Working for the man: Entertainers’ experiences of nightlife, marketing and intoxication
Club Health Lisbon 2015
Escola Superior de Enfermagem de Lisboa, 18th June 2015
Grant Holder: Alasdair Forsyth
Researcher: Jemma Lennox

Links to Previous Research
(Observational Studies)


(Note – The original of this paper was the all-time 5th most downloaded manuscript from the Glasgow Caledonian University depository out of a total of 2,127 papers in that collection, which ceased October 2012 – highest chart position = 2nd most downloaded)


(Note – The original of this paper was the all-time 9th most downloaded manuscript from the above Glasgow Caledonian University depository)
Music in the *night-time* economy

- **Music can be used as management tool**
  - Influencing disorder risk, incidence and severity (‘soft policing’)
  - Demarcating the night, both temporally and spatially
    - Who goes where, when, why & what they drink
- **How music can be used as drinks marketing tool**
  - To attract specific clientele / drinkers (build reputations)
    - or deter unwanted customers
  - To influence beverage choice (sponsorship, brand image)
    - Choosing more expensive drinks insitu
  - To increase consumer spend on alcohol (economies of scale / cheap)
    - Attracting larger crowds to a premises
    - Retaining customers on licensed premises for longer
    - To increase volume / speed of consumption

  *Effects demonstrated in (bar-lab) experimental research...*

Music & *increasing* drinking rate (experiments)

**Any Music increases alcohol consumption**


**Louder Music increases alcohol consumption** (as may silence in the audience)


**Faster Music increases alcohol consumption**


**(Slower Tempo elicited) Mood manipulation increases consumption**


**Lyrical content (about drinking) increases consumption** (priming)


**Distracting Music increases alcohol consumption** (taste better, under-estimate ABV)

Present study

**AIM**

Rather than observe or do lab experiments (potential ‘Hawthorne effect’)- actually ask the entertainers themselves (to address gap in knowledge):

- Are they aware of their roles in alcohol marketing and disorder...
  - Do they do this purposively (either by themselves or directed to by others)
  - How do they balance this with artistic or other concerns (e.g. own consumption)
- Go beyond music to other forms of licensed premises performers

**SAMPLE**

24 Qualitative interviews (late 2014)

Eight from each of 3 types of pub/nightclub ‘gigging’ entertainer:

1. **8 DJs**: playing various music genres and venue types
2. **8 Band members / Musicians**: playing various instruments and venues
3. **8 Other / Variety acts** playing music or non-music performances or venues

NB: Overlaps between groups (multi-task entertainers)

The eventual sample may reflect the scene in Glasgow (e.g. 20 were White Scots, 3 White Irish) but findings likely to be universal (many had touring experience)

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<th>Current venues or residency</th>
<th>Prior or other acts etc.</th>
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Licensed premises & entertainers’ careers

Some participants were already entertainers who found work via licensed trade

• “…I finished my course and got a [Music] degree, went into the Job Centre, and asked them to ‘give me a job as a rock star’, and they just laughed and said ‘it doesn’t work like that’. …so I just started going round all the pubs with little demos that I had recorded on my computer and given them CDs” (#11, male, rock singer/rock guitarist)

Others were licensed trade employees who became entertainers

• “I got a job in the [student club] when I was a student, like a bar job …and then I moved up to being a lighting guy…then of course that was in the DJ booth …” (#1, male, indie-rock DJ)

That’s drinkertainment?

Regardless of career route, from participants accounts there was consensus of an apparent ‘relationship’ between the entertainment and drinks industries

• “…[in Glasgow] there are no alcohol-free spaces for people to perform.” (#15, male, performance artist)

• “I don’t think I ever played to anybody that’s been sober to be honest” (#22 male, folk percussionist)

• “It’s part and parcel of a pub. Can’t think of any pubs that wouldn’t have some form of entertainment, whether that’s a DJ or a quiz or, and I think the pub would die out if they didn’t, I think the two of them need each other.” (#4, male, quiz host)
The ‘hidden agenda’?

Some entertainers considered themselves as alcohol marketers

• “...early on I realised it’s not just, like you’re not just playing some tunes and that’s the end of it you know? You are driving bar sales...”  (#9, male, techno DJ)

• “It doesn’t matter if you’re the best musician in the world ...as long as it’s continuing to push the alcohol sales.”  (#20, male, pianist)

• “…its reinforced by spaces that you know where the proximity to the bar is more what people are worried about than their proximity to the stage.”  (#15, male, performance artist)

• “…So they’ve [pub’s] got like a hidden agenda with having a DJ because you’re providing a service that’s keeping people drinking.”  (#8 female disco/funk/soul DJ)

Bar sales = more gigs / No bar sales = no show

• “We’ve got a bit of a following in Glasgow, so I suppose pubs would kind of think if we were playing they know they would kind of get a decent enough crowd, that they would kind of make enough money behind the bar.”  (#6, female, pop vocalist)

