Alcohol Advertising on Social Media:
What You Need to Know

With stricter advertising policies and evolving customer preferences for more premium, healthy, and low-calorie drink options, alcohol brands need to keep up with changing trends to ensure their advertising stays relevant.

We analyzed over 10,300 comments from 26 alcohol ads on social media to understand what brands in this space can learn.

Highlights

For the alcohol category, positive experiences with the product itself are what drives the overwhelming majority of positive comments on brands' ads.

Negative comments are focused on a mixture of products perceived to be poor quality and advertising creative that is perceived as inappropriate (e.g. advertising to those below legal age).

We observed significant customer confusion over ingredients used in the ads that were mistaken for / associated with illicit substances.

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Introduction

The alcoholic beverage market was valued at $1,344 billion in 2015, and is projected to reach $1,594 billion by 2022, growing at a CAGR of 2.1% from 2016 to 2022, according to Allied Market Research. The key region accounting for this growth is Asia-Pacific, with emerging countries, like India, China, Indonesia, and Singapore making up the most demand in both volume and value terms.

Premiumization, rising health concerns leading to a preference for lower-calorie alcoholic drinks, and growing acceptance of non-alcoholic beers are some of the key factors driving market growth. Sparkling wine and other similarly premium drinks have enjoyed a resurgence in popularity among the masses, while low-calorie alternatives along with alcohol-free beers are catering to more casual consumers.

Alcohol advertising has long been heavily regulated, with many countries restricting alcohol ads to adults over a certain age or banning its advertising completely. However, for a period of time social media was a grey zone, with alcohol brands being able to post liberally across social platforms. This has quickly changed.

Facebook now has in place advertising policies that require alcohol advertisers to comply with local laws in different jurisdictions. It is also trialing a new feature that will allow users to opt-out of seeing any alcohol advertisements. This move by Facebook is likely preemptive of the fact that more and more countries, starting with Europe, are starting to enforce stringent regulations about alcohol advertising online. In the U.S., the advertising of alcohol is largely self-regulated by the three major industry bodies: the Beer Institute, the Distilled Spirits Council, and the Wine Institute. For brands running ad campaigns targeting different audiences across different geographical zones, each with its own advertising laws, it is key to err on the side of caution.

Alcohol brands need to ensure they keep themselves updated on the ever-evolving social media landscape and policies around the advertising of alcohol in order to preserve brand reputation. Ads that are seen as distasteful or inappropriate may lead to negative associations with the brand or even put the brand at risk of complaints filed to regulatory or self-regulatory bodies.

The Analysis

We recently analyzed over **10,300 comments** across 26 ads from 16 alcohol beverage brands to see what we can learn from consumer engagement on these ads' comment feeds. Listening and analyzing in order to derive meaningful insights is our specialty at BrandBastion, and we find there is often a treasure trove of valuable lessons for brands who lean in to listen.

Twelve of the ads had a "Learn More" call-to-action leading the viewer to product pages with more information when clicked on. One had a "Watch More" CTA linking to a longer video, and one had a "Buy Now" CTA linking to an e-commerce page. Twelve ads had no CTAs used at all.

Note: These ads were created between November 2016 and May 2018. All comments referred to are still live and visible at the time of publishing this report.

Our technology uses neural networks, natural language processing and machine learning for content processing. Our content processing system processes all comments and takes actions based on pre-configured guidelines. Our trained teams of quality assurance managers and content processing specialists oversee the processes ensuring we have the highest level of accuracy.
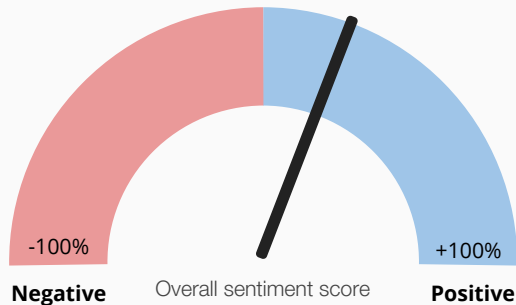
Limitations:

- This analysis mainly focuses on the most popular alcohol brands
- We analyzed only publicly visible comments
- Topics identified are based on current context and can change over time

Want a similar analysis like this for your brand's campaigns?

