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# Familiar lagers make pub customers more willing to try new beers, Molson Coors says

Among UK lager drinkers, 48% said recognizable core brands would make them likelier to experiment in pubs and bars.

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Core lager remains a major driver of beer sales in British pubs and bars, and its presence may also make customers more willing to try more expensive or less familiar beers, according to a new Molson Coors report released Thursday.

The brewer’s latest Pour Report found that 48% of lager drinkers said they would be more likely to try something new in a pub or bar if recognizable core lager brands were also available. The report argues that familiar standard-tier lagers give customers a sense of security at the bar, making it easier for venues to offer premium and craft options without losing drinkers who want a known choice.

The findings matter for the wider drinks business because they suggest that product range decisions in pubs may not be a simple choice between mainstream beers and higher-margin options. For operators planning beer, cider, wine and spirits ranges, the presence of well-known core beer brands could help create a broader sense of trust in the offer and support more experimental or premium purchases. In practical terms, that may affect how venues plan tap space, fridge stock, promotions and out-of-stock back-up options.

Molson Coors said core lager accounts for 35% of total beer volume sales in the on-trade, or roughly one in every three pints sold in pubs and bars. The company’s research was based on a survey of 2,001 adults in the UK and was combined with feedback from venue operators, publicans and wholesalers in England and Wales.

The report also found that core lager was the most common fallback choice when a customer’s first pick was not available. Among those surveyed, 27% said they would choose core lager if their preferred drink was out of stock, compared with 24% who would switch to premium lager and 14% who would choose craft ale. That result points to a direct commercial role for core lager beyond its own sales volume: it can also help a venue retain orders when a customer cannot get the brand or style they first wanted.

Molson Coors used the report to push back against the idea that core lager is chosen mainly because it is cheaper. Among regular core lager drinkers, 42% said price was the main reason for their choice, but 40% said taste was the biggest factor. Familiarity was named by 27%, brand reputation by 23% and promotions by 20%. Those numbers indicate that value remains important, but not on its own. Taste, habit and trust in the brand also play a large role in how customers order at the bar.

Kevin Fawell, sales director for Molson Coors UK and Ireland, said the research shows that core lager remains a major business opportunity for pubs and bars, both as a high-volume segment and as a way to give customers confidence when they are considering something different. He said operators regularly say that drinkers want reassurance when they approach the bar, and that seeing a familiar option can make them more comfortable trying a new beer as well.

Fawell said core lager and premiumization should not be treated as competing strategies. In his view, a strong core range can support significant direct sales while also helping customers feel confident enough to move into other parts of the category. That point is likely to resonate with pub groups and independent operators that have tried to increase premium and craft sales while still serving regular customers who want consistency and recognizable brands.

The report suggests that customer behavior remains split between exploration and reliability. While many drinkers are open to trying new products, they still want an anchor in the range. For venue owners, that can be important in an environment where drinks lists have become more crowded and consumers are often balancing price concerns with a desire for better quality or a different experience.

Molson Coors found that 41% of lager drinkers always or often choose core lager over premium or craft options. Among respondents who said they would choose core lager, 66% agreed that it offered the best value for money. That points to continued pressure on operators to show value clearly, even when they are trying to move customers toward higher-priced products.

The company also found room for improvement in how pubs present and manage the category. Better promotions and discounts would improve the customer experience, according to 34% of consumers surveyed. Other factors cited included availability, clearer pricing and making sure beer was properly chilled. Those details suggest that trade-up opportunities may depend not only on what brands are stocked, but also on whether the basics of execution are handled well.

That has implications beyond lager. Clear pricing, visible promotions and reliable availability are issues that affect the full drinks program in a pub, from packaged beer and cider to wine by the glass and mixed drinks. If customers view a venue as dependable on core products, operators may have more room to introduce newer or more premium items without increasing the risk of lost sales.

Terry Wheatley of Heavitree Brewery, which operates 40 pubs across southwest England, said core lager would continue to play a strong role in community pubs, sports-led venues and outdoor drinking occasions. He said it would continue to sell more volume overall than premium lager, underscoring the segment’s importance in high-footfall and mainstream venues where familiarity and speed of service are often central to the business model.