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# ***'Pretty in Pink' and 'Girl Power': An analysis of the targeting and representation of women in alcohol brand marketing on Facebook and Instagram***

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## **Abstract**

**Background:** Alcohol marketing helps shape how gender roles and relations are understood, and the gendered nature of drinking learned. In recent years, changes in how women are presented and addressed in marketing, including alcohol marketing, have been observed. This reflects the shifting social, political and regulatory context, in which increased attention has been given to gender inequality and the damaging impact of gender stereotypes. Research is yet to explore the gendered nature of alcohol marketing within this contemporary context.

**Methods:** A quantitative content and qualitative thematic analysis of alcohol marketing posts (N=2600) by 20 alcohol brands on Facebook and Instagram pages over an 18 month period (1<sup>st</sup> January 2019-30<sup>th</sup> June 2020) was conducted. Marketing strategies were identified, and the way in which posts targeted, represented and engaged women analysed.

**Findings:** New (e.g. 'influencer' collaborations) and established (e.g. competitions) strategies being used to target both women and men. Drinking was presented as a feminine practice and as an important component of 'doing' a combination of traditional, post-feminist and feminist femininities. Women were assigned a range of gender roles that acknowledged their individual pleasures and achievements, and traditional gender roles and stereotypes were both reinforced and rejected to promote alcohol use. An important move away from sexualising and demeaning women to the appropriation of feminist and equality messages was observed, which may appeal to a wider range of women, including those embracing feminist identities.

**Conclusion:** Alcohol brand marketing encourages alcohol use to women through both perpetuating and challenging gender stereotypes. Claims by brands of a commitment to equality are at odds with the harms related to alcohol consumption that contribute to the widening of health and social inequalities. It is important that future work on women's drinking

and alcohol marketing is situated within the shifting social-political climate in which traditional, post-feminist and new fourth wave feminist rhetoric and femininities co-exist.

**Key words:** public health, substance abuse, alcohol, drinking, gender, advertising, women, post feminism, feminism.

## **Introduction**

Alcohol brands, drinking practices, intoxication and the night time economy (NTE) are important sites of consumption that provide a means for individuals to forge, signal and perform feminine and masculine identities (Atkinson et al., 2012; De Visser & McDonnell, 2012; Lennox et al., 2018; Nicholls, 2019). Alcohol marketing, including on social media, not only influences alcohol-related attitudes and behaviours, but helps shape how gender identities are constructed and the gendered nature of drinking learned (Alhabash et al., 2015; Atkinson et al., 2021; 2016; 2019; Carah and Brodmerkel 2021; Jernigan et al., 2017; Lennox et al., 2018; Nicholls, 2019; Smith and Foxcroft, 2009). Beyond its influence on drinking practice, it reflects and impacts how women are viewed, positioned and treated within society (Atkinson et al., 2019, Hall and Kappel, 2018; Törrönen, and Rolando, 2017). Exploring the use of gendered targeting and messaging, and the construction of femininities and gender relations in alcohol marketing, is thus crucial when considering the influence marketing has on drinking practices and understandings of gender.

In recent years, changes in how women are presented and addressed in alcohol marketing have been observed, but not systematically analysed (Atkinson et al., 2019). Such changes reflect the shifting social, political and regulatory context, in which increased attention has been given to gender inequality and the damaging impact of gender stereotypes (ASA, 2018; Gill, 2015; Rivers, 2017). Research on alcohol marketing must explore both change and continuation in how alcohol brands target, represent and engage women, and the femininities and gender constructions drawn upon to encourage alcohol use, whilst potentially perpetuating and challenging gender stereotypes. The affordances social media platforms provide for the continuous development of innovative and engagement marketing strategies, and how these are gendered in nature, is another important consideration (Atkinson and Sumnall, 2016; Alhabash et al., 2015; Jernigan et al., 2017; Room and O'Brien, 2021; Winpenny et al. 2014). For example, social media influencers (brand-sponsored and vocational online stars who maintain a large social media following (Abidin, 2018)) provide indirect and mediated communication between marketers, brands and followers, and may exert stronger influence on consumers than traditional forms of marketing, through creating intimacy, relatability and trust (Abidin 2018; Carah and Brodmerkel, 2021; Yuan and Lou,

2020). This paper considers such developments and extends existing empirical knowledge and theory, by exploring the extent of gendered alcohol marketing on Facebook and Instagram over an 18 month period by 20 brands popular with women and men.

### ***Women, empowerment and alcohol***

Whilst alcohol use and related harms are more prevalent among men, a narrowing of the gender gap has been observed in recent years in countries such as the UK (NHS Digital, 2019; ONS, 2018; 2020; 2021; Slade et al., 2016). This convergence reflects the shifting social positions of women (i.e. increased economic independence; participation in education, work and public space); the increased affordability of alcohol; the restructuring of the UK night time environment (NTE) towards deregulation and feminisation; and gender-segmented alcohol marketing (Atkinson et al., 2019; Griffin et al., 2013; Plant, 2008). Women are now active participants in the NTE and like men, participate in a culture of drinking and intoxication in the pursuit of group belonging, bonding and friendship fun (Atkinson & Sumnall, 2016; Griffin et al., 2013; Nicholls, 2019).

Neoliberalism, an ideology characterised by capitalism and the rolling back of the state, is the backdrop against which women participate in drinking cultures (Griffin, 2013; Nicholls, 2019). Within this political and economic regime, consumption becomes a key marker of identity making alongside discourses of individualism, choice and responsibility (Harvey, 2015, Nicholls, 2019). Individuals construct and display an authentic self through consumption-based practices, self-surveillance and self-discipline (Giddens 1991; Gill, 2016; Harvey, 2005; Nicholls 2019). These discourses overlap and entangle with those of post-feminism (see Gill's (2016) discussion of post-feminism as a gendered neo-liberalism), with notions of autonomy, agency and independence supposedly positioning women as empowered subjects with the freedom and purchasing power to partake in market based practices, including drinking, sexual expression and the NTE (Griffin et al., 2012; Nicholls, 2019).

These opportunities have led to the assumption that women can now '*have it all*' (i.e. work, relationships, leisure, pleasure, sexual freedoms), and have provided a justification for the rejection of feminism as outdated and unneeded (McRobbie, 2009). Indeed, past research has found a narrative of assumed empowerment but lack of feminist discourse within young women's accounts of drinking (Atkinson and Sumnall, 2016; Griffin et al., 2013; but see Gunby et al., 2019 for an exception). Yet, with femininity being positioned as a bodily property and performance that requires consumption, individualism, and self-discipline, women are judged for making the 'right' or 'wrong' consumer choices (Gill, 2017; Griffin et al., 2013; Nicholls, 2019). As such, they manage and negotiate a complex climate of contradictions within their

drinking-related practice, which results from the tensions that exist between the demands of traditional 'respectable' femininity, and the new found freedoms and empowerment that are said to be afforded by post-feminist femininities (Griffin et al., 2013; Nicholls, 2019; Gunby, 2019). Thus, drinking-related practice provides a way for women 'to do gender' in ways that both challenge and reproduce the expectations inherent in normative constructions of traditional femininity (Atkinson et al., 2012; de Visser & McDonnell, 2012; Griffin et al., 2012; Measham 2002).

Historically, women who drink have been stigmatised, and portrayed as lacking femininity, as sexually promiscuous, out of control and neglectful of traditional roles and virtues (e.g. nurturing/carers, domestic, passive, submissive, self-disciplined) (Day et al. 2007; Emslie et al., 2012; Griffin et al., 2013; Jackson and Tinkler, 2009; Lyons and Willott, 2008). Such attitudes remain, particularly towards working class women (Griffin et al., 2012; Nicholls, 2019). However, within a supposed 'post-feminist' society in which gender equality is taken as given, women's drinking, participation in public drinking spaces and the performance of hyper-sexual or 'girly' femininity in the NTE, have been interpreted as social progress and as a right to choose, express and enjoy within discourses of individualism, choice and empowerment (Gill, 2008; Gill and Scharff, 2013; Griffin et al., 2012; Nicholls, 2020). However, with a resurgence of feminist thinking in recent years, labelled contemporary or 'fourth wave' feminism, increased awareness and concern has been given to the inequalities women experience in their day to day lives (Gill, 2016; McRobbie, 2020; Retallack et al., 2016; Rivers, 2017; Schraff, 2020).

