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Alcohol Advertising on Social Media: A Content Analysis on Message Strategies of Alcohol Advertisements on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram

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In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, alcohol consumption in the United States has increased greatly (Barbosa, Cowell, & Dowd, 2020), and social media use has increased in 2020. The current paper seeks to explore strategies of alcohol-related social media advertisements across a variety of alcohol types, alcohol brands, and social media platforms. By applying the *Elaboration Likelihood Model*, the current study analyzed message strategies used to appeal to consumers, content patterns, and characteristics of alcohol advertisements on social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram). A content analysis on 596 ads of 12 alcohol brands showed that the most common themes included “taste,” “seasonal,” “holiday,” “recipe,” and “joke/humor” in captions and pictures of alcohol ads. Themes known for targeting young people in the past (“social success,” “an improved mood,” and “increased sense of self-confidence”) were not found as much as expected in captions and pictures. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: Alcohol advertising, ELM, social media, message strategies

The Internet and social media provide the alcohol industry with a broad and nearly instant reach to consumers, and the majority of these online alcohol advertisements are accessible by all age groups including minors. American adults spend an average of about four hours a day on the Internet or an app (Nielsen, 2018). Interestingly, Generation Z and Millennials prefer to see advertisements on social media over any other platform (Abramovich, 2018). Previous studies suggest that traditional

advertisements, including television, radio, and print ads, affect young people's drinking behavior (e.g., Anderson *et al.*, 2009). Traditional alcohol advertisements have been found to frequently contain themes that appeal to youth such as social success, an improved mood, and an increased sense of self-confidence as a result of consuming alcohol (Weaver, 2016). Recent digital and social media advertisements behave the same way, but perhaps with an even greater impact and effect on these young adults due to the greater frequency of exposure and appealing messages.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM hereafter) and the Social Cognitive Theory provide insight into why peoples' attitudes could be more susceptible to alcohol marketing messages and why their behavior could be easily influenced by such advertisements (Roberson *et al.*, 2018; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In situations where the audience may be only moderately interested in a topic, peripheral cues cause the audience members to engage in the central route of processing, making for a more impactful and longer-lasting message (Agostinelli & Grube, 2002). For example, people who are only moderately interested in messages about drinking may be more likely to deeply process a message delivered by a favorite celebrity. The celebrity serves as a peripheral cue that could be very influential to the viewer, enforcing the message of drinking.

The past research showed various advertising appeals, such as "Taste," "Socializing," and "Humor" in alcohol ads in traditional media such as TV (e.g., Finn & Strickland, 1982; Morgenstern *et al.*, 2015;) or magazines (Jung & Hovland, 2016; Ross, Henehan, & Jernigan, 2017). However, most content analyses do not evaluate recent online/digital media platforms and nearly all of the content research on social media alcohol ads has been conducted in countries outside of the United States, such as studies in Australia (e.g., Hendriks, Van den Putte, & Gebhardt, 2018) or the UK (e.g., Atkinson *et al.*, 2016). This study will build upon past research, but by evaluating modern and recent advertisements, and by conducting the study among U.S. alcoholic beverage brands and their social media accounts, this research will introduce new insight that can be a guide for advertisers and future studies about alcohol ads on social media. Specifically, the current study examines message strategies in alcohol advertising used to appeal to consumers, by analyzing various appeals then categorizing them into three message strategies: 1) informational message strategy, 2) transactional message strategy, and 3) entertainment message strategy featuring ELM. Also, the current study shows the character length for the three most popular social media platforms. Many advertisers have been curious about the ideal character length to catch consumers' attention while giving information (Kunesh, 2020). Lastly, the current study shows the trend of alcohol ads in social media across alcohol types and brands. The results contribute to the theoretical explanation of social media ads from ELM and the practical implication as well.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ELM: Persuasive Messages in Alcohol Advertisements

It is widely acknowledged that the effects of advertisement are not limited to the information in the advertisement but are also a function of the appeals used in advertisements, like featuring a joke or humor (Ott *et al.*, 2016). The ELM theory is a framework used to understand and evaluate the underlying mechanisms to describe the relationships between these strategies of appeal and consumer response to such advertisements.

The ELM, which was developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), provides a framework for persuasion and attitude change that includes two routes: the central route and the peripheral route. The central route involves high elaboration and issue-relevant thinking, while the peripheral route involves less elaboration and a person's attitudes are formed based on relatively simple cues. These simple cues may be the credibility, attractiveness of the sources of the message, or the production quality of the message. An ELM will be high or low depending on a person's motivation and cognitive ability. Roberson *et al.* (2018) addressed the relation of social media and the social cognitive theory, a theory that proposes the idea that behavior is learned through observation. Mass media provides its consumers with large-scale modeling of behaviors, including drinking, and many of these examples are provided by the alcohol industry through its various advertisements. The theory proposes the concept that drinking could potentially be a learned behavior through these images. The ELM and social cognitive theory provide reasons why young peoples' behavior may be influenced by alcohol advertisements.

Studies on traditional platforms have found various correlations between effective alcohol advertisements and young people drinking or purchasing alcohol. Chen *et al.* (2005) showed the alcohol advertisements' qualities and effectiveness/likeability among 10~17-year-olds. The study found that the attractiveness of the commercial was related closely with the participants liking the storyline and humor; and there was a strong correlation with liking the ad and having an intent to purchase that brand, even with kids this young (p. 562). Snyder *et al.* (2006) evaluated alcohol advertisements from 1999-2001 and found that advertisement exposure positively related to an increase in drinking, and each additional advertisement was associated with a 1% increase in drinks per month (p. 22). Youth who lived in markets with more alcohol advertising (i.e., greater advertising exposure) drank more and their drinking levels increased more over time, in comparison to youth who lived in markets with less exposure.

