

Part 2: ALCOHOL

[excerpt]

What Marketers Know: Deep-Seated Tastes, Triggers, And Thirsts

The people brewing up marketing campaigns for alcoholic beverages know that beer, wine, and liquor are all massive money-makers ... and that beer, wine, and liquor are also products with huge behavioral and emotional impact on consumers. Let's ponder how they leverage gender, nostalgia, insecurity, and other vulnerabilities to get us drinking. And drunk.

Girls, Boys, Booze

There's nothing inherently gendered about alcohol, but marketers have long believed that targeting *just men* or *just women* makes their work simpler and easier. (Wonder how they'll adapt when they finally accept gender fluidity. Panic? Denial? We shall see.) Gender targeting is the crudest form of customization: When a company says, "Hey, you're a dude. Dudes drink Jägermeister," your vulnerable, approval-seeking brain thinks, "I *AM* a dude! Obviously, I need to start drinking Jägermeister so other dudes will acknowledge my inherent dudeliness." All you have to be is male, and you feel included by male-centric marketing. All you have to want is to belong, and you're susceptible; crude but effective.

And, of course, most marketing firms don't actually whang potential customers over the head with gender-targeted messages. They insinuate, often leaning heavily on stereotypes that invoke broad, widely-accepted ideas about what a "real man" or "real woman" does, says, likes, and fears.

Take beer commercials. How many have you watched that DON'T feature a scantily-clad gal, buxom barmaid, or other overt objectification of women? If you happen to have beheld such a rare creature, it undoubtedly featured big trucks, men lifting heavy objects, and sportsball of some sort, all being enjoyed or enacted without a woman in sight. Because, for decades, beer companies have either relegated women to eye-candy status or totally ignored them as potential customers.ⁱ This is especially true of the beer commercials associated with sports broadcasts, a chauvinistic partnership born shortly after the 1947 World Series. Since then, marketers have paired beer and sexism so frequently and shamelessly that many blame this advertising trend for perpetuating the American myth that beer is a "man's drink."ⁱⁱ Which, of course, means a *heterosexual* man's drink. (Wonder how they'll adapt when they finally acknowledge that gay people exist... and love beer, too.)

Of course, there have been some recent shifts in beer marketing, many of which appear to be driven by Millennials, who are sick of both sexism *and* ads that glorify drunken frat parties.ⁱⁱⁱ But it's unlikely that the industry will ever truly eradicate the objectification of women. I mean, why ditch a tactic that makes so many beer-guzzling dudebros happy? No matter how trite, rudimentary, and overtly manipulative it may be?

But what about women drinkers? A JAMA Psychiatry study published in 2016—which surveyed tens of thousands of U.S. adults over the course of 11 years—showed that women are drinking more alcohol, and drinking it more frequently as the years tick by. (It also asserted that “problem drinking” has spiked among women, minorities, older adults, and poor people. *Why on EARTH would those people want to get drunk all the time, I wonder?*)^{iv} The report itself described these statistics as signaling a “public health crisis,” but marketers took away a different message: Time to shift strategies and target the fairer sex.

Instead of going the sexy-sex route they use for the guys, ad agencies the world over chose dark humor as their weapon of choice. Campaigns featuring exhausted moms chugging box wine to cope with stress, and women snuggling up to huge bottles of booze have begun surfacing on social media.^v Underlying message: Being a woman is the pits, but getting drunk off your ass might make it tolerable. Heavy drinking among women is being portrayed as a badge of honor, a sign of toughness. It's been both glorified and normalized because cashing in on this demographic has become a priority for beer and booze-makers and marketers.

But not all women-focused alcohol marketing campaigns tout binge-drinking or stress relief. And not all have led to phenomenal success. Let's look at two products, one that tanked and one that made millions because of women consumers.

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ⁱSchonbrun, Zach. "Beer Ads That Portray Women as Empowered Consumers, Not Eye Candy." *The New York Times*, January 31, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/01/business/media/beer-ads-that-portray-women-as-empowered-consumers-not-eye-candy.html?_r=0.

ⁱⁱNurin, Tara. "After Decades Of 'Beer Babe' Commercials, Liquor Ads Could Improve NFL's Gender Relations." *Fortune*, June 9, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/taranurin/2017/06/09/after-decades-of-beer-babe-commercials-liquor-ads-could-improve-nfls-gender-relations/#35ee2b5e540e>

ⁱⁱⁱSchonbrun, Zach. "Beer Ads That Portray Women as Empowered Consumers, Not Eye Candy." *The New York Times*, January 31, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/01/business/media/beer-ads-that-portray-women-as-empowered-consumers-not-eye-candy.html?_r=0.

^{iv}Domonoske, Camila. "Drinking On The Rise In U.S., Especially For Women, Minorities, Older Adults." *NPR*, August 10, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/08/10/542409957/drinking-on-the-rise-in-u-s-especially-for-women-minorities-older-adults>

^vKindy, Kimberly, and Dan Keating. "For Women, Heavy Drinking Has Been Normalized. That's Dangerous." *The Washington Post*, December 23, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/for-women-heavy-drinking-has-been-normalized-thats-dangerous/2016/12/23/0e701120-c381-11e6-9578-0054287507db_story.html?utm_term=.1dcd9b1dd754.