The gender inequalities women experience include those at play in the NTE such as unwanted sexual attention, the harm from alcohol use by men through associations with intimate partner violence and sexual violence, and the problematic ways that women (who drink) are depicted in the media and (alcohol) marketing (Abbey et al., 2004; ASA, 2019; Gunby et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2019; Kavanaugh, 2013). Increased attention has also focused on how women increasingly experience the negative health impacts of alcohol use that were once predominantly experienced by men, and the rise in health harms that disproportionately affect women such as breast cancer (Choi et al., 2018; Fitzgerald et al., 2016; Key et al., 2006; ONS, 2020; 2021; Plant, 2008; Slade et al., 2016; Wilsnack and Wilsnack 1997; 2000). The existence of such inequalities alongside messages of empowerment highlights the mixed and contradictory messages women receive in relation to their drinking, and challenges the suggestion that women's participation in drinking cultures signifies gender equality. Moreover, increased attention aimed at addressing gender inequality, suggests that feminist identities are no longer repudiated but considered desirable, particularly by young women, which has not gone unnoticed by marketers (Gill, 2016).

## ***Post feminism and alcohol marketing***

It is against this gendered neoliberal backdrop that marketing, which has become one of the main purveyors of women's freedom and empowerment, should be studied (Gill, 2007; 2016). Marketing targets women as active consumers with post-feminist narratives of empowerment through pleasure, consumption, choice; individual achievement and confidence; female friendship; (hetero)sexual assertiveness; the commodification of appearance; and the celebration of traditional stereotypes associated with 'girliness' (e.g. makeup, the colour pink, shopping) (Gill, 2008; Gill and Scharff, 2013; McRobbie, 2007). A shift from the objectification of women's bodies to 'subjectification' or self-sexualising, as a form of empowerment, has also been observed in the media landscape from the mid-2000s (Gill, 2007; Rogan et al., 2016; Törrönen, 2014). Such discourses feature within alcohol brand marketing, alongside traditional gender roles and stereotypes, to segment the market, attract male and female consumers, and increase sales (e.g. Atkinson et al., 2012; 2016; Hastings, et al., 2010; Purves et al., 2014; 2018; Törrönen, 2011; 2014). Traditionally, women were represented in alcohol marketing to a lesser extent than men, as submissive and domestic, as serving the needs of others (e.g. men), and as sexual objects in an attempt to gain a greater share of the heterosexual male market (Atkinson et al., 2019; Friedman et al., 2018; Hall and Kappel, 2018; Marsteller and Karnchanapee, 1980). As a reflection of post-feminism and the infiltration of neo-liberalism in all aspects of everyday life, women's own time and pleasures are now acknowledged independently of men and the family, and they are positioned as active and empowered consumers (Beccaria et al., 2018; Månsson, 2012; Törrönen, 2011; 2014; 2015; Törrönen and Simonen, 2015; Törrönen and Rolando, 2017).

In addition to influencing alcohol-related attitudes and behaviours (Jernigan et al., 2017), alcohol marketing helps shape how feminine identities are constructed, and the social roles women are prescribed (Atkinson et al., 2019, Hall and Kappel, 2018). For example, it is suggested that the sexualisation of women in alcohol marketing creates a climate that tolerates sexist behaviour (e.g. unwanted sexual attention), which may undermine campaigns aimed at addressing gender inequality, including in the NTE (Gunby et al., 2016; Hall and Kappel, 2018; et al., 2013; Rogan et al., 2016; Sirr, 2015; Towns, 2012). Importantly, the regulation of (alcohol) marketing in the UK now aims to prohibit content that causes offence in relation '*to race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability or age*' and the use of '*gender stereotypes that are likely to cause harm, or serious or widespread offence*' (ASA, 2019). '*Sexualised imagery*' should not be used '*if this is irrelevant to the product*', women and men should not be sexualised and objectified, and people should not be '*mock[ed]... for not conforming to gender stereotypes*' (ASA, 2019). Despite some research exploring the

gendered nature of alcohol brand marketing (e.g. Atkinson et al., 2016; Griffin et al., 2018; Rogan et al., 2016), it has not been studied within the contemporary context in which society has supposedly become more feminist and gender aware (e.g. the visibility of the 2016 #Metoo movement) (Rivers, 2017). The role of social media in providing a platform through which brands are marketed, femininities performed, and feminism organised and commodified, is another important consideration for research exploring the contemporary nature of alcohol marketing (Banet-Wiesir, 2018; Gill, 2016; Rivers, 2017).

Social media channels such as Facebook and Instagram form an important aspect of the alcohol industry's multi-platform marketing strategies and have been shown to influence consumer-drinking behaviour (Alhabash et al., 2015; Jernigan et al., 2017; Room and O'Brien, 2021; Winpenny et al. 2014). They are used by alcohol marketers to communicate with consumers, tap into existing identities and communities (including those of consumers and influencers) and increase brand salience; encourage engagement and sales, and collect consumer data through a number of creative strategies (Atkinson et al., 2016; Banet-Weiser and Lapsanky, 2008; 2012; Critchlow et al., 2015; 2019). Importantly, these data-driven activities (Carah and Brodmerkel, 2021) provide a means of collecting and utilising data on consumer preferences and online behaviours, which are likely to differ by gender, including through third-party data sets and algorithmic models. They also allow marketers to optimise the targeting of ads and integrate them with the purchase decisions of sub groups of consumers, including women. Given the importance of these platforms to the alcohol marketing mix, the gaps in research identified, and the shifting social, political and regulatory context in which marketing is created, this paper presents an analysis of the extent and nature of gendered alcohol marketing content on Facebook and Instagram by 20 brands over an 18 month period, paying particular attention to how women were targeted, represented and engaged to encourage alcohol use.

## **Methods**

A mixed methods quantitative content and qualitative thematic analysis of marketing posts on Facebook and Instagram for 20 alcohol brands (see supplementary table) was conducted over an 18-month period (1<sup>st</sup> January 2019 and 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020). Brand selection was based on a survey of preferences among people living in one area of the North West of England (N=196), YouGov (2020) data on the most popular alcohol brands among the UK population, and the number of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter followers for these brands. Brands that scored high in each dataset from different beverage categories (e.g. beer, wine, spirits, cider) were selected. Brands had fewer Twitter followers, and so Facebook and Instagram posts were

studied. A combination of United Kingdom and global brand Facebook and Instagram profiles were analysed. Identical posts that were posted on both platforms were merged and included in the sample as one unit of analysis, with interaction data (i.e. number of 'Likes', 'Shares', and comments) for the same post on each platform being recorded separately.

Brand posts were extracted using Crowdtangle, which scrapes all textual, visual and interaction data for social media posts. After duplicates were removed, 2600 posts were archived, 2250 (86.5%) of which were coded as being gendered. Certain drink beverages and brands are associated and consumed by particular genders, and brands tend to target one gender to a greater extent than others. For example, based on gender differences in the consumption of different beverage categories (ONS, 2018), and data on the popularity of certain brands among the UK population (YouGov, 2021a;b;c;d), it could be suggested, for example, that wine brands, and in turn, their social media posts target women, and beer brands, men. However, whilst some brands may predominantly target one gender, they also target new markets. For example, beer brands have recently attempted to gain a greater share of the female market (Smithers, 2019). Thus, whilst we were interested in whether there were differences in the use of marketing strategies between beverage types as an indicator of gendered targeting (see Table 3), we were also interested in the gendered content and connotations within each individual post, particularly posts related to women. For example, the use of gendered language (e.g. '*girls*', '*ladies*'), the visual depiction of different genders, the use of gender stereotypes and societal constructions of masculinity and femininity (e.g. associations between sport and masculinity; appearance and femininity), and the use of gendered aesthetics such as pinkness and floral imagery to imply femininity. Gendered content therefore refers to the target audience of the brand, but also the nature of the post. Text and images that were specific to one gender were included, but also posts that depicted gender relations, for example images of men and women drinking together.

A quantitative coding of textual and visual content was systematically conducted using a coding frame incorporating a combination of pre-determined (based on previous research which has coded both textual and visual social media posts by alcohol brands e.g. Atkinson et al., 2016; Carah, 2014; Patterson et al., 2016; Nicholls, 2012) and emerging codes. This assessed the types of strategies (e.g. engagement marketing such as competitions, influencer collaborations) used to target different genders based on the brand's predominant target audience and popularity of the brand among men and women (YouGov, 2021). This involved coding textual and visual content into content categories (Chen et al., 2021). The coding frame was incorporated into an Excel sheet alongside the cleaned data, with a description of each



code in an additional sheet for reference. Each post was viewed using the scraped live links, and applied (indicating yes or no) to the text and image. For example, posts were coded as to whether they textually or visually referred to men and/or women and in what contexts (e.g. image of group or alone drinking), references to seasons, weather, and the time of day (e.g. reference to '*the sun being out*', images of people drinking whilst sun bathing) and whether posts sexualised those depicted. Each post was assessed against the ASA regulatory codes related to sex and gender. It is important to note that the data collection period partly included the COVID-19 pandemic, and marketers adapted their strategies to the changing context of drinking to within the home (Atkinson et al., 2021; Martino, 2021).

A qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2014; Chen et al., 2021) was then conducted to explore the latent messages in both the textual and visual content that was assessed as targeting and/or depicting women. The qualitative analysis excluded posts which were assessed as targeting men that did not refer (in text) to or include images of women. For example, images of men drinking together watching football whilst drinking beer were excluded, but images of women drinking beer, including in the presence of men, were. This resulted in a total of 1543 posts which were used in the qualitative analysis. The text for each post with a link to the associated image was exported into NVivo 12. A secondary close reading and viewing of both the text and image developed overarching and broader themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2014). The analysis was guided by the questions 'How are women targeted?' 'How are women, femininities and gender relations represented?' and 'What roles are women assigned?' Notes were taken on the underlying meanings of the post, and examples that could be drawn on when presenting each theme identified. We draw on textual examples when presenting the results, as well as commentary on the depiction of women in the imagery, and the use of particular feminine visual aesthetics.

An overview of the quantitative analysis of gendered posts (N=2250) is presented to highlight the extent of gendered marketing content posted by different beverage categories popular with men and women. The marketing strategies used to target them, and the differing contexts of alcohol use between women and men are presented for comparative reasons. A qualitative analysis of posts that targeted and/or represented women (n=1543) is then presented in six overarching themes. These are critically discussed to explore how femininities were constructed and what gender roles and stereotypes women were assigned to promote alcohol use and engage consumers in marketing content. We draw on illustrative examples when presenting each theme, as well as examples of quantitative coding that fit within each theme and links to example brand posts (see Supplementary material). Examples of engagement strategies used to encourage women to interact with brand posts are also provided.

## Findings

### **Quantitative content analysis (N=2250)**

#### *Common marketing strategies and content reach*

A total of 2600 individual posts on Facebook and Instagram were published by the 20 brands during the data collection period. Of these, 87% (N=2250) were assessed as being gendered in nature. An analysis of this sample found that all brands posted gendered content (see Supplementary Table 1), and that 59% (n=1543) of posts targeted and/or represented women. Similar established and newer marketing strategies (Atkinson et al., 2017) were used regardless of their target audience (see Supplementary Table 2). For example, seasonal/weather references; day of the week and time of day associations; real-world 'tie-ins' such as the sponsorship of music events; drink recipes and engagement techniques such as encouraging followers to comment and tag friends in posts. Other than beer brands that were more likely to ask questions to instigate audience interaction, there were no striking differences between the use of marketing strategies between beverage categories, suggesting brands that predominantly target men and women use similar techniques (see Table 3). In some cases, the nature of these strategies differed. For example, the content of time of day marketing was gendered, with female targeted brands using the terms '*wine time*', '*wine o'clock*'<sup>1</sup> and '*gin o'clock*', terms commonly used by women (Dann, 2020), to encourage alcohol use. Similar terms were used by beer brands such as BrewDog, a brand with a masculine aesthetic (Land et al., 2018; YouGov, 2021), who used the term '*Punk o'clock*' to promote the consumption of their product Punk IPA.

Brands also endorsed a number of social causes such as LGBTQ+ activism, gender and racial equality, and collaborated with celebrities and influencers in gendered ways. For example, wine brands collaborated with female fashion influencers, whereas beer brands collaborated with male craft beer bloggers. Such partnerships, which involved brands tagging collaborators in their posts, allowed brands to reach a wider audience via celebrity/influencer accounts. The accounts tagged had a combined reach of 68,234,559 social media users. All beverage categories and brands used competitions, but whilst wine brands tended to offer prizes such as pink products, makeup and fashion events, beer brands offered products and attendance at sporting events. The neo-liberal notion of responsible drinking (n=183) and the Drinkaware (an industry aligned charity) website (n=175) were promoted in 7% of the whole sample, by brands that targeted both men and women. Seasonal and weather associations and posts referring to product availability received the most interactions (likes, comments,

shares) (see Supplementary Table 2). Large numbers of followers were interacting with posts, with 2,140,628 likes across the two platforms (Facebook 1,440,824; Instagram 699,804), 347,811 comments (Facebook 324,478; Instagram 23,333), 75,979,014 video views (Facebook 72,043,977; Instagram, 3,935,037) and 400,979 Facebook shares.

### *Drinking depictions*

Less than half (42%) of posts used images depicting people drinking. Of these, a similar proportion portrayed women (73%; n=801) and men (67%; n=730). When the age of the those drinking was identifiable, those shown drinking were mostly young (61%; n=663; middle aged 12%, n=135; elderly 2%; n=17) and white (84%; n=919; people of colour 35%; n=386). Some images depicted ethnic minority people drinking (e.g. Black women drinking in campaigns celebrating Black beauty<sup>2</sup>), which suggests attempts by brands to be more inclusive and widen their appeal through presenting femininities and masculinities that fall outside of normative media representations. Drinking was overwhelmingly depicted as a social activity (69%, n=759). Women (n=82) were depicted engaging in solitary drinking to a greater extent than men (n=49), predominantly within the domestic sphere. When it was possible to identify the (assumed) gender of the those shown drinking in the images, drinking tended to occur in mixed gender groups<sup>3</sup> (40%, n=436). In such contexts, women drank the same branded products alongside men in equalitarian ways (e.g. drinking beer in the pub with men). A similar number of posts depicted images of all female group drinking (7%, n=148) and male only group drinking (7% n=157). The latter mostly included *BrewDog* posts depicting men drinking beer (note that the brand also promoted beer drinking among women), yet as discussed in the qualitative analysis below, female group drinking was underpinned by a narrative of friendship bonding, which was rare in posts depicting men.

### *A move away from objectification and sexualisation*

An important finding was the absence of objectification and sexualisation. A small number of posts (n=10) involved elements of self-sexualisation (e.g. sexual dress, women dancing sexually in branded music videos<sup>4</sup>), a key feature of post-feminist and the fourth wave feminist femininities whereby women actively sexualise themselves as an expression of empowerment (Gill, 2008; Rivers, 2017). None was found to sexually objectify in a way that degraded and dehumanised (i.e. reducing women to sex and the body through sexual images depicting body parts; suggesting women's key role is to sexually please men). There was also an absence of 'banter' (male humour that can involve everyday sexism, objectification, misogyny and homophobia, NUS, 2014) and whilst *BrewDog* (n=42) presented videos of various challenges that could be defined as male oriented in humour (e.g. videos of men competing in drinking challenges in which they mocked each other), none were derogatory to women. We found little

evidence of posts breaching ASA and Portman Groups codes related to objectification and gender stereotypes. At the time of writing, only two complaints (one of which was upheld) have been made to the ASA on grounds that alcohol adverts breached codes that aim to prevent the use of harmful and offensive gender stereotypes.

### **Qualitative content analysis (N=1543)**

Qualitative analysis of brand posts that targeted and depicted women resulted in six interlinked themes. Examples are drawn on to highlight how alcohol marketing reflects the co-existence of traditional, post-feminist and newer feminist constructions of femininity, which at times were difficult to untangle. How such constructions encouraged consumer interaction with marketing content, and incorporated a number of established (e.g. engagement) and new (e.g. influencers) marketing strategies to encourage use, is also considered.

### ***'Pretty in pink': restricted choice and the pinking of products***

A neo-liberal and post-feminist discourse of consumerist choice was evident in female targeted brand posts. Relative to beer brands that have traditionally targeted the male market, brands that targeted women with wine and gin, promoted a range of new products. Whilst the release of new products suggested that women have more choice in the alcohol market, the products fell within a narrow classification that reflected and reproduced 'girly' femininity as a consumer-based aesthetic. This restricted choice was most effectively exemplified through the 'pinking' of products (e.g. the depiction of pink liquid products and pink vessels) and the feminisation of post design (e.g. posts with glittery and floral imagery). Drink recipes, including those endorsed by female influencers, also suggested women should enhance beverage aesthetics through the addition of accessories such as flowers, glitter and pink candyfloss (*Lambrini*, *Echo Falls*). This limited nature of the drinks on offer was highlighted in a post by *Echo Falls*, which depicted an image of a new pink product, asking '*Prosecco or pink gin, pink gin or prosecco? Don't just choose one of your favs. Have a Berry Gin Spritz cocktail!*'. Here the notion of choice was suggested, but then limited to the consumption of two stereotypically feminine products.