Click Here

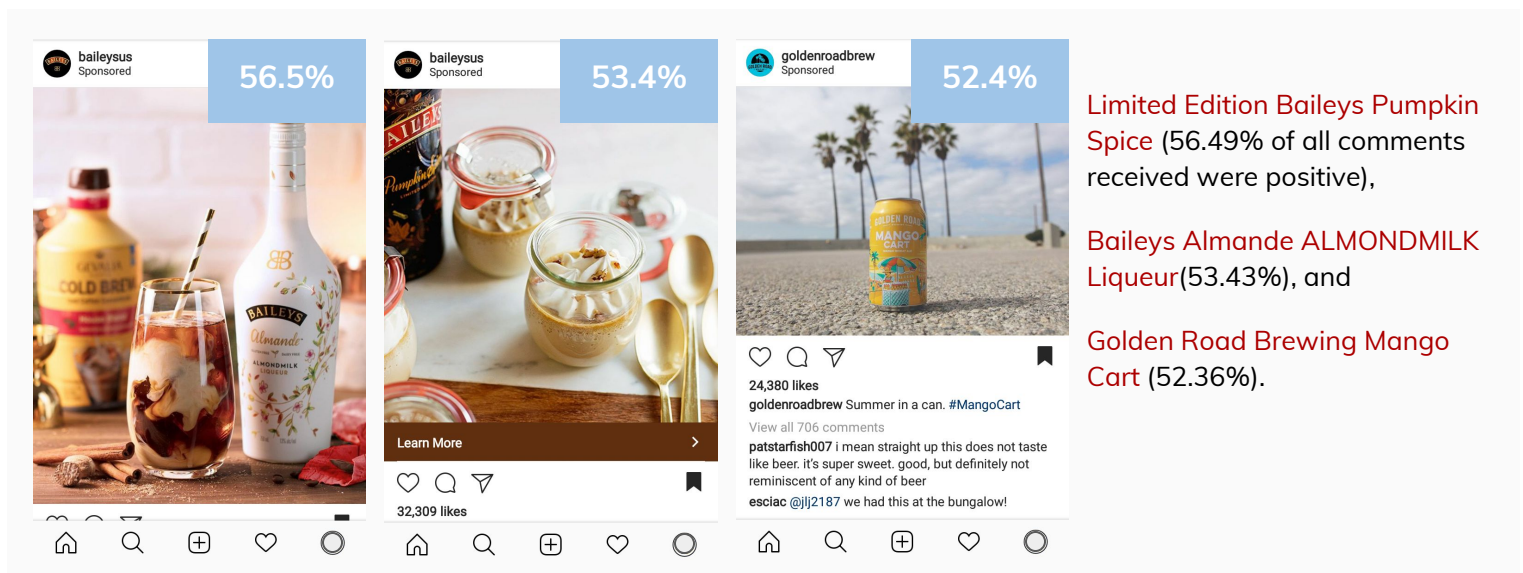Or contact us at sayhello@brandbastion.com

Top 3 Ads With Most Positive Comments

Out of 10,334 comments, **3,187** (30.84%) were of positive sentiment, compared to **780** (7.55%) that were of negative sentiment.

On average, 32.80% of all comments received per ad were positive.

In terms of individual ads, the top 3 ads with the highest percentage of positive comments were for the:

56.5%

53.4%

52.4%

Limited Edition Baileys Pumpkin Spice (56.49% of all comments received were positive),

Baileys Almande ALMONDMILK Liqueur(53.43%), and

**Golden Road Brewing Mango Cart** (52.36%).

The positive comments for all three brands' ads were predominantly about the product itself. An overwhelming majority of these comments consisted of users tagging their friends and partners recommending them to try out the product being advertised, or telling their friends "I want to try this!"

People also discussed getting the products for specific occasions, including weddings, parties, and casual get-togethers. A small handful of positive comments were related to the ad creative, including the styling and how the video ads showcased specific ingredients like grapefruit and hops used in the products.

TAKEAWAY #1: Happy customers increase an ad's reach

Having a great product and keeping customers satisfied increases the ROI of your social spend and extends the reach of campaigns, as users spread the ad's reach organically by tagging their friends in the comments feed and recommending them to try the product.

Top 3 Ads With Most Negative Comments

52.0%

37.0%

31.3%

Bud Light   **Michelob ULTRA**   **Stella Artois**
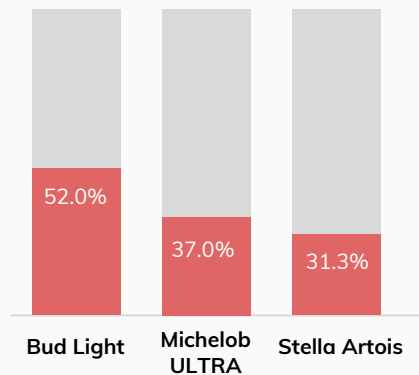
On average, 14.34% of all comments received per ad were negative. In terms of individual ads, the top 3 ads with the highest percentage of negative comments were for Bud Light's "Roaring Conversations" (52.00%), Michelob ULTRA's TCSNYC Marathon (37.04%), and Stella Artois' partnership with Water.org (31.25%).

For the Bud Light ad, the majority of negative comments were related to the product itself, with many users criticizing its taste.

Conversely, in the Michelob ULTRA ad, the negative comments were largely around the connoted association between beating cancer and drinking beer in the ad, with many finding the ad distasteful (which is valuable creative feedback for Michelob ULTRA's marketing team!).

