

College Students' Attitudes Towards Alcoholic Energy Drinks

By: Emily Butler, Meg Hayes, Doug Heckmann, Christopher Peter Makris & Thomas Todd

A:

This problem is interesting because it is extremely relevant to college students of multiple demographics. Specifically, we would like to examine the responses of students from The University of Pittsburgh versus Carnegie Mellon University. Because combined alcoholic energy drinks are new products in the beverage market, there is little research and understanding of its effects. Many college students do not even know the actual health risks associated with these types of drinks, just that they are the center of a growing health controversy.

Our primary goal would be to understand undergraduate college students' attitudes towards alcoholic energy drinks. Specifically, we want to see how these opinions may be similar or different for students attending public and private universities. Although the alcoholic energy drink issue has been present for some time, we are motivated to study this now based on the recent controversy over the banning of energy stimulants from the original alcoholic beverage Four Loko. It was not until this specific brand of alcoholic energy drink became popular and was subsequently banned from use that this controversy has been highlighted. Our survey is not aimed at either promoting or deterring individuals from purchasing and consuming the Four Loko beverage; however, we believe the coverage of this specific story has been heard by many college students. Therefore, our survey is primarily about alcoholic energy drinks in general, but may use the Four Loko story as an agent to elicit survey question answers.

In theory, we hope that this project would be relevant to individuals on both sides of the alcoholic energy drink debate. Namely, our findings may be interesting to the Food & Drug Administration or to various alcoholic energy drink companies for very different reasons. For example, since there has not been any formal study about consumer interest on the alcoholic energy drink industry, our survey may uncover information that may be useful for either the FDA or various alcoholic energy drink companies. Whether or not our study finds that the recent controversy has had an effect on students' perception of this type of drink, this information may be useful to the FDA for educational purposes. On the other hand, the alcoholic energy drink companies may like to know the results of our survey for future advertising purposes. Also, our survey may potentially be of interest to university Health Services. For example, if our survey finds that the recent controversy has not changed students' views of combining the consumption of alcohol and energy beverages, the university Health Services may want to promote an effort to educate their students on the possible physical ramifications of this type of substance abuse.

B:

In recent years there has been an ongoing debate concerning the health repercussions of combining alcohol and energy drinks. This debate has been brought to the forefront of the media with the recent events surrounding Four Loko, an alcoholic energy drink, which has had increased popularity since the summer of 2010. We would like to understand college student attitudes towards alcohol and energy drinks in general. Some questions that we would like answers to include, but are not limited to: what are the differences in attitudes about alcoholic energy drinks between students at Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh?

Are attitudes regarding alcoholic energy drinks different for different demographic groups? How has the media affected students' attitudes and habits regarding these types of beverages? How has students' attitudes and patterns of use of Four Loko been affected by the release of a new non-caffeinated product? Has the recent media coverage of health problems associated with mixing alcohol and energy drinks changed students' habits of manually mixing these two types of drinks?

C.

Jonathan Strong; November 27, 2010; "Is Four Loko Dangerous? The FDA Doesn't Say"; appeared online at: <http://dailycaller.com/2010/11/19/is-four-loko-dangerous-the-fda-doesnt-say/>
Summary: This article attempts to discredit the FDA's banning of caffeine from Four Loko by claiming that the studies used to support the argument did not use pre-mixed alcoholic energy drinks. The article also claims that the FDA has not conducted any of its own research on the drink and therefore the ban is unreasonable.

Team Member: Meg Hayes

Steve Wood; November 10, 2010; "Four Loko energy drink raises health concerns among youth"; appeared online at:

http://www.usatoday.com/yourlife/parenting-family/teen-ya/2010-11-10-alcoholic-energy-drinks_N.htm?csp=34news

Summary: This article is a compilation of individual accounts of experiences with Four Loko and studies conducted with regards to the effects of consuming alcoholic energy drinks. It also describes aspects of Four Loko that make it specifically attractive to college students, like its low cost.

Team Member: Doug Heckmann

Nina Mandell; November 25th, 2010; "Caffeinated Four Loko will be off shelves across the country by Dec. 13"; appeared online at:

<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/2010/11/25/2010-11-25-caffeinated-four-loko-will-be-off-shelves-across-the-country-by-dec-13-fda.html>

Summary: This article addresses the FDA's ban of Four Loko and similar caffeinated alcoholic beverages. It describes how many people are stocking up in anticipation of the ban and are also throwing Four Loko "vigil" or "goodbye" parties. The article concludes with individuals' opinions of the ban on Four Loko.

Team Member: Thomas Todd

New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services; November 17, 2010; "NYS OASAS and HYSDOH Health Advisory: Caffeinated Alcoholic Beverages"; appeared online at:

http://nyhealth.gov/community/youth/development/docs/2010-12-02_oasas_doh_cab_health_advisory.pdf

Summary: In this article, the Health Advisory highlights the recent controversy over caffeinated alcoholic beverages (CABs). It includes the consumption patterns of CABs among young adults, and points to the negative effects, such as binge drinking, that have been associated with their consumption.