Alcohol social media advertisements are accessible by young people, including minors, and studies show that these advertisements may also influence their behavior. McClure *et al.* (2016) found that the majority of 15~20-year-olds reported exposure to alcohol marketing on the Internet and a positive correlation between internet usage and receptivity to internet alcohol marketing. Jernigan *et al.* (2017) found that compared to adults over the age of 21, adolescents 13~20-year-old are nearly twice as likely to recall exposure to alcohol ads on the Internet. This age group is also twice as likely to respond to the advertisements by liking, sharing, or reposting. Additionally, Roberson *et al.* (2018) noted that there was a correlation found among adolescents with higher levels of social network use and binge drinking. Also, Siegel *et al.* (2013) found that the top alcohol brand preferences of youth who engaged in "heavy episodic drinking" were brands associated with high advertising expenditure.

Messages of Alcohol Advertisements

Marketers of the alcohol industry use many digital and traditional tactics. However, just as consumers have moved online, marketers have also. People spend much time on social media, as the average adult spends around four hours a day online and teens spend an average of nine hours a day online (Nielsen, 2018). The alcohol industry is no different; in 2017, the industry's expenditure on digital ads was more than \$126.8 million (Nielsen, 2017). Marketers of alcohol use many digital tactics to target Internet users including extensive marketing on websites and social media channels, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, which have become increasingly popular (Noel & Babor, 2017; Barry *et al.*, 2018b). Despite the 2020 Covid-pandemic, digital advertising is still forecasted for

aggressive growth in 2021 and the coming years. Mintel (2020) estimates digital advertising spend for the year at \$125.9 billion. While major brands reduce ad spending for 2020, the reduced ad spend will come at the expense of traditional media as COVID-19 has only accelerated digital usage (Mintel, 2020).

As digital advertising is a more recent development, themes within traditional media were taken into account for cross-examination. A trend in content displaying “partying” or “friendship” has previously been found in traditional television and magazine alcohol advertisements and more recently also has been found in alcohol advertisements on digital platforms. Morgenstern *et al.* (2015) performed a class analysis study on 581 unique television alcohol advertisements and identified five content classes emerging from the advertisements including partying, quality of the product, sports, manliness, and relaxation. The study found that “party-related content,” including themes of love, sex, and partying, was the most dominant theme making up 42% of the advertisements (p. 1771). Similarly, Noel and Babor (2017) found a high prevalence of “party” and “friendship” themes on alcohol advertisements on Facebook (p. 734). Barry *et al.* (2018b) noted that these linkages between alcohol and socialization and parties are “insidious” for adolescents because this age group is especially preoccupied with their social standing and peer acceptance, making them highly receptive to the implied suggestion that drinking will help them make friends and fit in (p. 260).

Other social media studies have found variances in themes depending on the brand, while also a theme that is consistent with the ‘partying’ trend. Barry *et al.* (2018b) conducted a Twitter content analysis study to see common themes among 19,005 tweets of 13 alcohol brands. Eleven of the 12 significant themes that emerged were dedicated to a specific brand. For example, *Jack Daniel’s* tweets produced a rock-and-roll lifestyle theme and used words like “music,” “rock,” and “night,” while *Grey Goose* produced a theme of luxury with words like “extraordinary,” and “toast” (p. 259). The only theme that was not brand specific was a theme using words such as “party,” “celebrate,” and “friend” (p. 260). Likewise, Nicholls (2012) conducted a study with 12 of the UK’s leading alcohol brands’ Facebook and Twitter posts during November 2011 and analyzed how the posts fit into predetermined categories. Less than 10% and less than 25% of all tweets “explicitly suggested consuming alcohol” (p. 489). This implies that conversations can be about other things as long as they are in a branded environment, which seems to be an approach many of these brands used. Once again, “celebration” was also a key term across the vast majority of brands, whether it was referring to a special occasion or simply because it is okay to “celebrate” a Monday with *Bacardi* (p. 490).

A different content analysis study evaluated pictures on Instagram for the visible content shown within the photos. Barry *et al.* (2018a) evaluated 15 alcohol brands on Instagram over one month for 38 different content categories, including production value, character appeals, youth-oriented themes, product appeals, reward, appeals, and several more. The study found that the production value of the posts was generally high; color, texture, shine, and contrast were found in over 80% of the ads. Seventy percent of the advertisements used product appeals, 29% of posts depicted achievement including wealth and social gain, and 17% of posts depicted camaraderie including partying and friendship (Barry *et al.*, 2018a). Positive emotional experiences, including laughing, smiling, relaxing, were depicted in half of the sample, and 98% had a person or people in the post. Around 17% of the posts included inappropriate use; for example, activities that should not be combined with alcohol like mountain biking or skiing or overconsumption with a person holding a full bottle of liquor. These risky

behaviors portrayed in the media could lead to how young people perceive regular drinking (Barry *et al.*, 2018a). The current study employs thematic categories to appeal to the audience used in the previous studies (Barry *et al.*, 2018a; Nicholls, 2012; Noel & Babor, 2017; Weaver, 2016).

There is also a limited presence of moderation, responsible drinking, and safety messages within online alcohol marketing campaigns. In the Twitter content analysis (Barry *et al.*, 2018b) mentioned above, moderation messages were only found in three instances out of over 19,000 tweets by 13 brands: *Captain Morgan* with “#alwaysinmoderation,” *Hennesy* with “#drinkresponsibly,” and *Absolut* with “limit” (p. 259-260). In the UK Facebook and Twitter content analysis (Nicholls, 2012), none of the Facebook posts recommended moderate or responsible drinking, and out of over 400 total tweets, only six potentially “strategically ambiguous” tweets by *Bacardi* and one tweet by *Smirnoff* referenced responsible practices (p. 489). The tweets were mixed in with many other messages that did not regard safety.

Based on the review of ELM and alcohol ads message appeals in the previous studies, the following research questions are posed.

RQ1: *What advertising message appeals (i.e. friendship, partying, etc.) were most frequently used in alcohol advertisements on social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram)?*

RQ2: *Does the use of message appeals in alcohol advertising vary by alcohol types and brands?*

RQ3: *To what extent does the character length differ across platforms?*

RQ4: *How does the strategy of appeals relate to user engagement in terms of sharing the ad, liking the ad, and commenting on the ad?*

METHODS

The purpose of this study is to find, describe, and quantify patterns and trends among the strategies of appeal and content within alcohol advertisements on various social media platforms, featuring Elaboration Likelihood Model. Data should provide insight into the series of advertisements' characteristics and qualities in a systematic and measured way. Content analysis cannot draw direct correlations between advertisements and effects on an audience; however, any historical change will be studied and notable findings will be discussed (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014).