In addition to presenting pink as a symbolic aesthetic denoting femininity (*'Pretty in pink'*, *Lambrini*), the colour was presented as representing a feminine attitude when depicting pink products, alongside captions instructing women to '*Think pink, drink pink*' (*Gordon's Gin*). Such posts encouraged women to drink pink products to express both a feminine appearance

and personality, thus positioning drink choice as important to the expression and enactment of feminine identities (Atkinson et al., 2016; Nicholls, 2019). Moreover, the consumption of pink products was promoted through associations with seasonal, day of the week and time-related marketing, with brands instructing women to consume pink products in multiple contexts and on numerous days of the week (e.g. the use of hashtags ('#onwednesdayswedrinkpink', *WKD*; '#PinkKindaDay', *Barefoot*). For example, *Blossom Hill* posted images of pink products surrounded by pink flowers and pink chocolates, suggesting consumers '#drinkpink' to celebrate friendship and the onset of summer. *Freixenet* appropriated the discourse of the popular 'chick flick' film *Mean Girls*, which has been debated as both post-feminist and feminist (Rhalls, 2011), to encourage mid-week drinking when instructing women that on '*Wednesdays, we drink pink!*'<sup>6</sup> alongside an image of a female lifestyle influencer consuming a pink product. The colour was also drawn on to encourage female consumers to interact with content, for example, through competitions to win pink-themed alcohol and non-alcohol products (hair straighteners) (*Blossom Hill, WKD, Lambrini*). By textually and visually drawing on the longstanding cultural association between pink, femininity and girliness, brands were able to successfully gender their products, in ways that restricted choice but encouraged use. Consequently, products were reduced to aesthetic accessories in symbolising and celebrating a very specific form of traditional femininity; one that was girly, pretty, pink, palatable, and focused on appearance (see *Appearance* theme).

### **'Tag your besties': Female friendship**

Friendship was a common feature of all brand posts. While mixed gender groups were represented in images posted by beer and spirit brands, female friendship was more prominent in the marketing of female targeted brands (i.e. wine, gin), in a way that framed drinking as a defining feature of female friendship. Only 7% (n=148) of the sample presented visual images of women drinking with other women. For example, images depicted female models posing as consumers, as well as photographs of female influencers and members of the public drinking branded products with female friends. However, wine and gin brands addressed women through a feminised language of friendship, with words such as '*besties*', '*bffs*', '*the girls*', '*girlfriends*', '*sisters*', '*queens*' and the '*ladies in your life*' being used to promote feelings of bonding and solidarity and to encourage group drinking. This gendered language of friendship was absent from male targeted posts, and tended to be posted alongside images of products accompanied with quotes celebrating friendship and female solidarity. For example, *Echo Falls* posted that '*Any friend of wine is a friend of mine*' and

'Friends who wine together stay together', alongside images of products or as standalone captions against pink backgrounds.

Female friendship group drinking was encouraged in multiple contexts (e.g. images and textual references to drinking in the home, at picnics, in drinking venues), at various times of the day ('brunch', 'afternoon', 'evening', 'wine o' clock') and on every day of the week. This included drinking in public spaces such as bars and festivals, but more commonly and more traditionally in the domestic sphere. Whatever the context, alcohol use was presented to women as an essential component of female friendship. Common examples included posts that depicted images of women consuming brands together during a 'girls nights in' or 'ladies night' at home. In such cases, appearance-based activities (see *Appearance* theme) such as 'pampering' ('It's Friday... so gather your Queens and pamper! 🍷♀️', Barefoot<sup>7</sup>; 'Girls night in ft. your favorite Chardonnay 🍷🍷', Barefoot) and the application of makeup were presented as shared activities that could be made more pleasurable through the consumption of alcohol. For example, Freixenet provided 'tips' for the 'perfect ladies night in' in which women were instructed to 'Grab a bottle of our Prosecco and lots of different garnishes, your friends can then go wild with different flavour combinations!' The 'pre-drinking' context was also drawn upon to encourage women to consume brands whilst 'getting ready for a big night out' and 'glammed up for a night of dancing' with friends. Images depicted women drinking together whilst listening to music, chatting and perfecting feminine appearance.

Women were encouraged to consume branded products as a celebration of female companionship ('The perfect way to celebrate the power of female friendships!!', Blossom Hill). For example, brands marketed their products as gifts to express an appreciation of friendship, including Blossom Hill, who posted an image of their products as an accompaniment to a bouquet of flowers, stating that 'What better way to spoil the special ladies in your life, than with a beautiful bunch of flowers, and a refreshing glass of Blossom Hill'. Celebrating female friendship was also promoted through encouraging drinking on specific days such as 'National' and 'International Friendship Day'<sup>8</sup>, 'National Girlfriends Day', and 'Galentines Day'<sup>9</sup> (as an alternative to Valentine's Day). For example, Blossom Hill suggested women 'Celebrate Galentines Day on 13th February by sharing a glass of Blossom Hill wine with your favourite sisters from another mister!'<sup>10</sup> Here post-feminist and fourth wave feminist undertones were drawn on to inform women to prioritise female friendship over romantic relationships (see *Romantic relationships* theme).

Importantly, the promotion of female friendship allowed brands to use women's online social capital to enable opportunities for engagement marketing. They were encouraged to tag their friends<sup>11</sup> in brand posts ('@ your best gals in the comments and if they don't reply in 5 mins, the 'brini is on them ☺', *Lambrini*) and to enter competitions to win prizes that could be enjoyed with friends (e.g. products, ticketed events; 'Tag your bestie in the comments', *Lambrini*). Questions ('We've all got a wine bestie 🍷❤ Who's yours?', *Echo Falls*) were also asked, as were requests for women to upload and tag brands in their own photographs of friendship group (pre) drinking (e.g. *Barefoot*, *Echo Fall*, *Lambrini*). These opportunities allowed brands to associate their products with real life friendship groups, creating content with more personal meaning and a wider reach.

### **'Brides', 'girlfriends' and 'single ladies': alcohol and romantic relationships**

Women were targeted and represented in relation to romantic relationships in ways that reflected traditional, post-feminist and newer feminist identities. In a more traditional sense, they were targeted as girlfriends, fiancés and brides, with alcohol products being depicted as featuring within marriage proposals ('The kind of proposal we'd say yes to. 🍷💍', text posted alongside image of bottle with engagement ring, *Freixenet*<sup>12</sup>). The consumption of branded products was also framed as an essential component of 'date nights'. For example, *Echo Falls* posted an image of a limited edition pink wine bottle labelled 'date night', in collaboration with a female influencer, and *Barefoot* framed their products as an essential component of dating asking 'Date night? It has to be Barefoot'. Alcohol products were also promoted as suitable gifts for bridesmaids, as wedding favours and for women on Valentine's Day. For example, *Gordon's Gin* posted 'We've all been there, chocolates, flowers or wine? Why not celebrate Valentine's Day with your loved one and Gordon's Pink 🍷❤ #ShallWe?'. Valentine's Day posts also provided an opportunity to instigate consumer engagement and gain a wider audience reach through questions ('How are you celebrating Valentine's Day this weekend?', *Blossom Hill*) and competitions ('❤️ COMPETITION TIME ❤️ Want to win a pair of tickets to a Valentine's Movie Experience? All you need to do is like this post and comment below tagging who you would bring!', *Lambrini*). A heteronormative femininity, a key, and arguably compulsory, component of traditional and post-feminist identities, was also evident in some brand posts both in captions (e.g. 'Men are like wine...stomp them down and ignore them for years', *Echo Falls*), and images depicting opposite sex couples consuming products in romantic settings (e.g. on the beach at sunset). Others drew on relationships without addressing specific genders, which could be interpreted as an attempt to address both same and opposite sex couples. For example, brands referred to 'Lovers' (*Barefoot*), 'Me and you'

(*Jägermeister*), and *'Whoever you're doubling up with'* (*Gordon's Gin*). However, the aesthetics and femininities presented within such posts remained highly girly, which whilst potentially holding appeal to femme queer women (Gunn et al., 2021), on the whole reproduced a predominantly heteronormative femininity.