On Stella Artois' ad, however, the comments took on a different nature. American users criticized the decision to give water "to the world" while Flint, Michigan is still suffering from the ongoing Flint Water Crisis, which began in 2014. Whether triggered by the ad creative, the product, or ongoing social issues affecting perception of the ad's content, all of these negative comments are visible to everyone who sees the ad and become part of the ad itself. These negative associations have the potential to turn potential customers off the products advertised, and serves as valuable consumer feedback for marketing teams.

Here's a sampling of some of the comments that these three brands received:

Bud Light

> Why aren't they throwing that crap beer in the fire? Lol

Michelob ULTRA

> One way to reduce your risk of breast cancer: Reduce your alcohol intake or not drink at all. Nice try, michelob. 🗣

Stella Artois

> How about helping people in Flint who still don't have access to clean water?

TAKEAWAY #2: Listen to what your customers have to say

The feedback from the comments thread contains valuable tips for future improvement and helps you spot issues with consumer perceptions about ads that you may not otherwise notice. From Vinebox's Summer Wine ad where people confused the shot samples with lip gloss or roll-on perfume, to criticism about Michelob ULTRA's ad which was perceived as associating fighting cancer with drinking beer, to scrutiny of Stella Artois' social mission to "give water to the world" while Flint, Michigan still suffers from an ongoing water crisis - reactions like these provide important feedback for brands.

Ads With The Most Engagement

Overall, Jameson's IPA Edition ad garnered the most engagement with 3,886 comments and Samuel Adams' "Fill Your Glass" the least with only 6 comments. (Note: This does not take into account the varying ad spend in order to achieve such engagement levels.)

The ad for Jameson's IPA was a video ad introducing "the newest member of the Jameson family". 10.16% of all 3,886 comments were of negative sentiment, while 28.80% were of positive sentiment.

A significant number of comments were positive about the product itself, with users commenting on how good it tastes or leaving their appreciation for the recipe and flavor combination featured in the ad. Many users tagged their friends in the comments to recommend that they try the product out.

On the other hand, the negative comments mostly consisted of comments about the ad creative, which showed a grapefruit being cut with a knife on a slate board - driving users to leave comments like:

> Reported this ad for being offensive. You don't cut fruits like that. 🔪🔪🔪🔪🔪

> Who cuts a grapefruit like that? That's not how you cut a wedge #KnifeSkills

> I've never felt more uncomfortable watching someone cut fruit. Poor knife. No on cuts fruit like this.

A sizable proportion of negative comments were also related to the appropriateness of the ad, such as:

> Hey back 3 years ago when I used to be a raging alcoholic that was my favorite drink! I wish they'd stop sending me these ads.

> Im underage stop trying to make me a criminal

> I'm in recovery, please do not advertise to me @jameson_us

TAKEAWAY #3: Ensure you are advertising to the right audience.

In the U.S., while the Distilled Spirits Council's Code of Conduct dictates that "digital marketing communications should be placed only in media where at least 71.6% of the audience is reasonably expected to be of the legal purchase age", in other countries, this age may vary or be older in other countries. Facebook's Audience Targeting tools allows you to select the right audiences so you don't violate these regulations.

Other types of engagement

Confused consumers

In addition to positive and negative sentiment, we looked at which ads had the most customer inquiries in the ad comments. We found that the Jameson Whiskey IPA ad had the largest number (123 comments) of such comments. The questions were driven by confusion about the ad creative itself, which featured hops. Many users mistakenly confused the hops for marijuana, leaving comments like:

> So you're just gonna confidently cut a grapefruit incorrectly then throw marijuana at it?

> What's that that they sprinkled by that drink at the end? Some marijuana? I'm in!

> Did he just throw some weed nuggets

Meanwhile, on Vinebox's Summer Wine ad, people were also confused by the ad creative, which featured shot samplers in long, thing tubes, which many users mistook for lip gloss or perfume products.

Harmful comments

Aside from measuring sentiment and customer queries, we found that on average, 4.01% of all comments in the ads analyzed contained a threat such as competitor mentions, discriminatory comments, extreme profanity, criminal use of drugs or intoxicants, sexual or toilet humor, all of which could be associated with the brand being advertised. The ads also contained comments containing industry-specific threats, such as regulatory issues related to underage drinking.

Post issues

> I'd love the recipe! The link is not working.

> Link not working?

> I can't see the pic for some reason smh

Discrimination

> Why is there fags in the ad tho?

> Running for fun? I've never heard anything any more gay

Sexual/Toilet

> I'll show you my diddly diddly for $5

> Stayeth tuned for these nuts on your chin, that is what I'll be doing instead of drinking this horrid horse piss.

TAKEAWAY #4: Listen and moderate actively

Active social listening and moderation can significantly reduce the volume of competitor promotions, toilet humor, spam, brand attacks, and other types of harmful comments. In addition, great customer feedback can be found in the comments and can help you clarify your messaging, improve your creative, or discover new product ideas.

Recap of takeaways

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Platforms covered:

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