Samples

This study considers the most recent Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook posts as of November 2020 by the three top alcohol brands in the categories of Beer, Vodka, Hard Seltzer, and Whiskey. These categories provide a variety of types of alcohol and preference among these types is consistent among the target age group of 18 to 25-year-olds. (Fortunato *et al.*, 2013).

Beer is one of the oldest and most popular drinks in the world; the third most popular drink overall after water and tea (Nelson, 2005). *Bud Light* is a premium light lager that is the best-selling most popular beer in the United States by a two-to-one margin. The 2018 market share of *Bud Light* was 14.3%, which was down more than 20% from 2013 (Andrews, 2019). *Coors Light* is the second most popular beer brand in America, which held 7.2% of the market share in 2018 (Andrews, 2019). *Miller Lite* was released in 1975 and is now the third most popular beer brand in America, having 6.1% of the market share in 2018 (Andrews, 2019). Vodka is a clear, distilled spirit made from water and

ethanol from grains or potatoes. It is the most popular liquor to use in cocktails, mixed drinks, and shots (Graham, 2019). In 2019, around 77.57 million nine-liter cases of vodka were consumed in the United States. In 2019, the advertising spending for vodka in the United States amounted to over 102 million dollars (Statista, 2019). As of 2019, *Smirnoff* was the leading vodka brand in the United States with nearly nine million nine-liter cases sold. In 2019, *Smirnoff* and *Tito's* both had 11% of the market share, with *New Amsterdam* at 7% (Statista, 2019). Hard seltzer is alcoholic bubbly water with natural fruit flavoring and around 5% alcohol by volume (ABV). Hard seltzers are ready-to-drink cocktails that are low-calorie and low-carb and have been on the rise in recent years (Vinepair, 2014). As of 2019, *White Claw* made \$526 million of sales within the year, which was up 203.2% since the previous year. *Truly Hard Seltzer* had \$274 million in sales that year which was up 183.5% since the previous year. *Bon & Viv* had the next highest sales with \$70 million that year (Riell, 2019). *Bon & Viv* is owned by Anheuser-Busch Inc., which is also the parent company of *Bud Light*. Whiskey is made with many grains, flavors, and distillation processes making it one of the most diverse distilled spirits. It is made from malted grains and almost always aged in barrels for years or decades. Jack and Coke is one of the easiest and most popular cocktails made with whiskey, using *Jack Daniels* and *Coca-Cola* with ice (Graham, 2021). Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were the platforms chosen for this study because they are extremely popular among teens and young adults and several alcohol brands have a presence on these three channels.

Coding Procedures

Prior to developing a coding scheme, authors visited the brands' Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook accounts and discussed a list of coding schemes. The unit of analysis is the major entity analyzed (Krippendorff, 1980), and that of the current study is each posting on three social media platforms of 12 alcoholic beverage brands. Before the analysis, 36 ads from each brand per platform were reviewed to develop the coding scheme and a list of message strategies and other relevant information to answer research questions. One of the authors and one trained coder were trained thoroughly to understand all of the operational definitions, category schemes, mechanics, and peculiarities of the study and to eliminate any methodological problems or discrepancies. Within the sessions, the authors revised definitions, clarified the boundaries, and compiled all of this into a detailed instruction sheet with examples.

Coding Schemes

Names and industry type of companies. In order to code the social media accounts, coders needed a nominal determinant for each brand. The names of each company were coded as *Bud Light* (1), *Coors Light* (2), *Miller Lite* (3), *Tito's* (4), *Smirnoff* (5), *New Amsterdam* (6), *White Claw* (7), *Truly* (8), *Bon & Viv* (9), *Crown Royal* (10), *Jim Beam* (11), and *Jack Daniels* (12). The coder also coded the industry type of each company, based on the major products each produces beer (1), vodka (2), hard seltzer (3), and whiskey (4). The coder also coded the media platform: Instagram (1), Twitter (2), and Facebook (3).

Engagement. The number of followers, likes, shares/retweets, and comments were recorded for each post.

Type of Ad: Advertisement or Post. Each ad was coded as either advertisement (1) or non-advertisement post (2). Non-advertisement posts were coded for a specific type: social issue (1), Covid-19 related (2), Company information (3), Environmental Issue (4), Underage Drinking (5), CSR

initiated (6), Unrelated to Drinking (7), Random (8), Other (0). The advertisements were also coded for type: Regular ads (0), Seasonal promotion (1) (i.e. themes relating to Superbowl, college football, or summer special), holiday (2) (i.e. themes relating to Christmas, Thanksgiving, or Labor Day), and contest/giveaway (3).

Caption. The advertisement was coded for if there was a caption (1) or if there was no caption (99). If there was a caption, the number of words was recorded, including hashtags, username tags, and numbers. Hashtags count as one word, and so do tags. For example, “#DrinkSmirnoffResponsibly,” “@kendalljenner,” “2020” is coded as one word. Emojis do not count as words.

Messages. The strategies of appeals were coded for advertisements. First, the caption was coded for all of the following themes, then the first picture or video was coded for all of the following themes. Many of the following categories were modeled after Weaver's (2016) study. Table 1 shows the themes that were coded as dichotomous variables: no (0) and yes (1).

