

COLLABORATING WITH BUSINESS

by academics in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Do the British still think beer is a man's drink?

Psychology experts from The University of Nottingham worked with one midlands company find out.

Price often plays a significant role in our purchasing decisions. We also buy things because we associate them with positive qualities, such as desirability and value. But have you ever stopped to think why we make these associations.

Dr Mark Haselgrove, Associate Professor at The University of Nottingham's School of Psychology, says the answer lies in the theory of 'associative learning'. "We learn by making connections between one thing and another. It is the reason we know fire is hot, and water quenches our thirst", he explains.

Mark says marketers often encourage customers to buy products by creating associations between brands and aspirational attributes. "Alcohol is a great example", he says. "For generations, advertisers have connected some drinks to attributes people consider to be masculine and others to characteristics we perceive to be feminine."

'How can we shake off the perception beer is man's drink?', was the question posed to Mark by one local company during a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) workshop organised by The University of Nottingham's Ingenuity network. "I had never really thought about it until Os Morgan from Nottingham craft beer bar Kraft Werks asked me", recalls Mark. "But something about the question pricked my



interest. I also saw an opportunity to lend my expertise to a small business trying to challenge an unhelpful perception."

With support from the Ingenuity team, Mark secured funding for a collaborative research project with Kraft Werks. Alongside colleague and social psychology expert Dr Stephanie McDonald and second-year psychology undergraduate Charlotte Hull, Mark held focus groups, spoke to the bar's staff and conducted an online poll of local pub-goers to understand the relationship between people's perception of beer drinking and gender.

"Beer is still more associated with men than women. However, our research suggests these attitudes are changing. One of the most interesting things we learned was the role of the environment in people's enjoyment of beer", Mark explains. "While the majority of men don't feel setting is important, for most women, it is crucial. Kraft Werks' hipster aesthetic appealed to both genders. However, women suggested they would be more inclined to visit and sample a beer if the decoration was more comfortable." Kraft Werks Director, Os says the report has



been invaluable. “It has given us a detailed insight into our customers and positively impacted how we plan to move the business forward.”

Through the Ingenuity network, Mark has since established an Innovate UK-supported Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) with Nottingham creative agency, **Together**. “We are going to develop innovative new approaches to marketing that tap into human behavioural psychology”, explains Together’s founding partner, Nick Honey. “This has the potential to be incredibly powerful in the way we market brands.”

The projects have made Mark see industry engagement in a new light. “There was a time where I thought businesses were only interested in the bottom line. However, working with Kraft Werks and Together has shown me companies also have an appetite for discussion and insight”, he says. “Os and Nick were both refreshingly realistic from the start, and intellectually engaged with the research-based perspectives I brought to the table. I’ve enjoyed the two-way dialogue, the chance to share ideas with different audiences and get out of the office to test my hypothesis in the real world.”



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