At the same time, alcohol use was framed as holding more importance to women than these traditional relationship centred identities, and singlehood as an expression of independence was celebrated in a way that contested the societal assumption that women need romantic relationships to be happy. For example, brands such as *Lambrini* framed singlehood as a sign of independence and empowerment when stating *'Never forget ladies...be as fussy with your men as you are with your selfies'* to celebrate *'#IndependentWomen'* on *'#SinglesAwarenessDay'*. *Gordon's Gin* also toasted single women's *'GINdividuality'* on *'singles awareness day'* and *Echo Falls* positioned wine drinking as a sign of singlehood, posting animated speech bubbles for a fictional conversation between two female friends. Entitled *'When you've got big news... 🍷<sup>13</sup>*, the single friend was humorously mocked for purchasing wine (*'I bought a bottle of wine...'*), relative to those in relationships who had purchased houses (*'I bought a house...'*) and got engaged (*'I got engaged...'*). On Valentine's Day the brand also humorously posted in relation to singlehood, stating that *'I enjoy Romantic walks, down the wine aisle'* and single women were encouraged to treat themselves and celebrate their single lives through alcohol use (*'To me, from me... happy Valentine's Day?'<sup>14</sup>*, image of a woman drinking wine and eating chocolate alone at home, *Lambrini*). *'Galantines Day'* was also promoted by numerous brands as an alternative to Valentines, which suggested women should prioritise friends over romantic relationships and celebrate these friendships through group drinking (see *Female friendship* theme). Drawing on these various relationship statuses (e.g. girlfriend, wife, single) was advantageous to brands, as it allowed them to target and appeal to a wider category of feminine identities, and resulted in alcohol use being encouraged in numerous contexts (i.e. drinking with friends, partners, alone). In addition, it provided opportunities for audience engagement, through the use of themed competitions and questions (*'Valentine's Day is fast approaching, and so it's time to start thinking about finding the perfect wine! ❤️ Tell us what food you'll be having, and we will pick the perfect Freixenet wine to go with it'*).

**'On the go' and 'Me time': alcohol use as time out and reward from working and domestic roles**



Wine and gin brands encouraged drinking 'on the go' and in the domestic context within women's busy everyday lives. Recognising the demands placed on women, small products such as 'mini' and 'in a can' versions, were framed as convenient and 'perfect to pop in your bag ready to enjoy on-the-go! Available as deliciously pink White Zin too!' (Barefoot<sup>16</sup>). Here alcohol and its use was given status as an essential good, and brands appeared considerate of women's assumed practical needs within their day to day lives. 'Me time' was also encouraged, with women being instructed to relax ('relax with your favourite Barefoot wine, chocolate and a warm bubble bath'), focus on themselves ('To Me, You're welcome! From Me, x', Barefoot), enjoy time out from work ('Working nine to wine', Echo Falls<sup>17</sup>) and reward their individual achievements through alcohol use. Images that accompanied such captions included illustrations of clocks indicating it was time to consume wine (e.g. 'wine o'clock'), and photographs of women consuming alcohol in relaxing contexts such as in the bath. For example, Freixenet posted 'To do list = done! Celebrate the end of your working week with vibrant pink Cordon Rosado bubbles 🍷', and along with Blossom Hill, encouraged women to celebrate 'the little wins' and to 'Toast [themselves]! After the week you've had, you deserve it! 🍷 #WorkLife'.

During this 'Time to wind down' and 'five minutes of free time' (Echo Falls), women were visually depicted and textually instructed to engage in a range of mostly feminine activities alongside drinking. This included 'pampering', watching 'chick flicks', online shopping, reading women's magazines, and indulging on sweet tasting foods. Regardless of the activity, the end of the day (post 5pm) was labelled as a time for women to take their 'bras off', change into their 'comfies' or 'PJs' on and put their 'feet up' (Echo Falls, Lambrini). Entwined with encouraging women to focus on the self, the concept of self-care was drawn on by some brands to associate alcohol use with wellbeing and time out. For example, alongside an image of bath products and wine, Freixenet asked 'What are your best Sunday self-care tips?'<sup>18</sup>

Within this theme, motherhood was both celebrated and humorously commented on to promote the consumption of alcohol. Whilst male targeted brands did post content on Father's Day (Jack Daniels<sup>19</sup>, Guinness), they did not draw on narratives of day-to-day parenting. This contrast indirectly framed women as carers relative to men and with reference to traditional domestic roles, which in turn encouraged drinking within domestic contexts. Such posts included brands celebrating the identity of motherhood through linking their products to Mother's Day celebrations and as 'treats...because she deserves it' (Blossom Hill, Smirnoff). Consumption was also promoted as a means of bonding with daughters ('Like mother, like daughter' alongside image of women drinking', Freixenet<sup>20</sup>), providing an opportunity to target women as alcohol consumers within the roles of care giver and care receiver. These posts

provided further opportunities for engagement marketing through competitions for which mothers and daughters could win branded products (e.g. *'It's Mother's Day! And to celebrate, we're giving you the chance to win a bottle of Rosé & Gin Fusion plus a rose gift set from @olive\_and\_bloom 🍷🍷 To enter, tag that special person in your life! ❤️ T&Cs apply. Link in bio'*).

The joys and stresses involved in every day parenting were also referred to to promote alcohol use by women. Consumption was framed as a time when women could *'put [their] feet up'*, escape the domestic identity of the *'busy mom'* (*Barefoot*<sup>21</sup>) and de-stress from the *'chaos'* (*Lambrini*) involved in parenting. For example, *Lambrini* posted that *'Now the chaos of Pancake Day with the kids is over, we hope you saved some for yourself 😊 Enjoy your sweet (or savoury) treats with a glass of our Fully Sparkling Lambrini 🍷'* [image of Halloween treats and a glass of wine]. *Echo Falls* informed women that whilst children enjoyed Halloween treats prepared for them, mothers should *'grab yourself a glass [of wine]'*. Non-alcoholic products during pregnancy were also targeted at mothers to be through connotations of relaxation (*'Run the bath, pour the glass and relax 😊'*, [image of a women relaxing in the bath consuming the product]), and reward (*'A well-earned treat!'*, *Echo Falls*). These posts included images of motherhood influencer, and pregnant female consumers drinking branded products. For example, *Echo Falls* posted *'MAT LEAVE! 🎉 Celebrating with the brightest pink bath, @echo\_falls sparkling (alcohol free) wine and the biggest tub of shortbread as its my No1 craving 😊?'*<sup>22</sup>. Whilst alcohol free products were presented as substitutes for alcohol use during pregnancy, when underpinned by the notion of *'me time'*, they established a link between alcohol use, time out, stress relief, and escaping the traditional identity of motherhood, which may resonate with new mothers. Combined, posts depicting motherhood and women's working lives promoted alcohol use as a reward for managing, escaping and succeeding in both the public and private gender roles that women now occupy, in ways that framed alcohol use as a symbol of independence, empowerment and individual achievement.

### ***'Wines also pair nicely with a pair of new shoes': appearance and bodily femininity***

Reflecting the post-feminist and fourth wave feminist pursuit of reclaiming traditional concepts of feminine beauty and the cultural dominance of make-over culture as empowering (Gill, 2008; McRobbie, 2007; Rivers, 2017), an appearance based, and embodied femininity, was promoted by female targeted brands. This highly girly femininity was presented as being perfected through stereotypically feminine consumption-based activities that women were

depicted partaking in alongside alcohol use, such as (clothes) shopping, beauty regimes and makeup application.

For example, stereotypical feminine items, such as shoes, particularly high heels, handbags and make up were depicted in images alongside alcoholic products, and posts encouraged alcohol use after a hard day's shopping ('*Sleep in, stay in, snack in. That's Black Friday On Tap*', *Barefoot*). *Echo Falls*<sup>23</sup> suggested their '*wines also pair nicely with a pair of new shoes ☐ 🍷*'. Applying makeup, painting nails, straightening hair and applying '*fake tan*'<sup>24</sup>, all key accessories to creating post-feminist hyper feminine and sexual femininities (Griffin et al., 2013), were visually depicted and referred to as bonding activities that could be enjoyed with friends (see '*Tag your besties*' theme), as well as solitary acts of relaxation (see '*Me time*' theme). This was exemplified in how *Echo Falls* suggested that the weekend was a '*time for a face mask and a glass of something new! How about our bloomin' fruity botanical with rosé wine, raspberry and lavender? #livelifetothefalls*' and how *Lambrini*<sup>25</sup> provided recipes for homemade facemasks that could be enjoyed whilst consuming their products. Whilst these depictions may seem to reproduce negative stereotypes by reducing women to appearance, a language of empowerment and choice underpinned the promotion of this particular feminine look and lifestyle. For example, women were asked to choose which item- lipstick, alcohol, chocolate or their mobile phone, they '*couldn't you live without?*' and *Echo Falls* informed women that '*Anything is possible with a little lipstick and prosecco...you've got this queen*'.