Table 1
Themes in Ads

	Description	Examples
Taste	Taste, which also included flavor or description of the drink’s taste	Tastes, tastes good/is easy to drink/refreshing: “Goes with everything and tastes good”
Seasonal	Features seasonal characteristic, relating to a particular season of the year such as fall, summer, spring, winter	“A good drink for summer”
Holiday	Featuring themes relating to a specific holiday such as Christmas or Halloween	“ <i>Smirnoff</i> is the perfect way to celebrate the 4th of July”
Celebrating	Features the scenes of celebrating, honoring or commemorating a particular event by expressing excitement	“Celebrate with a <i>White Claw</i> ”
relaxing	Features relaxing from drinking, reducing tension, being calm, unwinding, or being lazy	“Great for relaxing”
feel good/fun/happy	Features hedonic feeling from drinking, or a good mood as a result from drinking	“Drinking <i>Smirnoff</i> will make your life fun!”
getting drunk	Consumption of too much alcohol, encouraging overindulgence in alcohol.	“Drink it to get wasted”
socializing	Conversing and mingling with other people.	“Drink to entertain,” friends pictured
food	Food such as appetizers, snacks, and meals.	“To be enjoyed over cheese and crackers with close friends”
recipe	Instructions for preparing a specific mixed drink or cocktail and a list of ingredients	“Can put in sweet recipes,” lists a recipe
sophistication	Elegant, professional, refined, and sophisticated themes	“An elegant drink to have with friends over lunch”

adventure	Risk-taking, venturesome experiences, or an extravagant journey	“From coast to summit, surf or ski with <i>White Claw</i> ”
healthy	A drink that is better for you nutritionally	“Now with fewer calories!”
joke or humor	An intention for the audience to think something is funny, includes puns, memes, and jokes	“Let the evening be-GIN”
Covid-19	A message/theme relating to the 2020 pandemic, COVID-19	“Don’t forget to social distance while drinking,”
responsibility	Message regarding drinking responsibly, safely, or being 21+	“Drink responsibly”
Other	If an advertisement fit none of the themes listed above (1), or if an advertisement featured one of the themes listed above (0)	

The “occasion” theme features a reason behind the drinking, a particular event or activity, such as a party or a sports game, and it was coded: party (1), family/friends get-together (2), romantic (3), outdoors (4), working out/exercise (5), sporting game (6), any occasion (7), or can’t determine (0).

Number of Pictures/Videos. The number of pictures was noted or marked (0) for not present. The number of videos was also noted or marked (0) for not present. The first picture or video was coded for the above messages and appeals.

Intercoder reliability. A pilot study of 72 advertisements (17%), two advertisements from each brand on each platform was independently and separately conducted between one of the authors and the trained coder. All of the information was input into excel sheets by placing checkmarks or numbers into predetermined spaces. The reliability coefficient was .98 reliability (percentage agreement) and Cohen’s kappa values ranged from .85 to .95. Cohen (1960) suggested the kappa result should be interpreted such that values less than 0 indicate no agreement, values from 0.01 to 0.20 are none to the slight agreement, values from 0.21 to 0.40 are fair agreement, values from 0.41 to 0.60 are moderate, values from 0.61 to 0.80 are substantial, and values from 0.81 to 1.00 indicate almost perfect agreement.

RESULTS

Sample Profiles

Among the 12 studied brands, a total of 432 social media posts and advertisements were coded, including 36 from each brand with 12 from Instagram, 12 from Twitter, and 12 from Facebook. Therefore, there were 108 beer, 108 vodkas, 108 hard seltzer, and 108 whiskey social media posts/advertisements coded. The majority of social media posts from the 12 brands were advertisements ($n = 363$, 84%) and the remaining 69 were non-advertising posts. Thirty-four of the non-advertising social media posts were corporate social responsibility related (49.28%). The 69 non-advertisement posts were excluded from the further research analysis to examine the ad message strategies among alcoholic beverages on social media.

Strategy of Appeals within Captions, Picture, and Video

Among the valid 363 advertisements, the majority were regular advertisements ($n = 245$, 67.5%) with a notable amount of seasonal and holiday promotions ($n = 87$, 24%). Contests and giveaways made up the remaining 8.5% ($n = 31$). Among the valid 363 advertisements, the majority ($n = 360$, 99.2%) had a caption and the average number of words was 23.1 ($SD = 191.18$). Among the valid 363 advertisements, 305 advertisements (84%) contained at least one picture or video. A total of 193 advertisements (63.2) contained at least one picture and 112 advertisements (36.7%) contained at least one video. Of the 193 advertisements with at least one picture, 168 advertisements (87%) only had one picture and 25 advertisements (13%) contained more than one picture with a maximum of five pictures. The first picture on each post was the picture that was coded. No advertisement contained more than one video. Table 2 shows the strategies of appeals within captions, pictures, and videos. Twenty percent of ads ($n = 74$) mentioned a specific occasion for drinking within the caption; therefore, in the majority of these advertisements ($n = 286$, 79.4%) the drinking occasion was undeterminable by the caption. The most common occasion mentioned within the caption was a sporting game found within 9.4% ($n = 34$) of captions. The “party” occasion only made up 1.7% of captions ($n = 6$).

Table 2
Strategies of Appeal in Captions, Pictures, and Videos

	Caption ($n = 360$)	First Picture ($n = 248$)	First Video ($n = 112$)
Taste	$n = 96$, 26.7%	$n = 98$, 50.8%	$n = 54$, 48.2%
Occasion	$n = 74$, 20.5%	$n = 48$, 24.9%	$n = 25$, 22.3%
Seasonal	$n = 122$, 33.9%	$n = 54$, 28%	$n = 37$, 33%
Holiday	$n = 114$, 31.7%	$n = 19$, 9.8%	$n = 28$, 25%
Celebrating	$n = 24$, 6.7%	$n = 11$, 5.7%	$n = 6$, 5.4%
Relaxing	$n = 23$, 6.4%	$n = 15$, 7.8%	$n = 11$, 9.8%
Feel good	$n = 17$, 4.7%	$n = 2$, 1%	$n = 0$, 0%
Get drunk	$n = 4$, 1.1%	$n = 0$, 0%	$n = 3$, 2.7%
Socializing	$n = 18$, 5%	$n = 23$, 11.9%	$n = 13$, 11.6%
Food	$n = 22$, 6.1%	$n = 14$, 7.3%	$n = 7$, 6.3%
Recipe	$n = 57$, 15.9%	$n = 22$, 11.4%	$n = 25$, 22%
Sophistication	$n = 5$, 1.4%	$n = 6$, 3.1%	$n = 5$, 4.5%
Adventurous	$n = 2$, 0.6%	$n = 9$, 4.7%	$n = 8$, 7.1%
Healthy	$n = 6$, 1.7%	$n = 3$, 1.6%	$n = 1$, 0.8%
Joke/Humor	$n = 54$, 15%	$n = 21$, 10.9%	$n = 7$, 6.3%
Sexual Context	$n = 3$, 0.8%	$n = 0$, 0%	$n = 0$, 0%
Age	$n = 2$, 0.6%	$n = 0$, 0	$n = 0$, 0%