Team Member: Christopher Peter Makris

Abby Goodnough; October 26, 2010; "Caffeine and Alcohol Drink Is Potent Mix for Young"; appeared online at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/27/us/27drink.html>

Summary: This article focuses on specific instances of alcohol abuse involving Four Loko. It illustrates the perceived danger surrounding Four Loko, and lists the responses of State Attorney Generals and college administrators.

Team Member: Emily Butler

D:

Sampling Frame:

We would like to have a comprehensive random sample of students from both Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh (i.e. we want to survey as many different types of students as possible). For Carnegie Mellon, we first would like to stratify our sample in an effort to get all demographics of college: we assume surveying outside near Doherty Hall would give us a good mix of primarily Science, Engineering, and Humanities & Social Science students, the cafe Taza de Oro in the Gates-Hillman Center would help cover primarily Computer Science and Mathematics students, and the Zebra Cafe in the College of Fine Arts would help cover Art and Design students. Furthermore, we would like to survey near general areas of traffic like Kirr Commons and the corner of Forbes and Morewood where we expect to receive sufficient cover of students of all demographics including, but not limited to: age, gender, and Greek life orientation.

these are good plans for covering the campuses by MOS interviews.

Likewise, our plan for surveying the students of the University of Pittsburgh is very similar. We believe students of all classes and Greek life orientation are commonly located at Schenley Commons, Soldiers and Sailors Hall, and the campus Starbucks. Therefore, these are areas where we plan to solicit survey responses. Additionally, by surveying students near the Petersen Events Center we assume we will also cover students enrolled in the university honors program. In general, we believe these specific areas of the University of Pittsburgh campus may cover all demographics of students sufficiently.

As you collect data, start comparing proportions of various kinds of respondents in your sample (m/f, fr/soljr/sr, etc.) with the proportions in each campus population, to

Sampling Population:

Our sampling population consists of a stratified random sample of Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh undergraduate students who have presumably experimented with the consumption of alcohol.

are you going to reject any respondent who has not tried this? or do you want attitudes of those who have not tried, as well??

your sampling and target pop's are essent. the same.

Target Population:

Our target population is all undergraduate students at The University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon who have experimented with the consumption of alcohol.

We may experience coverage error due to the times we conduct our survey. Depending on what time we are out surveying, we may miss students of particular majors or fields of study because of when certain classes occur. We also may experience this error if we do not survey near a building where all or most of the classes of a particular major take place. We tried to choose locations on both campuses that are main meeting points where we expect a large variety of students will pass through. We will also attempt to conduct our survey on different days in order to counteract possible non-response error. For example, we may run into this problem is certain types of classes occur only on Tuesdays and Thursdays versus the other days of the week.

Because the specific days and times we choose to survey individuals may have implications on who responds to our survey, we may also encounter non-response error. For example, certain majors may have a required class at a certain time, or there may be sporting events or other campus events that day that draw a specific demographic of students away from our survey location, etc. To mitigate this problem, we will sample at multiple times on different dates at these locations. I'd like to see the plans for this before you do the survey. Also, I'll need to see your plan for which respondents to approach (e.g. every third one no matter what or ...??)

Furthermore, we may experience measurement error because the terminology in our questions could potentially have various interpretations. For example, students may have a different interpretation of the definition of a "blackout." Also, students may have varying levels of familiarity with the coverage of the physical effects of alcoholic energy drinks. To account for this, we plan to include definitions of certain potentially confusing words and have the option to read a small unbiased paragraph of background information so all respondents will be on common ground. We also will ask for an honest disclosure of answers and will try to ensure anonymity of survey answers. This is further described in the following section.

F:

Because we do not have easy access to a contact book of email addresses or telephone numbers for both campuses, we will be soliciting responses in person. By using the CMU C-Book and the University of Pittsburgh's equivalent student lookup as a reference, we assume we will be able to determine the approximate true population percentages for school demographics. This will help allow us to make sure our sample is representative of these populations. This tactic can be done in a common manner for both campuses by having the survey be self-administered on paper. In the locations and the manner described above, we will randomly ask students (e.g. every third student that passes by) if they would take a minute to fill out our survey. We will provide them with the necessary items to fill out the survey (e.g. a writing utensil, something to lean on). We may also consider providing an unbiased, short, and optional reading and background information on the subject for each possible subject to consider before filling out the survey. In an effort to ensure anonymity of our subjects' answers, when the individuals are finished, we will have them fold up their papers and put them in a box where we will keep all of the completed surveys. ok

ok good!

this will have to be very very short if you do use it!

G:

Gender, age, year in school, Greek-affiliation? Do you drink? (y/n) Frequency of drinking? Do you drink energy drinks in conjunction with alcohol (for instance, Four Loko, Red Bull & Vodka, Jager Bombs, etc)? Have you ever consumed Four Loko? If so, before or after it was pulled from the market (November 1st, 2010)? Have you ever experienced a blackout? (experienced complete memory loss after a night of drinking) If so, was the blackout due to an alcoholic energy drink (Four Loko, Red Bull & Vodka, etc)? Will you continue to drink Four Loko despite the removal of caffeine and energy stimulants? If you have not consumed Four Loko, will you consider drinking it since the alterations have been made? Have the recent findings concerning the health risks associated with alcoholic energy drinks influenced your decision to continue to drinking them?

definition?