• “…they told us it was £60 to rent this room but they said unless you bring in enough people or you make £160 on the bar then the fee is waivered. A part of me was like ‘that’s really wrong you’re basically turning me into a merchant of death’.”  (#16, male, comedy artist)

• “I’ve had a full room [up dancing] and they’ve closed early cause everyone has stopped buying drinks.”  (#2, male, vinyl DJ)

• “Now, if somebody turned up [at my pub] and wanted to book a gig and said ‘our crowd is really young so can you make it all ages’, as a businessman now I would see the pound signs not flashing in front of my eyes.”  (#18, male, punk/disco guitarist – now pub licensee)
‘Dry’ venues = ‘unders’

When asked if they had ever played an alcohol-free events there was usually a long pause, often followed by equating this to either the ‘unders’ [under 18 years, the legal drinking age in Scotland] nights or when they themselves were u-18

- “Ehm [pause] well, now that I think of it pretty much everywhere I do will have a bar eh [pause] but then again you have like when I did that party, the 16th party...” (#1, male, indie-rock DJ)

- [long silence] “No. Not off the top of my head that I can remember. No. I’ve done a kids party. A kid’s 10th or 12th birthday party and I don’t think they drank! No, but I don’t think, no, everywhere I’ve played has always sold alcohol.” (#9, male, techno DJ)

Relatedly, some participants noted there were no venues where people with addiction issues could get involved.

No bar = BYOB

Some had played gigs outwith licensed premises but noted that no matter the venue, alcohol was often present, brought by organisers or audiences (exception being day-time-economy in-store shop promo work)

- “Trying to think actually, I don’t, I don’t think I have in my life somewhere that doesn’t [sell alcohol] ... we even played in like the chapel hall, kind of one night, but they had a bar, because I was thinking maybe that night they wouldn’t have it, but they had a hall, it was a kind of a charity night for Christian Aid but they even had alcohol here, so it’s quite prevalent.”(#6, female, pop vocalist)

- “I’ve done places there’s been no alcohol but just ‘Bring Your Own Bottle’. They are actually worse.” (#5, female, stand-up comic)

  [When asked why?]

  “People just take more than they need. They can get quite mad with it. ...people brought drugs and everything in, people went a bit crazy so it was like everything going on. The police came and everything.”
What if no licensed venues?

Another show-stopping question was asking if they would get any gigs at all if there were no alcohol licensed venues?

• “I wouldn’t have had a job for 3 years. The relationship between bar-music-alcohol is 100s of years old, and for a good reason, they are mutually co-dependent.” (#20, male, pianist)

• “…if you were playing a gig in a place where there was no kind of bar or no licence you’d might think ‘oh no this going to be a bit dull’” “people just wouldn’t come” (#6, female, pop vocalist)

• “I think that people would just get drunk beforehand…” (#23, female, punk/riot grrrl guitarist)

One dissenter felt YouTube was the answer, while others saw all social media as a threat to live entertainment

Beverage-entertainment associations

Links between specific drinks (brands) and entertainment could very from local to global levels

• “[mainstream pub] had bottles of beer downstairs, all in date and all above board. It just wasn’t selling. It was £4.50 a bottle or something like that and they said why not 2 quid [£2.00], sell them on the Friday nights and Saturday afternoons when there is music on [i.e. my act] and they started flying off the shelf and when that becomes a regular drink they put the price back up. The two influenced each other…” (#19, male, folk singer-songwriter)

• “I think some drinks [brands] like to associate themselves with a certain image like and that’s worked quite well like but… but for example Jagermeister they kind of associate with the heavier rock” (#23, female, punk/riot grrrl guitarist)
**Sponsorship**

Some saw some benefits to forging relationships with the licensed trade – not just bands, but DJs and variety acts.

- “...[drinks] brands are quite good to get in with actually because they’ve got fucking cash to chuck at things. ... And they’re dead easy to work with. The booze companies generally don’t approach you directly, they get someone else to get DJs in to do it and they’re great fun, they pay really well, you get tons of free booze from them and they’re really good to get in with. Corporate gigs are really good.” (#9, male, techno DJ)

- “Usually they [alcohol sponsored events] are just a better gig, usually they are better paid... usually there’s free beer and, usually because they’re sponsored, they’re in some kind of better venue...” (#5, female, stand-up comic)

**Brand image versus artistic ‘cred’**

The Alcohol industry were felt associate with entertainment (venues, acts, genres etc.) for brand-stretching, although it could be seen as un-cool by some to get overtly involved

- “[after playing a Miller (USA beer brand) gig] ...these tempting corporate offers which, whilst it would ease the financial burden from time to time, it would be a horrible, horrible kind of side line to get into and then somebody would out you and your credibility would be smashed...” (#18, male, punk/disco guitarist)

- “**Tennent’s** and **McEwan’s** [major Scottish beer brands] started muscling in on the alternative scene about 1989/90, and you could see the kind of sponsorship, sponsoring events, purchasing credibility, purchasing you know an alternative image...” (#15, male, performance artist)