Associating alcohol use with appearance and beauty regimes was also reinforced through reference to events such as London Fashion Week (*Freixenet*), collaborations with beauty and fashion influencers and brands (e.g. *Pretty Little Thing*, a brand which has in the past commodified feminism), offering free branded beauty products (e.g. nail files, *Echo Falls*) and collaborative competitions with beauty based consumer products that encouraged women to interact with and share brand content. Entry requirements included following brand social media accounts, liking posts and tagging '*your best friend*', all strategies designed to extend post reach, and associate prizes with perfecting appearance in preparation for a night out drinking ('*The perf getting ready bundle is up for grabs*', *Echo Falls*). For example, *Echo Falls* collaborated with *Remington UK* offering women the '*chance to win to win a bottle of Summer Berries Pink Gin and a pair of Keratin Protect Intelligent Straighteners!*' and *Lambrini* collaborated with *Fake Bake* tanning lotion, *Primalashes* and *WAH Nails*<sup>26</sup>.



The latter is an interesting example when the identity of marketing collaborators are considered. *WAH Nails* is a London based nail salon first established from a feminist magazine created by a fourth wave feminist of colour, who now has influencer/celebrity status. The neon pink post read '*Sisterhood*' and depicted an image of female musician Cardi B, a self-

proclaimed celebrity feminist who proudly self-sexualises, to invite women to attend a brand sponsored event to celebrate *International Women's day* and the launch of the brand's latest product (see gender equality theme). The example highlights how a focus on appearance-based traits and activities such as long painted nails and makeup may at first seem to reproduce traditional negative stereotypes that reduce women to appearance. However, in the context of both post- and fourth wave feminism, such marketing takes on undertones of empowerment through the reclaiming of traditional forms of femininity, and as such, may not alienate women through the use of stereotypes. Another example that transgressed normative expectations of feminine appearance was *Barefoot's Purple Light Project*, a collaboration with Black females working in the beauty industry. This campaign promoted self-love, acceptance and a more inclusive definition of beauty than the normative (i.e. white) ideals that dominate the industry and society more generally. Whilst this may help widen societal definitions of beauty, women were still reduced to the body, and the narratives of inclusivity and diversity ultimately provided brands with an opportunity to target alcohol use promotions to specific sub-groups of women.

As an extension of the appearance and bodily femininity constructed by marketers, brands drew on women's body image anxieties and post-feminist notions of disciplining the body to maintain normative expectations of ideal femininity (Gill, 2007). *Lambrini* depicted women's exercise routines and promoted low calorie and 'Skinny' products and recipes (i.e. *the Skinny Minnie*). *Barefoot* posted that their new product contained 'only 70 calories per can'<sup>27</sup> and on occasion the low alcohol content of products appeared to be presented as a proxy for low calories. Illustrating the mixed messages women receive, brands also drew on messages of 'self-love' and body confidence, examples of feminist and post-feminist discourses that have been commercialised in recent years to promote consumption (Gill, 2017; 2016; McRobbie, 2020; Riley et al., 2019). Moreover, a rejection of weight and diet cultures through humorous commentaries on indulgence and a lack of physical activity contradicted posts that focussed on calories and appearance. For example, *Bailey's* and *Lambrini* joked about over-eating (e.g. 'Let's do what we love and do it a lot. Me: \*sits and eats 6 slices of French toast\*', *Bailey's*<sup>28</sup>) and *Echo Falls* posted 'If wearing leggings & reaching for a glass of wine is considered yoga then I've worked out tonight' and 'Yoga Class? I thought you said pour a glass'. Moreover, indulgence ('When in doubt, indulge...' *Bailey's*) was promoted and relative to male-targeted posts, which presented the consumption of meat<sup>29</sup> as a symbol of masculinity, female targeted brands framed alcohol use as both an accompaniment to, and ingredient within (e.g. *Bailey's*), indulgent foods such as desserts, cakes and chocolate. This framing not only reinforced alcohol as a reward, but widened the contexts and times in which its use was promoted (e.g. brunch with friends, afternoon tea, evening treat).

## **‘Girl Power’, ‘strong women’ and ‘safe spaces’: celebrating women and promoting gender equality**

The language and imagery (e.g. pride colours, raised fists) of equality and the commodification of feminist messaging was also appropriated by some brands. This included beer brands presenting the inclusion of women in traditional male-centred activities (e.g. brewing, rugby) as an expression of empowerment and encouraging women to break the gendered norms and stereotypes around the acceptability of drink choice that are perpetuated by female targeted brands as a sign of equality. For example, *Guinness* posted images and videos of a Japanese women’s rugby team Liberty Fields RFC<sup>30</sup>, stating that ‘*despite opposition both on the field and off it, fought the odds and won*’. The brand suggested consumers ‘*Watch the inspiring true story, and raise your next Guinness to the pioneers of women’s rugby*’. Encouraging the transgressing gendered drink choice, *Jack Daniels*<sup>31</sup> posted an image of two identical whiskey bottles labelled ‘*HIS*’ and ‘*HERS*’, stating that ‘*This International Women’s Day, let’s remember that the bar’s always better when it’s well balanced*’, thus framing women drinking like men as a sign of equality to encourage women to consume their products.

Feminist iconography (i.e. ‘’, ‘’) (N=34), a key feature of fourth wave feminism (Gill, 2016), was appropriated, and brands endorsed sponsored real life events that celebrated women’s achievements in various fields (e.g. *Echo Falls ‘Amazing Women Awards’*, *Baileys ‘Women Book Prize’*). For example, the messages and aims of ‘*International Women’s Day*’ (IWD), an annual event (for which the alcohol corporation *Diageo* is a sponsor) that aims to celebrate the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of all women (including trans women), raise awareness of gender-based bias and encourage action for gender equality across the world, were commonly drawn on. On IWD day, brands posted images of women celebrating their achievements and friendships through group drinking and illustrated the visibility of female staff within their corporations<sup>32</sup>, drawing on post-feminist notions of celebrating women’s achievements and success in male orientated spaces, whilst failing to use the words feminism or feminist. For instance, products were described as ‘*Best paired with strong women*’ (*Stella Artois*) and consumers were encouraged to ‘*raise a glass to women all over the globe #InternationalWomensDay*’ (*Guinness*), ‘*who support, motivate and inspire us all year round*’ (*Kopparberg*) and to ‘*toast to all the incredible female winemakers out there*’ (*Barefoot*). Alcohol use was thus presented as an expression of solidarity and support for women’s achievements. This was exemplified by *Blossom Hill*<sup>33</sup> who used IWD to introduce a new product, posting that the ‘*thing about [their] wines is that they bring women*

*together to laugh, chat and support each other, all over a simple glass of wine 😊. We've listened to your needs and have been working all year on something exciting and new dropping NEXT WEEK (eek)! Can you guess what it is?! Happy #InternationalWomensDay Blossoms – this one's for you #TogetherLetsBlossom'. Such content encouraged women's interaction through requests to upload photos of their female friends and tag the brand to 'celebrate your sister from another mister (Blossom Hill) and to vote for their favourite 'inspirational women' by commenting on brand posts (Gordon's).*

Whilst the language of equality could be said to reflect post-feminist sentiments by presenting female empowerment as achieved through consumption and individual success, other brands, particularly those that target all genders, moved beyond the simple celebration of women and consumption to create specific campaigns that attempted to address and raise awareness of gender inequality. For example, in collaboration with a female DJ, *Smirnoff's 'Equalising Music Campaign'*<sup>34</sup> aimed to raise awareness of women's under representation in the music industry and women's experiences of live music venues to promote the need for 'safe spaces'<sup>35</sup>. *Absolut Vodka* attempted to raise awareness of issues surrounding sexual content through their 'Sex responsibly' campaign, a collaboration with US charity RAINN, which provides support for survivors of sexual assault. These examples acknowledged the unequal treatment women receive in society, yet failed to address the root causes of such inequalities, instead promoting individual consumer actions (e.g. listening to more female musicians, being more informed about sexual consent, purchasing brands to support women's causes) to encourage alcohol use.

