

21st century youth: the new British sophisticates

Submitted by: The Inkling Agency

Tuesday, 10 May 2005

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Ten years of R.O.A.R. youth research reveals that:

- Young people are partied out
- Pubs, clubs and TV are out
- Getting drunk is losing its appeal
- Smoking is considered 'stupid'
- Lager's off, wine and spirits are in
- Restaurants and cultural pursuits are in
- Responsibility is no longer a curse

Britain is nurturing a generation of mature, sophisticated, more abstinent and culturally adventurous young people. In contrast to the images of binge drinking and thuggish public behaviour commonly projected by the media, the reality is that Britain's young people are more grown-up and responsible than their counterparts were ten years ago.

These are the latest findings from R.O.A.R. (Right of Admission Reserved) – the influential research programme run by OMD Insight (the research division of the OMD media agency group) and Channel 4, to investigate the lifestyles and attitudes of young people in Britain.

To mark the tenth anniversary of the launch of R.O.A.R., OMD Insight and Channel 4 decided to revisit the generation of young people first interviewed in 1995 to gauge how their attitudes have changed over the past decade and to compare their attitudes with those of today's generation of 15-24 year olds.

Responsibility is the new rebellion

In 1995, 40% of 15-24 year olds agreed that they "never wanted to get tied down with lots of responsibility". Ten years on, it's clear a more conventional life has become more appealing to the nation's youth; only 21% of today's 15-24 year olds and 15% of the original respondents (now aged 25-34 years old) agree with this statement.

R.O.A.R.'s findings also indicate that in this age of cheap travel and more flexible working, there is now less pressure on young people to squash in new and challenging experiences while they are young.

Ten years ago 84% of 15-24 year olds felt that travelling to new places while they were young was important, but that figure has dropped to 69% amongst their modern counterparts and to 64% amongst the original R.O.A.R. kids, now aged 25-34.

Life's no longer just one big party

The proportion of 15-24 year olds stating that the most important thing in life is to have fun has fallen considerably – from 88% back in 1995 to 74% today, dropping even lower to 71% amongst the 25-34 year group of original respondents.

It's good to note that young people appear much more optimistic about what the future holds. A decade ago, 45% of 15-24 year olds said they thought their prospects were better than their parents'. In 2005, 58% of 15-24 year olds and 51% of 25-34 year olds said they expected to have a rosier future than their parents.

This optimistic attitude is matched by positive moves to make their hopes become reality, with many more young people committing to further education today than 10 years ago. In the 15-24 age bracket, the proportion of those studying at school has risen from 22% in 1995 to 30% today. Even more markedly, the number of those studying at university has risen from 12% ten years ago to 32% today.

No longer creatures of habit

As choice has increased and attitudes have altered, so young people have become more varied in their leisure activities. Ten years ago, 56% of 15-24 year olds said that they visited the same places when socialising week after week. A decade later and this figure has dropped to 31% amongst the original ROAR kids (now aged 25-34). But amongst today's 15-24 year olds we can also see a definite increase in their range of leisure activities, with just 46% visiting the same places every week.

All clubbed out

Once a mainstay of socialising, clubs have become far less important to young people, with just 35% of today's 15-24 year olds and 18% of 25-34 year olds considering them central to their social life in 2005.

Ten years ago, the original R.O.A.R. kids were much more strongly tuned into club culture: 45% felt clubs played a big part in their life, with 38% going clubbing once a week or more, 16% going every fortnight and only 15% never going at all.

This R.O.A.R. finding may mirror the demise of the "superclubs", but it also reveals a broader trend towards more varied, sophisticated and less hedonistic youth lifestyles. Amongst today's 15-24 year olds only 27% go clubbing once a week or more, and only 11% go fortnightly and a quarter never go. The older group, the original R.O.A.R. kids, are also hanging up their party gear – a quarter never go clubbing, 33% go clubbing less than once every 3 months, and just 8% regard themselves as hardcore clubbers who go every week.

Last gasp of the lager louts?

Binge drinking youths may have grabbed the headlines in recent months, but for most young Brits, getting legless has lost its appeal. When asked whether they often went out intending to get drunk, only 30% of today's 15-24 year olds agreed, compared to 39% of their counterparts ten years ago. Amongst the older, original group (now 25-34 year olds), the figure dropped to 26%.

But it's the men who are struggling harder to shake off the lager lout image, with 32% agreeing they go out to get drunk, in comparison with 27% of women.