Covid Related	n = 4, 1.1%	n = 0, 0	n = 1, 0.8%
Other context/can't determine	n = 46, 12.8%	n = 16, 14.3%	n = 9, 8%
Responsibility message	n = 6, 1.7%	n = 34, 30.4%	n = 57, 50.9%

Strategic Appeal of across Alcohol Type and Brands

Across the different types of alcohol in the 360 advertisements with a caption, a series of chi-square tests were conducted, and the results were statistically significant for all captions' strategic appeal categories except for "healthy," "food," and "adventurous." Across the different types of alcohol, a chi-square test was conducted, and the results were statistically significant for "taste" ($\chi^2(3) = 35.84, p < .000$), the effect size, Cramer's V, was from moderate, .316. Hardly any beer captions had a "taste" appeal (n = 4, 4.2%); however, 39.4% of vodka captions (n = 37), 35.1% of hard seltzer captions (n = 34), and 28.4% of whiskey captions (n = 21) had the "taste" appeal. Table 3 shows the chi-square results of themes across captions, pictures, and video.

Table 3

Appeals by Alcohol Type on Caption, Picture, and Video

	Caption	Picture	Video
Taste	($\chi^2(3) = 35.84, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .316	($\chi^2(3) = 64.51, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .578	($\chi^2(3) = 42.15, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .616
Occasion	($\chi^2(18) = 60.66, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .237	($\chi^2(21) = 81.16, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .374	($\chi^2(15) = 26.19, p < .05$), Cramer's V = .279
Seasonal	($\chi^2(3) = 37.83, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .324	($\chi^2(3) = 10.00, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .228	($\chi^2(3) = 15.21, p < .01$), Cramer's V = .369
Holiday	($\chi^2(6) = 23.49, p < .001$), Cramer's V = .181	not significant	not significant
Celebrating	($\chi^2(3) = 14.73, p < .002$), Cramer's V = .202	not significant	not significant
Relaxing	$\chi^2(3) = 18.216, p < .000$, Cramer's V = .225	($\chi^2(3) = 9.85, p < .02$), Cramer's V = .226	($\chi^2(3) = 40.12, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .598
Feel good	$\chi^2(3) = 13.247, p < .004$, Cramer's V = .192	not significant	0

Get drunk	significant	0	$(\chi^2(3) = 16.10, p < .001)$, Cramer's V = .379
Socializing	$(\chi^2(3) = 10.268, p < .05)$, Cramer's V = .169	not significant	$(\chi^2(3) = 27.45, p < .000)$, Cramer's V = .495
Food	not significant	$(\chi^2(3) = 9.61, p < .05)$, Cramer's V = .223	not significant
Recipe	$(\chi^2(3) = 51.56, p < .000)$, Cramer's V = .379	$(\chi^2(3) = 24.82, p < .000)$, Cramer's V = .359, significant	$(\chi^2(3) = 18.57, p < .000)$, Cramer's V = .407
Sophistication	$(\chi^2(3) = 11.493, p < .01)$, Cramer's V = .179	$(\chi^2(3) = 8.94, p < .05)$, Cramer's V = .215, significant	$(\chi^2(3) = 11.18, p < .05)$, Cramer's V = .316
Adventurous	not significant	$(\chi^2(3) = 14.44, p < .01)$, Cramer's V = .274, significant	$(\chi^2(3) = 16.39, p < .001)$, Cramer's V = .383
Healthy	not significant	$(\chi^2(3) = 2.73, p > .1)$, Cramer's V = .119, not significant	not significant
Joke/Humor	$(\chi^2(3) = 22.56, p < .000)$, Cramer's V = .250	$(\chi^2(3) = 38.33, p < .000)$, Cramer's V = .446, significant	not significant
Sexual Context	$(\chi^2(3) = 8.65, p < .05)$, Cramer's V = .155	0	0
Age	not significant	not significant	0
Covid Related	not significant	not significant	not significant
Other context/can't determine	not significant	$(\chi^2(3) = 22.16, p < .000)$, Cramer's V = .339	not significant
Responsibility message	not significant	$(\chi^2(3) = 13.67, p < .01)$, Cramer's V = .266	$(\chi^2(3) = 15.125, p < .01)$, Cramer's V = .367

Notes. If the Cramer's V is less than 0.2, the result is weak association, if it's between 0.2 and 0.6, the result is moderate association, and if it's more than 0.6, the result is strong association (Cohen, 1988).

Across the brands, a chi-square test was conducted, and the results were statistically significant for “recipe” ($\chi^2(3) = 51.56, p < .001$), the effect size, Cramer’s V, was moderate, .379. No beer captions featured the “recipe” strategy, whiskey and hard seltzer did not utilize this strategy much ($n = 11, 11.3\%$; $n = 11, 15.1\%$); however, 37.2% of vodka advertisements used this strategy ($n = 35$). The results were statistically significant for “joke/humor” ($\chi^2(3) = 22.56, p < .000$), the effect size, Cramer’s V, was moderate, .250. Beer captions utilized the “joke/humor” appeal frequently ($n = 27, 28.4\%$) compared to vodka ($n = 9, 9.6\%$), seltzer ($n = 15, 15.5\%$), and whiskey ($n = 3, 4.1\%$). The results were statistically significant for “sexual content” ($\chi^2(3) = 8.65, p < .05$), the effect size, Cramer’s V was weak, .155, as this appeal was not used in any alcohol types except for vodka ($n = 3, 3.2\%$). Table 4 shows the chi-square results of themes on captions, pictures, and videos of 12 alcohol brands’ social media ads.