Wine brands, which predominantly targeted women, were less prominent in their endorsement of LGBTQ+ issues, and as such, predominantly heteronormative in their image. The traditional gender binary of male and female and post-feminist heteronormative relations dominated wine marketing, but spirit brands contested this in line with fourth wave feminism (Emslie et al., 2017; Rivers, 2017). Brands such as *Smirnoff* ('Labels are for bottle' campaign) and *Absolut*, which are popular with women (Table 3), promoted gender transgression (e.g. *Barefoot* collaborating with the TV programme 'Ru Paul's Drag Race #MarchOnward'), the concept of gender as including identities beyond the male and female binary, and the rights of non-binary and trans people, including through collaborations with influencers who presented themselves as 'allies' of such causes. Others<sup>36</sup> associated their brands with LGBTQ+ equality in posts that appropriated rainbow colours and depicted same sex couples embracing, to celebrate events such as Pride (n=34). LGBTQ+ and Pride limited edition products (e.g. *WKD*, *Barefoot*, *Absolut*) were also promoted and provided as competition prizes to instigate user interaction, and specific campaigns and collaborations with charities (e.g. *Stonewall*, *LGBT*

*Foundation*) were presented as opportunities to raise awareness and money for the cause. Thus, we found evidence of brands promoting messages of gender equality and inclusivity by moving away from heteronormative messaging to marketing that endorses social causes (Banet-Weiser and Lanpansky, 2018) to appeal to women, LGBTQ+ women and those who are more feminist and social justice aware.

## **Discussion**

This is the first study to explore the extent and nature of gendered alcohol marketing on Facebook and Instagram, and how brands target, represent and engage women in the context of contemporary feminism. It found that similar strategies were used to target women and men, yet the nature of content was highly gendered. Focussing on the nature of content related to women, brands were found to reflect and reproduce important aspects of feminine identities and women's day to day lives, to promote alcohol use and encourage consumers to interact and co-create content. Combined with a range of established (e.g. competitions) and newer strategies (e.g. 'influencer' collaborations), this meant that brand posts reached a high number of consumers with meaningful messaging (Carah and Brodmerkel, 2020). Both continuation and change in how women are targeted and represented in alcohol marketing was found, with the co-existence of traditional, postfeminist and newer 'feminist' femininities (Gill, 2016), and evidence of more interactional representations, which are likely to appeal to a wide range of consumers.

Drinking was framed as a key component of the various social roles women occupy in contemporary society, and associated with all aspects of their everyday lives. They were depicted drinking with and alongside men, including in public spaces, implying that women's visibility in once male dominated spaces provides evidence of gender equality (Månsson, 2014; Törrönen, 2014). In contrast to depictions of men, the importance of all female friendship was drawn upon in post-feminist and feminist ways (e.g. prioritising friends over romantic relationships, sisterhood), to present alcohol use as an essential and normalised component of women's everyday socialising, and drinking as a form of female bonding. This reflects and appeals to women's lived realities, given that the 'girls nights out', 'nights 'in' and 'pre-drinking' provide opportunities for women to collectively engage in feminine practices with the aim of constructing 'girly' identities, which are important for women's shared pleasure and bonding (Atkinson and Sumnall, 2017; Nicholls, 2019).

Constructions of female friendship (e.g. *Lambrini*) reflected post-feminist notion of '*girl power*' (*Lambrini*) and 'girl culture', a marketing strategy that has been used since the 1990s to denote female empowerment through female friendship, 'girly' femininity and consumption-

based practices (Gill, 2008; Lai and Cooper, 2016). It both reflects and reproduces the importance of friendship to women, and helps promote group drinking with female friends as an empowering act, while structural inequalities are concealed, rather than overcome. Linked to the prioritising of female friendship, a pro-singleton rhetoric underpinned by notions of independence, mocked the un-aspirational post-feminist stereotype of the drinking spinster as a source of pity (McRobbie, 2009). This suggests that narratives of singlehood have shifted alongside contemporary feminisms, where being alone is no longer represented as a source of shame, but celebration, and a form of independence that should be embraced individually and collectively through alcohol use (Gill, 2016; McRobbie, 2009). Whilst the depictions of female friendship and singlehood discussed may contain feminist undertones by suggesting women prioritise female friends over romantic relationships, and the importance of women's collective experiences, they did so to promote alcohol use and initiate consumer engagement with marketing content (i.e. 'tag your besties').

Alcohol use was also presented as an opportunity for women to reward themselves for the day-to-day activities involved in their public and private roles. Framing these as individual achievements, drinking was depicted as well-deserved time out from women's busy and at times mundane everyday lives and identities (Emslie et al., 2015). In turn, messages of empowerment underpinned brand promotion, by presenting alcohol use as an opportunity to escape the pressures involved in negotiating the plurality of traditional (i.e. motherhood) and post-feminist and feminist (i.e. workers, female only friendship) identities (McRobbie, 2009; 2020). Neo-liberal discourses of self-care, which form part of both post-feminist and fourth wave feminist rhetoric (Gill, 2016; McRobbie, 2020), further instructed women to reward themselves to time out and relaxation through drinking. This reflects a recent popularisation of self-resilience as an individualised and feminised approach to mental health and well-being, which is underpinned by the assumption of empowerment through self-focus, a positive mind-set and consumption (McRobbie, 2020; Riley et al., 2019). As a result, alcohol use was encouraged as a feminine way of dealing with stress, which is problematic when the link between alcohol use and mental health is considered (e.g. Jane-Llopis and Matytsini, 2006).

There were many examples of marketing that whilst reproducing traditional forms of femininity, resonated with post-feminist and new fourth wave feminist identities. For example, brands drew on the cultural association of pink with femininity. The overuse of this aesthetic may appear to reproduce a narrow and harmful classification of femininity that reinforces difference between women and men and reduces women to appearance, girlhood and innocence (Koller, 2008; Lai and Cooper, 2016). Indeed, it is likely that such products are



rejected by some women on these grounds (Cullen, 2011). Yet these associations hold wider appeal when they are placed within a post-feminist context in which there has been a resurgence in the popularity of pink and girly aesthetics among (young) adult women, who have reclaimed it as an expression of empowerment and celebration of womanhood (Gill, 2008). More recently, and as a result of fourth wave feminism being born out of post-feminism, the colour pink has taken on feminist undertones (Koller, 2008; McRobbie, 2020; Rivers, 2017; Schraff, 2019). This reflects attempts to address the dissonance between feminism and femininity (e.g. through the reclaiming of pink) that has led to them no longer being regarded as mutually exclusive concepts (Gill, 2007; Kellor, 2008; Scrafff, 2019). As such, pink products hold significance to the performance of a variety of femininities, including those that are feminist, and in turn promotes the consumption of alcohol to a larger range of women than it may initially seem.

Similarly, an appearance-based femininity was depicted as the norm, in ways that appeared to reproduce traditional and potentially harmful feminine traits and stereotypes. Whilst the enjoyment and sense of empowerment women may gain from appearance-based activities and identities should not be overlooked, such examples perpetuated the importance of appearance to how women are valued in society to promote alcohol use. However, in a post-feminist and fourth wave feminist context, in which a celebration all things girly and traditionally feminine- makeup, painted nails, shoes, clothes, accessories, shopping- are embraced (Gill, 2016), such depictions are less likely to be interpreted by women as negative stereotypes, and as such hold wider appeal. The result is both the promotion of alcohol to women, and the dominance of a limited version of normative femininity; one that reproduces and conforms to, rather than challenges, traditional gender stereotypes (Gill, 2008; Gill and Scharff, 2013; Nicholls, 2019). Despite some brands drawing on women's body image anxieties and post-feminist notions of disciplining the body to promote low calorie and light products and recipes (Gill, 2007), others rejected diet culture, and instead acknowledged the normality and acceptability of being 'imperfect' and embracing individual flaws (McRobbie, 2020). These feminist undertones are likely to be appeal to women who reject diet culture and traditional beauty standards within their identity making.

Importantly, the research found an absence of the representation of women as sex objects, suggesting a move away from the historic use of sexist content such as the (hyper) sexualisation and objectification of women's bodies, once common in beer brand marketing to attract male consumers (Hall and Kappel, 2018; Kilbourne, 1999; Sirr, 2015). As such, marketing posts were considered not to be in breach of regulatory codes aimed at preventing the use of negative gender stereotypes and causing offence on the grounds of gender. In turn,

we found that only a small number of public complaints have been received by the ASA to date against alcohol adverts on these grounds (ASA 2014a; b, 2019; Portman Group). The economic reasons for a move away from this type marketing are clear, and as suggested by the ASA (2019), advertisers now see '*the commercial advantages of rejecting gender stereotypes*'. Thus, whilst these changes to both self-regulatory and brand's in-house policies (e.g. Diageo's (2020) gender stereotype training) are a positive development for gender equality, they are underpinned by concerns over the economic impact of alienating female consumers; concerns that are reflected in research confirming that women dislike the use of sexual images of women to a greater extent than men (e.g. Jones and Reid, 2010; Polonsky et al., 2001; van Zanten et al., 2005). Whilst this is a positive development, other media sources such as music videos, which are unregulated, continue to sexually objectify women in relation to alcohol (Lindsay and Lyons, 2018). Moreover, with the intensification of engagement marketing that encourages users to interact with brand content, users themselves may respond to marketing posts depicting women in ways that sexualise and objectify, and research conducted in Australia has found evidence of this (Carah, 2014).