Today's young people also spend less time propping up the bar. In 1995, 39% of the younger group went to the pub two and four times a week, whereas only 23% of their counterparts today and 17% of 25-34 year olds visit the pub this often.

Britain's 21st Century youth no longer considers eating out to be something reserved for older people in their leisure time. Whereas only 36% of the younger group regularly went to restaurants in 1995, this has increased to 46% of today's 15-24 year olds, increasing to 59% amongst 25-34 year olds.

Similarly, theatres, galleries and exhibitions have succeeded in widening their appeal to the youth market. A quarter of today's 15-24 year olds and 25-34 year olds regularly indulge in these cultural activities, up from 19% of 15-24 year olds in 1995.

The just say no generation

This more mature outlook is also reflected in young people's view of drugs and smoking. In 1995, 56% of 15-24 year olds did not agree that "Drugs are less damaging than alcohol", compared to 67% of 15-24 year olds today. This compares with 64% of the supposedly more mature generation of 25-34 year olds, suggesting that young people are now more able to distinguish between the dangers of drugs and alcohol.

There's also been a real backlash against smoking – the number of 15-24 year olds who 'think smoking is stupid' has climbed from less than a third (31%) in 1995, to almost half (48%) today. The original ROAR kids, now 25-34 years old, have also had a wake-up call, with 40% scorning smoking.

And it's not just talk – 30% of today's 25-34 year olds consider themselves to be strong anti-smokers, compared to 23% in 1995. There's also been an increase in those who have never smoked, from 24% in 1995 to 26% today, while 21% of the older group are now reformed/ex-smokers. Young people also seem to have moderated their smoking habits – while 26% of 1995 ROAR respondents considered themselves medium or heavy smokers, now just 18% of 15-24 year olds are regularly puffing away.

Interestingly, across the younger group, the anti-smoking backlash is most fierce amongst men, with 33% against smoking compared to 27% of women. The number of male medium to heavy smokers in the 15-24 year old bracket has actually halved over the last ten years from 30% in 1995 to 16% in 2005. The decline has been less marked amongst women, dropping from 23% to 18% today.

Mine's a Chardonnay

As the behaviour of young people has become more sophisticated, so has their choice of refreshment. Lager, the stereotypical drink of the young, has plummeted in popularity over the last decade, making way for wine and spirits as the new drinks of choice for today's sophisticated young palates.

Reaping the rewards of young people's newly refined palates, spirits brands will be pleased to hear

that over a third (35%) of 15-24 year olds state that spirits are their favourite drink and a further 35% drink spirits on occasions. This compares with ten years ago when more of the younger group (57%) drank spirits occasionally, but just 13% said spirits were their preferred drink.

The most profound change in preferences can be seen amongst women. Whereas in 1995, 55% sometimes drank bottled lager and it was the favoured drink for 15%, 15-24 year old women are now turning their noses up at lager, with only 27% ever drinking it and only 7% naming lager as their favourite drink. Canned and draught lagers have suffered similarly.

Instead, the favourite drinks for 15-24 year old women are spirits (42%), wine (34%) and alcopops (32%).

But the problem for the breweries is not limited to winning female drinkers. Ten years ago, 70% of 15-24 year old men sometimes drank bottled lager and 58% occasionally drank canned/draught lager. In 2005, far fewer men occasionally drink bottled lager (35% of 15-24 year olds) and canned/draught lager (32% of 25-34 year olds).

Perhaps the biggest worry of all for brewers though students. After all, if you don't drink lager as a student, when will you drink it? The number of students citing canned/draught lager as their favourite drink has remained largely static, but R.O.A.R. found that – outside this core of lager lovers – only 25% of students now drink lager occasionally, compared with 64% ten years ago.

Bottled lager is also increasingly out of favour. In 1995, 64% of students said they sometimes drank it compared to 29% today. Instead, students have increasingly turned to spirits (favoured by 32% and drunk occasionally by 35%), alcopops (the favourite for 26% and sometimes consumed by 33%) and wine (the drink of choice for 23% and drunk by occasionally by 36%).

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

Methodology

R.O.A.R asked 1,000 15-24s and 1,000 25-34s to take part in an online survey which looked at their media habits, consumption and attitudes. The original 1995 survey was replicated in order to establish trends and understand how 15-24s have changed from 10 years ago. The respondents were also asked a number of topical questions relevant to the world in which they live today. In some instances, respondents were asked whether they:- agreed, disagreed or neither agreed nor disagreed with various statements. Therefore, the positive and negative responses do not always add up 100%. The research was carried out at the end of April.

About OMD

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