Table 4
Appeal by Alcohol Brand on Caption, Picture, and Video

	caption	picture	video
Taste	$(\chi^2(11) = 115.43, p < .001)$, Cramer’s V = .566	$(\chi^2(11) = 88.92, p < .000)$, Cramer’s V = .679	$(\chi^2(11) = 56.74, p < .000)$, Cramer’s V = .715
Occasion	$(\chi^2(66) = 246.48, p < .000)$, Cramer’s V = .338	$(\chi^2(77) = 281.04, p < .000)$, Cramer’s V = .456, significant	$(\chi^2(55) = 78.61, p < .05)$, Cramer’s V = .375
Seasonal	$(\chi^2(11) = 91.71, p < .000)$, Cramer’s V = .505	$(\chi^2(11) = 51.59, p < .000)$, Cramer’s V = .517	$(\chi^2(11) = 29.51, p < .05)$, Cramer’s V = .513
Holiday	$(\chi^2(11) = 86.31, p < .000)$, Cramer’s V = .346	not significant	$(\chi^2(11) = 56.89, p < .000)$, Cramer’s V = .713
Celebrating	$(\chi^2(11) = 53.69, p < .000)$, Cramer’s V = .386	not significant	$(\chi^2(11) = 22.01, p < .05)$, Cramer’s V = .443
Relaxing	$(\chi^2(11) = 57.496, p < .000)$, Cramer’s V = .400	$(\chi^2(11) = 29.34, p < .01)$, Cramer’s V = .390	$(\chi^2(11) = 55.135, p < .000)$, Cramer’s V = .702
Feel good	$(\chi^2(11) = 41.73, p < .000)$, Cramer’s V = .340	not significant	0
Get drunk	$(\chi^2(11) = 19.885, p < .05)$, Cramer’s V = .235	0	$(\chi^2(11) = 112.00, p < .000)$, Cramer’s V = 1.0

Socializing	($\chi^2(11) = 39.64, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .360	($\chi^2(11) = 47.43, p < .001$), Cramer's V = .496	($\chi^2(11) = 67.99, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .779
Food	not significant	($\chi^2(11) = 47.04, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .494	($\chi^2(11) = 21.70, p < .05$), Cramer's V = .440
Recipe	($\chi^2(11) = 128.01, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .597	($\chi^2(11) = 42.43, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .469	($\chi^2(11) = 68.04, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .779
Sophistication	($\chi^2(11) = 31.46, p < .001$), Cramer's V = .296	($\chi^2(11) = 47.63, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .497	($\chi^2(11) = 23.50, p < .05$), Cramer's V = .015
Adventurous	not significant	($\chi^2(11) = 67.92, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .593	($\chi^2(11) = 25.71, p < .001$), Cramer's V = .479
Healthy	($\chi^2(11) = 32.73, p < .001$), Cramer's V = .302	not significant	not significant
Joke/Humor	($\chi^2(11) = 47.34, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .363	($\chi^2(11) = 114.16, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .769	($\chi^2(11) = 51.97, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .687
Sexual Context	($\chi^2(11) = 38.75, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .329	0	0
Age	not significant	not significant	0
Covid Related	not significant	($\chi^2(11) = 22.56, p < .05$), Cramer's V = .340	not significant
Other context/can't determine	($\chi^2(11) = 35.10, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .312	($\chi^2(11) = 34.00, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .420	($\chi^2(11) = 43.23, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .621
Responsibility message	not significant	($\chi^2(11) = 82.29, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .656	($\chi^2(11) = 70.56, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .794

The results were also statistically significant for “occasion” ($\chi^2(66) = 246.48, p < .000$), Cramer's V = .338. Three *Coors Light* captions (9.4%) featured a “party” occasion. *Jim Beam* (n = 2, 6.7%) and *Crown Royal* (n = 1, 4.3%) were the only other brands to feature the “party” occasion in a caption. The “friends/family get-together” was found in 25% of *Tito's* captions (n = 8), but only 8% of *Smirnoff* captions (n = 2) and no *New Amsterdam* captions. This theme was found in about 6% of *Coors Light* and *Miller Lite* captions, but not found in *Bud Light* captions. *Bon & Viv* had “friends/family get-together” in 6.5% of captions (n = 2), while the other hard seltzer brands did not use this occasion. *Jim Beam* used this occasion in 13% of captions (n = 4), *Jack Daniels* used this occasion

in 14% ($n = 3$), and *Crown Royal* did not use this occasion. *Coors Light* and *Miller Lite* both used the “sporting game” occasion in around 6% of captions ($n = 2$), while *Bud Light* did not use it. *New Amsterdam* used this occasion in 25% of captions ($n = 9$), while *Smirnoff* used it in 8% ($n = 2$) and *Tito’s* did not use this occasion. *Crown Royal* used this occasion in 70% of captions ($n = 16$), while the other whiskey brands did not use this occasion.

Strategy of Appeals across Different Platforms

The second research question seeks to know which strategies of appeals are being used on different social media platforms. A chi-square test was conducted to determine whether strategies are statistically associated with the types of social media platforms. The results showed that there were statistically significant differences with the “socializing” appeal within captions on Facebook compared to Twitter and Instagram ($\chi^2(2) = 6.05, p < .05$), the effect size, Cramer’s V, was small, .130. In other words, the “socializing” appeal appeared more in Facebook advertisements’ captions than Twitter and Instagram. Additionally, the results showed that there were statistically significant differences for the “joke/humor” appeal on Twitter captions than on Facebook and Instagram captions ($\chi^2(2) = 11.192, p < .005$), the effect size, Cramer’s V, was small, .176. Except for these two appeals (i.e., socializing and joke/humor), there were no significant differences in the use of all other strategies of appeals that appeared in the three platforms. In other words, the message strategies in captions were similar on social media ads among 12 alcoholic beverage brands on three platforms. There were no significant differences for strategies of appeals in pictures and videos across the three platforms.

