians and artists genuinely enjoy our brands, enough that they chose to reference them in their music. We do not pay or sponsor any musicians, or record labels," says Cohen in an emailed statement.

"Patrón Spirits...is firmly committed to ensuring the safe, legal and responsible consumption of beverage alcohol. We adhere to strict industry standards of marketing only to those of legal drinking age."

Other alcohol brands agree that the alcohol industry avoids marketing to underage drinkers.

Phil Lynch is the Vice President and Director of Corporate Communications at Brown-Forman, producers of Jack Daniel's, Southern Comfort and several other brands.

He believes the research is "seriously flawed."

"The Federal government recently issued a major report on alcohol advertising and recognized the distilled spirits industry for having a strong and effective self-regulatory system in directing advertising to adults," Lynch says in an e-mail.

Lynch believes the University of Michigan's ["Monitoring the Future" study](#), which showed drinking of those under 21 to be at an all time low, should be prioritized above other studies.

"...Underage drinking is at historic lows – lower than anytime since before the 1980s – a fact that is conveniently ignored by researchers trying to establish links between teen drinking and whatever they happen to be studying (in this case, music lyrics)," says Lynch.

Lynch added that Brown-Forman, like Patrón, does not pay artists to include Jack Daniel's in their songs, and these artists are merely using their "First Amendment rights in creating their art."

Regardless of the reason behind artists including lyrics about alcohol, these songs may still be affecting the drinking habits of students.

Sarah Scotti, a sophomore theatre major at the University of Southern California, has noticed an increase in the amount of drinking going on at parties when songs about alcohol are played.

"So many lyrics in songs that are popular are instructing you to do the dumbest things and people that are drunk enough will try to do those things. I've been to rave-like parties and 'Shots' comes on and everyone takes a shot and drinks way too much," Scotti says.

But other students think the drinking comes far before the music.

Since most college students are purchasing their poison on a limited budget, Nihar Garg, a sophomore mechanical engineering major at Purdue University, believes party-throwers can't afford the expensive alcohol mentioned in popular songs.

"On college campuses, people just drink what they can. Frats will just get whatever they can for the party. If a brand pays for their name in a song, we won't necessarily go after that kind of alcohol. We just get what we can."

Still, some students have taken note of the marketing techniques of various alcohol brands.

Evan Maag, a recent graduate from the University of Georgia, worked as a DJ throughout college. This experience gave him valuable insight into the drinking habits of college students.

"There's definitely a product placement type deal going on- these brands will hunt down record labels and say 'I'll toss money at you or sponsor you if you put me in a song,'" says Maag.

But Maag doesn't necessarily believe these alcohol brands are encouraging drinking among young adults.

"People are already drinking- I wouldn't say people drink more because of music since they already take shots and drink, and that's all already going on without the music," says Maag.