  [when asked about any personal involvement in alcohol promotions]  
  “It would be seen a gauche... That would be colluding with ‘the man’.”
Influencing the drinking rate – ‘in tandem’

*However the show itself could do the promoting and got the drink flowing*

- “I play some folkier stuff that, its all G and C chords... that heavier right folksy bluesy stuff, you can thump your feet to it sort of thing, the drinks start flowing to that kind of thing. I don’t think that’s intentional. I don’t think any musician sitting thinking ‘mmh how can I get them to drink more’ but I think there is a relationship there between the two” (#19, male, folk singer-songwriter)

- “…some people won’t get up to dance until they’ve had a few drinks and then I think once they do then they do tend to drink, like it kinda goes sort of in tandem with the dancing as well. …” (#1, male, indie-rock DJ)

- If they [audience] are there longer then they buy more drink. It’s as simple as that. I have, in the past had managers come up to me or managers come up and go “could you clear the dance floor a wee bit, there’s nobody at the bar.” (#7, male, cheesy-pop DJ)

Keeping in time – breaks to the bar

*Structure of the night (e.g. quiz rounds, karaoke/open-mic turns, intermissions or set-lists) was often built around creating drinking opportunities*

- “…between every round there’s a sort of short break and without anybody needing to be told that’s when everybody will usually storm the bar. One thing I do notice is on quiz nights people tend to drink and smoke a lot more than they do any other night and it’s as if they just subconsciously have this break where they think ‘right we need to get everything done here.” (#4, male, quiz host)

- “You could have a full pint sitting at the table but you go ‘Oh it’s time for a break I had better buy another two beers.’” (#19, male, folk singer-songwriter)

- “…take as many breaks as you want, stop and chat to people, venues love that cause often if they [patrons] feel like a personal connection to you they are guilted into staying for more drinks. That’s actually what you’re there to do. You’re really just an alcohol pusher, in a lot of places…” (#20, male, pianist)
**Verbal encouragement / endorsements**

*Some verbally encouraged the audience to drink – ranging from entirely of the own volition through varying degrees of commercial pressures*

- “Yeah, if I’m being honest, because I enjoy that atmosphere, I am sure there is plenty of times I’ve said ‘Let’s all have a drink, it’s the intermission, fill your wellies’ [boots]” (#19, male, folk singer-songwriter)

- “there’s a manager coming to me at the start of a shift and going ‘I want you to push Becks [German beer brand], I really want you to push Becks tonight, tell them it’s £1.50 a bottle or six for six quid [£6.00] or whatever it is... These people at the end of the night are going to go, ‘if you don’t push that I’m not gonnae pay you’” (#7, male, cheesy-pop DJ)

- “I don’t think I’ve ever been asked to advertise it over the microphone but I have taken it upon myself many times to do that because I know that makes me look good to the bar. It makes me look, from the bar’s point of view like I’m part of their team and that’s good for the relationship in the long term.” (#11, male, rock singer/guitarist)

**Non-verbal encouragement**

*Entertainers were also encouraged to lead the drinks party by example*

- “…the thing was that you got paid in booze. So it was almost the thing like they were encouraging you to look like you were drinking to keep people drinking because they were like ‘well, look if the DJ is having so much fun and she’s drinking and she’s having a great time, then you should stay and you should drink and you should be having a great time!’” (#8 female, disco/funk/soul DJ)

- “[at après ski] ...it’s actively encouraged. You get as much free alcohol as you can consume but only during the hours that you play. It’s a curious situation because you’re kind of forced then to try and get a drunk before you stop... plus, they bring you shots, they set them on fire, you have to drink them and cheers the crowd. Every time you cheers the crowd at least 10 people buy a shot and it’s 6 quid [£6.00] a shot. We are alcohol salesmen, so they’ll like sporadically, and not as sporadically as I would like, bring us unusual shots ...and it’s hard like, especially last season, I found I put on 2 stone, my liver was in bits like...” (#20, male, pianist)
Findings

• As well as effects noted in prior research, entertainers, not just musicians/DJ, and their roles in drinks marketing extended to:
  – Manipulating beats, tempos, behaviours (dancing or sitting)
  – Taking breaks, to encourage bar purchases (timing rounds)
  – Communicating with audience (building a loyal relationship)
  – Conspicuously consuming alcohol (promo brands, expensive)
  – Leading by example in drinks party promotion (being part of it)
  – Keeping on same level of intoxication as patrons (in the zone)

• As well as confirming disorder risk (management) issues highlighted in prior research, the current study suggests that entertainers may be also be at 'high risk' in terms of their own alcohol consumption. Hinting at possible origins for the 'Forever 27-club' effect.

• But for audiences, is this better than drinking supermarket booze at home, sitting, watching on screen 'X voice has got talent'? Yes ❌

So tell me what you want what you really, really want?
Questions?