Our analysis highlights how brands have moved away from sexualising women to messages of empowerment to promote alcohol use to women. For example, women's individual achievements and female friendship (or 'sisterhood') were championed and celebrated (e.g. International Women's Day; Emslie, 2019). Alcohol use was also presented as a means of escaping traditional gender roles (e.g. motherhood) (Mackiewicz, 2012; Törrönen, 2011) and engaging in activities once deemed by society as masculine (e.g. drinking itself, sports, brewing). Much of this rhetoric is not divorced from post-feminist sentiments that assumes gender equality, such as the notion of empowerment through consumption, 'girl power', the celebration of stereotypical femininity, independence and embodied self-expression (Gill, 2016; McRobbie, 2007). Moreover, despite the backing of such causes, all the brands failed to use the words 'feminist' or 'feminism', suggesting the post-feminist tendency to draw on feminist thinking but failing to refer to it, perhaps to negate any negative connotations that continue to be applied to feminism and as such preventing alienating consumers who do not identify as such (McRobbie, 2008). We also found examples of brands moving beyond simple messages of empowerment to promote equal gender and sexual representation (i.e. *Smirnoff's Equalizer*, *Absolut Sex Responsibly*) and raise awareness of the broader inequalities women experience. Nonetheless, as examples of 'commodity' feminism and activism (Banet-Weiser and Lansansky, 2018; Banet-Weiser, 2018) such campaigns failed to acknowledge the underlying structural causes of inequality (Gill, 2016). Instead, individual consumer actions were presented as a solution, which allowed

brands to promote alcohol use whilst advancing brand image by presenting them as ethical and morally aware organisations.

The paper has important theoretical implications. The analysis draws attention to how despite a renewed acknowledgment of feminism in popular culture, the extent to which the new feminist femininities at play within 'fourth wave' feminism, depart from, or in part reflect and reproduce post-feminist sentiments, is debateable (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Gill, 2016, p.618; Rivers, 2017). Whilst there are many current examples of collective feminist action (e.g. Everyday Sexism Project, #MeToo, Sisters Uncut), it has been argued that contemporary feminism, particularly that depicted in mainstream media, reproduces key elements of post-feminism. This includes a focus on the individual such as self-care, the promotion of consumerist based feminine identities, and empowerment through sexual expression and the reclaiming of traditionally feminine or 'girly' culture (Gill, 2016; Rivers, 2017). Other than sexual expression, our analysis found evidence of each of these, and that brands have intensified the commodification of female empowerment to incorporate feminist undertones to promote alcohol use. If women's participation in drinking cultures are considered a reflection of their shifting social positions, and marketers associate alcohol use with messages of empowerment, then it is crucial that women's drinking and the marketing of alcohol is understood within this shifting social-political climate in which post-feminist and new fourth wave feminist rhetoric co-exist. This is an important focus for future research, as is exploring the femininities and masculinities to promote alcohol products through collaborations with 'influencers' (Hendriks et al., 2020). We found that such collaborations further reinforced associations between femininity and pinkness, appearance, slimness, and motherhood, and encouraged women to consume alcohol within their feminine identity making. The emerging use of real-life femininities through collaborations with celebrities and influencers therefore extends brands ability to instruct consumers on how to "do gender" through drinking, and provides a means of indirect and mediated communication between brands and followers (Yuan and Lou, 2020).

As discussed by Carah and Brodmerkel (2021), influencers are useful to alcohol marketers as they provide a means of representing alcohol in ways that brand content cannot. Influencers draw on alcohol brands and consumption within their own identity display and commonly post pro-alcohol content on behalf of brands (Hendricks et al., 2020; Willow, 2020) Our analysis adds to this work by highlighting how these collaborations provide a means of targeting consumers through gendered messaging and the appeal of influencer identities that incorporate traditional, post-feminist and feminist femininities. Importantly, influencer content may hold more significance and influence on the identity making practices of consumers, by

encouraging parasocial relations between the content creator and their audience, moving beyond a one-sided illusion of intimacy, to provide the opportunity for two-way interaction and engagement (Abidin 2018; Chen, 2016; Gannon and Prothero 2018; Yuan and Lou, 2020). Social media platforms allow content creators to create a feeling of 'everydayness' through candidly and regularly sharing ordinary aspects of their lives, which builds a sense of intimacy, relatability, similarity, approachability and trust with their followers. This is important as influencers may in turn be viewed as 'friends' or peer rather than marketers, thus acting as a source of peer influence, that alcohol brands appear to be utilising (Berryman and Kazka, 2017; Chen, 2016; Yuan and Lou, 2020). Concerns have also been raised about the role of social media influencers within corporate digital marketing strategies, including unequal power relationships with public relations and marketing professionals, exploitation, and vulnerability (Archer, 2019). Whilst authenticity is key to influencers' success, tensions exist when their role is to promote specific products in specific ways and appeal to specific demographics (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). Such issues are important considerations for future research on influencers collaborations with alcohol brands.

A number of limitations of the current study should be acknowledged. Firstly, whilst the large sample of posts addresses the limitations of past research (Atkinson et al., 2016), the analysis focussed on only two social media platforms, Facebook and Instagram. Future research should consider platforms such as Tik Tok, which has increased in popularity particularly among young people (Statista, 2021) and provides space for the intensification of influencer-based marketing. Moreover, by focussing on the content of brands posts and the strategies used to promote products in gendered ways, the research does not account for the data-driven capabilities and affordances of digital platforms (Carah and Brodmerkel, 2021) or how marketing is experienced, perceived, negotiated and subverted by consumers. Whilst interaction data such as the number of likes, comments and shares for each post were collected and the total number of these interactions for each marketing strategy commented on (Table 3), an analysis of comments left by users was not presented. It is important that future research systematically analyses the way in which social media users respond to brand posts through the comment function, including how comments relate to the gendered nature of the post and the gender of those commenting, and how brands themselves interact with consumers. The study also focussed on alcohol brand marketing, when the promotion of alcohol brands by nightlife licensed venues in localised contexts (Griffin et al., 2018) requires further exploration.

## **Conclusion**

Alcohol brand marketing presents women's drinking as a feminine practice and as an important component of 'doing' a combination of traditional, post-feminist and feminist femininities (Atkinson et al., 2012). Predominantly younger women were presented and targeted, and although the women portrayed in images tended to be white, many did depict a more intersectional perspective with women of colour being included and addressed. Women were assigned a range of gender roles that acknowledged their individual pleasures and achievements, and traditional gender roles were both reinforced and rejected to promote alcohol use. Drinking was presented as an important aspect of 'having it all' (McRobbie, 2009; 2020); including slimness, grooming, fashionable clothing and accessories, meaningful friendships and the successful management of women' multiple social roles (i.e. friend, mother, worker). Through a lens that fails to consider post-feminist and fourth wave feminist rhetoric, it may be assumed some of the femininities presented would be rejected by women as negative stereotypes. However, in a post-feminist and fourth wave feminist context, aspects of traditional femininity such as pink and makeup have been reclaimed as a celebration of womanhood. As such, brands are able to appeal to a wider cohort of women, including younger females who are embracing new feminist identities. It is important that women's drinking and alcohol marketing are explored within this shifting social-political climate in which post-feminist and new fourth wave feminist rhetoric co-exist.

Importantly we found a move away from sexualising and demeaning women, to the appropriation of feminist and equality messages. This may provide an opportunity to spread important messages for social change and inclusivity, and engage with people who may otherwise reject feminism, as well as a younger generation of young men and women who identify as feminist (see Punia (2019) for an example industry documenting such intentions). However, our findings provide further evidence of the commodification of feminism (Åkestam et al., 2017; Gill, 2008; Sobande, 2019), which dilutes progressive messages, oversimplifies marketing straplines, and fails to disrupt structural inequalities that disadvantage women and other minority groups (APPG for UN Women, 2021; Abbey et al., 2004; Gunby et al., 2019). Instead, this appropriation of empowerment and equality provides is used by corporations to broaden their appeal and increase profit. When considering the messages of empowerment used to promote products to women and other minority groups (i.e. LGBTQ+ people), it is crucial to highlight that alcohol is '*no ordinary commodity*' (Babor, 2010). It is directly linked to many illnesses that affect women, including breast cancer (2016), and alcohol related harms are higher among minority groups such as the LGBTQ+ community (Emslie et al., 2017; Hunt et al., 2019). As such, the messages of equality used to promote alcohol products are at odds with the harms caused by alcohol to women and minority groups.

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