Character Length

To find the differences in the word count of ads among 12 alcoholic beverage brands across three platforms, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted. The average number of words in captions on Instagram was 26.73 ($SD = 23.94$), that of Twitter was 19.14 ($SD = 12.19$), and that of Facebook was 22.63 ($SD = 18.02$). The result showed that there was a significant difference, $F=4.664, (2, 357), p = 0.01$. The post-hoc analysis showed that the difference between the average word counts of Instagram ($M = 26.73, SD = 23.94$) and Twitter ($M = 19.14, SD = 12.19$) was statistically different. In other words, brands tend to use more words on Instagram than on Twitter and it is significantly different.

Another one-way ANOVA test was conducted to find the difference in the word count across the 12 brands. The average number of words in captions for *Bud Light* was 16.65 ($SD = 18.26$), that of *Coors Light* was 23.47 ($SD = 12.80$), that of *Miller Lite* was 8.72 ($SD = 5.09$), that of *Tito’s* was 47.88 ($SD = 29.16$), that of *Smirnoff* was 23.15 ($SD = 18.98$), that of *New Amsterdam* was 19.97 ($SD = 14.29$), that of *White Claw* was 10.71 ($SD = 6.23$), that of *Truly* was 23.59 ($SD = 18.94$), that of *Bon & Viv* was 37.29 ($SD = 18.71$), that of *Crown Royal* was 23.73 ($SD = 5.03$), that of *Jim Beam* was 23.73 ($SD = 15.20$), and that of *Jack Daniels* was 22.62 ($SD = 12.49$). The result showed that *Tito’s* has the highest mean score of 47.88 ($SD = 29.16$) and *Miller Lite* has the lowest mean score of 8.75 ($SD = 5.09$) making these two brands more statistically different than many of the others. In other words, the majority of brands tended to use very different amounts of words from each other in their captions. Another one-way ANOVA test was conducted to find the difference in the word count across the alcohol types. The average number of words in captions for beer was 16.53 ($SD = 14.631$), that of vodka was 30.35 ($SD = 24.879$), that of hard seltzer was 23.45 ($SD = 18.920$), and that of whiskey was 21.62 ($SD = 12.184$). The result showed that there was a significant difference, $F = 8.904, (3, 356), p < 0.001$. The post-hoc analysis showed that the difference between 1) the average word counts of beer

($M=16.53$, $SD = 14.63$) and vodka ($M = 30.35$, $SD = 24.88$) and 2) the average word counts of vodka ($M = 30.35$, $SD = 24.88$) and whiskey ($M = 21.62$, $SD = 12.18$) were statistically different. In other words, Vodka captions tended to be very long compared to beer and whiskey.

Strategy of Appeals on Engagement

RQ4 asked whether the advertising message strategies in social media to be related to the engagement in terms of sharing ($M = 2643$, $SD = 85.45$), liking ($M = 1047.6$, $SD = 1804.1$), and commenting ($M = 78.78$, $SD = 244.6$). The message strategies were categorized as Entertainment message strategy ($M = 1.13$, $SD = .95$), Transactional message strategy ($M = .42$, $SD = .63$), and Informational message strategy ($M = .28$, $SD = .49$). Only Informational messages were negatively correlated to the number of comments ($r = -.109$, $p < .01$). In other words, when an alcohol ad had more informational messages, it had a smaller number of comments.

DISCUSSION

The current study sought to research alcohol-related social media advertisements across a variety of alcohol types, alcohol brands, and social media platforms. The advertisements were then compared to cross-examined with a variety of alcohol types, alcohol brands, and three social media platforms. Firstly, the sample profiles of each brand are notable. The likelihood of brands to post advertisements (84%) than corporate social responsibility-related posts (8%) shows that social media is advertisement-heavy, rather than an outlet for public relations/corporate social responsibility posts. Nearly all advertisements (99.2%) had a caption. The average number of words was 23, which is about the length of a sentence. That seems to be a good amount to grab the attention of the viewer, but not lose their interest in a paragraph. Other captions, primarily those listing a recipe, were significantly longer with more than a hundred words.

Advertising Appeals

Notable themes across all captions were “seasonal” (40%), “holiday” (32%), “taste” (27%), “recipe” (16%), and “joke/humor” (15%). Many themes that were discussed and criticized in the literature review for being particularly appealing to teens and young adults, such as “parties” (1.7%), “socializing” (5%), and “feeling good after drinking” (5%) were hardly found within captions. Most advertisements (84%) contained pictures or videos; insinuating that even many Twitter advertisements contained a picture or video. The majority of advertisements included pictures as opposed to videos. This could be partly because pictures are a cheaper alternative, more aesthetically pleasing, or convey the message in just one glance from the viewer that is scrolling through a feed, rather than taking a longer amount of the viewer’s time to demonstrate the message through a video. Notable themes across all pictures were “taste” (51%), “seasonal” (28%), and “occasion” (25%). Notable themes across videos were “taste” (48%), “seasonal” (33%), “holiday” (25%), and “occasion” (22%). While some of the most common appeals across captions and pictures/videos were the same, others were not and there was a difference in each of the appeals’ percentages for captions for pictures/videos. This shows that a caption does not necessarily have to have the same message in the caption as within the picture/video. A social media post could have a picture showing a sports game on a holiday but have a caption about the taste and flavor of the alcohol. One advertisement can convey a variety of themes and messages to its viewer through its caption and picture/video. A brand maximizes the messages that it conveys by having both a caption and one or more pictures/videos.

"Socializing" is one of the appeals that appeared more in pictures/videos than in captions, in about 12% of pictures and videos. Perhaps alcohol brands are trying to take a more subtle approach rather than appealing to teens by blatantly stating the theme. However, again many themes that were discussed and criticized in the literature review for being particularly appealing to teens and young adults, such as "parties," "celebrating," "getting drunk," and "feeling good after drinking" were hardly found within pictures and videos. This shows that alcohol brands primarily do not use the appeals that they used to. Brands may still be targeting young adults and teens; if so, they have taken a different approach and found less obvious strategies for doing so.

"Joke/humor" was a notably common appeal across captions, and also was used relatively frequently in pictures and videos. A vast majority of these jokes included memes, which is a very popular part of Generation Z culture; and perhaps, most likely more relatable to Generation Z than any other age group. Flavors, which are included in the "taste" appeal, may also be a way to target a younger generation. Flavors are found to be more appealing to a younger generation; as youth and young people prefer sweet flavors (Hoffman *et al.*, 2016). Many alcohol brands have flavors such as chocolate, cake, mango, tropical, etc. "Taste" was the most popular appeal in pictures and videos, and one of the third most popular appeals in captions; a caption/picture/video with flavors mentioned primarily made up the "taste" category. "Seasonal" and "holiday" appeals were also very popular across captions, pictures, and videos. In some states, alcohol advertisements with Santa are banned for creating an association between a childhood theme and alcohol. Advertisements with the Easter Bunny, Halloween candy/costumes, or other holiday appeals have no restrictions and were widely seen in alcohol social media advertisements. One *Coors Light* advertisement had a cute, animated snowman singing and playing the piano, the advertisement was kid-friendly. These significant themes may be a new way that targets a younger audience.

Elaboration Likelihood Model

As discussed in the literature review, the elaboration likelihood model or ELM provides a framework for persuasion and attitude change that includes two routes: the central route and the peripheral route. The central route involves high elaboration and issue-relevant thinking, and the peripheral route involves less elaboration as a person's attitudes are formed based on relatively simple cues (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). For the current study, themes of informational message strategies are central routes, and themes of transactional/entertainment message strategies are peripheral routes. The central route appeals were not as frequently used in the advertisements as the peripheral route appeals were. The only central route appeal that was used frequently was "recipe." Peripheral route appeals such as "seasonal," "holiday," "joke/humor" were used more frequently. This may be because young people might be only moderately interested in drinking, yet certain factors acting as peripheral cues that younger people are interested in such as memes or sweet flavors could cause young people to engage in the central route processing. Young people who are only moderately interested in messages about drinking may be more likely to deeply process a message with a meme attached or pictures of intriguing flavors.

Message Strategies: Character Length

Instagram captions had the longest mean word count, while Twitter had the shortest. Twitter is known for being primarily words rather than pictures; however, many Tweets were just short blurbs. Instagram has a longer number of allowed characters than Twitter, which has a maximum of only 280

characters. Instagram is better for posting recipes, which requires a higher character word count than Twitter offers and is a notably popular theme in captions. Vodka brands had a higher word count than all other brands; vodka brands also posted recipes more frequently than all other brands. *Tito's* had a higher word count than the other vodka brands and was also the brand that posted the most recipes. Beer brands have little need to post any recipes, as they are more so ready-to-drink and are not used in many recipes, which may be why their word count was significantly lower. Each brand has different message strategies in terms of length. Among 12 brands, *Tito's* social media ads are much lengthier than other brands and *Miller Lite* has the shortest. Message strategies in terms of length were different across the type of alcoholic beverages. Vodka captions tended to be very long compared to beer and whiskey, making the difference significant.

Appeals and Types/Brands of Alcohol

Certain types of alcohol used certain themes more than other types. Similar to the “recipe” appeal, the “taste” theme was not found in beer videos; however, this appeal was found in 90% of seltzer videos. This makes sense, as most beers do not have many flavors to advertise; however, all seltzers have many different flavors as that is one of the seltzers’ most appealing features. Lots of themes that were popular for specific alcohol types/brands across captions were also similar across pictures and videos. For example, “Joke/humor” appeared in around the same number of beer captions as it did in the pictures. However, as discussed before, this is not true for all themes as “socializing” appeared more in pictures/videos than in captions.

Even within the same type of alcohol, many brands varied in popular themes. For example, “seasonal” was a very popular theme across captions, pictures, and videos. However, certain brands preferred to use this theme as *Coors Light* and *Tito's* used this theme significantly more in captions compared to other brands. For videos, *Tito's* used the “taste” theme significantly more than *Smirnoff* and *New Amsterdam*, *Bon & Viv* used the “taste” theme significantly more than *White Claw* and *Truly*, and *Jack Daniels* used the “taste” theme significantly more than *Crown Royal* and *Jim Beam*.

Many brands differed in appeals because of their brand image and identity. The “adventure” appeal was used far more by *White Claw* than any other brand. *White Claw's* brand is based on adventure, its logo is a wave, and its website includes statements such as “discover pure refreshment” that capture the theme. Similarly, *Coors Light's* slogan is “made to chill,” and had more “relaxing” themes in pictures than any other brand (n = 5, 33%), and 43% of *Coors Light* videos also had this theme (n = 6). *Bon & Viv's* slogan is “zero sugar, great taste,” and was one of only two brands to use the “healthy” appeal in captions.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, alcohol consumption in the United States has increased (Barbosa *et al.*, 2020). This is why a “Covid” category was included in the coding key. The Covid-19 theme was also very scarcely used across captions, videos, and pictures. As mentioned earlier, *Jim Beam* was the only brand to include a “Covid” message. Drinking often takes place in a social setting such as a party or a bar, but the number of warnings or messages about social distancing was extremely low. Additionally, Mintel (2020) found that Covid-19 messaging is generally welcomed within advertisements, and consumers appreciate learning about how companies have helped out during these tough times and are more willing to do business with them later. However, alcohol brands hardly addressed the pandemic; perhaps these alcohol companies want to reassure their customers and create a sense of normalcy so that their sales are not affected.

Study Limitations and Future Research

Some limitations of the study include the time of year it was performed in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic and "seasonal" and "holiday" themes. Further research should be performed in the future, perhaps in summer months, and include other types/brands such as tequila and wine. Additionally, Snapchat could be added as a platform to study. An experiment should be conducted to find if the common themes of "taste," "seasonal," "holiday," and "joke/humor" significantly appeal to young adults and teenagers. It would be useful in determining the correlation between advertisements and appeal to young people. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, alcohol consumption in the United States has increased, social media use has increased, and underage drinking has likely increased; therefore, it is important that more research is conducted to better understand how these new popular themes are affecting young people.

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