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This is an electronic version of a paper, Helm, C. and Evans, L. (2016) Understanding the Effect of Television Advertising on Women's Attitudes and Purchase Intentions Towards Beer: A Study of Three Major Brands, presented at *Academy of Marketing Brand SIG 11th Global Brand Conference* University of Bradford 27 to end of 29 Apr 2016 .

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Title:

Understanding the Effect of Television Advertising on Women's Attitudes and Purchase Intentions Towards Beer: A Study of Three Major Brands.

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Purpose of Paper:

The market for beer in the UK is now mature and sales have been stable at around £16bn for about ten years (Mintel 2014). More recently, there have been changes in the market as consumers have switched from bigger mainstream brands to a growing number of smaller craft beers. However, in order to grow further significantly, the industry needs to explore new market segments and find new consumers for beer. So far, it is estimated that only 1.3m women in the UK drink beer (O'Reilly, 2014; Mail Online, 2015). Women are therefore an underexplored segment and present the main growth opportunity for beer drinking in the UK.

However, most beer television advertising has traditionally been aimed at the male audience and there have been suggestions that some of this advertising has been seen as unpopular with or even insulting to women (Jackson, 2013; Zwarun et al., 2006). The Chief Executive of major brewer SAB Miller, which owns the Foster's brand, has recently written that, 'We have to acknowledge that core lager advertising, for many years, was either dismissive of, or insulting to, women.' (Shubber, 2015).

If women are to be the new consumers and the future target for beer advertising, there is therefore a significant gap in the knowledge and literature concerned with how women differ from men in responding to the television advertising produced by beer brands and it is important that this gap in knowledge is addressed. The purpose of this paper is therefore to explore the effect of the television advertising of the three top selling UK beer brands on women's attitudes and purchase intentions towards those brands. More specifically, the objectives are:

1) To gain an understanding of how female consumers respond to existing beer television advertising, specifically in terms of the 'likeability' of the content of TV commercials produced by the three leading UK beer brands among female consumers.

2) To examine the effect of the rational and emotional content, including the use of humour, in television commercials produced by the three leading UK beer brands on the attitudes of female consumers towards those brands.

3) To explore in-depth female consumer attitudes towards the content (message cues and symbolism) of the television commercials produced by the three leading beer brands in the UK and their effect on subsequent purchase intentions for each brand.

As well as a general literature on gender differences in responses to advertising, the female consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions were considered from the perspective of the Message Interpretation Processing (MIP) Model (Austin, Chen and Grube, 2006) that considers rational and emotional responses such as 'scepticism', 'identification' and 'desirability' that affect consumers' likeability and purchase intention towards the brand, and also the Elaboration Likelihood (EL) Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1983) which considers

attitude change, as well other theoretical concepts which are discussed in the literature review.

Methodology and Approach:

This is an exploratory study concerning the effect of the advertising produced by the three leading beer brands on women's attitudes in terms of likeability and other factors, and also on their purchase intentions. As the research focuses on a complex range of consumers' views, beliefs, opinions, feelings about beer brands and an explanation for their purchase intentions, an interpretive research approach and methodology that focused on gathering qualitative data was appropriate (Malholtra, Birks and Wills, 2012; Strauss and Corbin, 1997).

The television commercials of the three brands were shown to a total of thirty seven participants selected as a purposive sample by the following criteria; female, alcohol consumers aged over 18 and living in central London. Four focus groups of 8 - 10 participants were interviewed. The focus group setting enabled the moderator to create a rapport with the participants and stimulate interaction amongst the group in order to uncover and probe for detailed information, views and opinions (Malholtra, Birks and Wills, 2012; Silverman, 2011). The aims of the focus group questions were to explore the participants' response to the content of the commercials for the beer brands in terms of factors such as likeability (or dislikeability), and to examine the effect of emotion, humour and other message cues on their attitude and purchase intentions towards the brands. In addition to the focus groups, a further three in-depth interviews were conducted with individual participants in order to gain deeper insights and understanding that may not have emerged in the focus groups. These interviews were semi-structured to allow probing and the creating of a rapport with the respondents. The focus groups and interviews were recorded and the data resulting

from them was coded and analysed using an inductive, grounded theory-type thematic analysis.

The television commercials selected represented the three leading beer brands in the UK; Stella, Foster's and Carlsberg, and were considered to be representative of the brands' advertising at the time (June 2015).

The Stella advertisement is aimed at women and features a sophisticated, well dressed woman descending a staircase, entering a stylish bar and being served the perfect beer by a handsome young bartender.

The Foster's and Carlsberg advertisements are more male oriented. The Fosters commercials are a series of five short, 18 second vignettes entitled 'How to Speak Australian' that humorously parody the attitudes of the stereotypically macho, unsophisticated Australian male ending with the tagline; 'Foster's, Australian for Beer.'

The Carlsberg ad is entitled 'The Eternal Optimist' and features British sports celebrities Ian Wright, Paddy McGuinness and Jeff Stelling sitting in a typical British pub full of male football supporters trying to watch a match on a large screen TV. But they can't see the TV because there are some pillars in the way and the bar is too crowded to get a beer. Jeff Stelling, wearing a Carlsberg green suit, pushes a magical Carlsberg button that makes the pillars instantly disappear, the TV grow in size and a conveyor belt bearing Carlsberg beers appear from the wall. Finally, Ian Wright shouts at the on- screen referee to call in favour of England, to which the referee responds. The message is that, for these men in the pub, Carlsberg makes the impossible, possible.

Findings:

The findings are analysed and discussed using the Message Interpretation Processing (MIP) model (Austin, Chen and Grube, 2006) and also the Elaboration Likelihood (EL) Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1983) and highlight some significant and formerly unexamined factors in the differences in gender responses to beer advertising, and also more particularly the effect of beer brands' advertising on women's attitudes and purchase intentions.

While some findings seemed to broadly concur with previous research that has examined gender differences in responses to advertising (Darley and Smith, 1995; Goodrich, 2014; Meyers-Levy and Loken, 2015; Schwarz, Hoffmann and Hutter, 2015), three main themes emerged. The first was that the women participants strongly liked the advertising by the brand (Stella) that they felt was relevant to them and contained emotional cues and a style that were believable. These factors overcame any rational scepticism of the situation portrayed in the commercial. They also overcame any pre-existing attitudes towards the brand which had previously been aimed at men and known colloquially the 'wife beater', a fact which some respondents were aware of and recalled. The result was generally a favourable attitude change and positive purchase intentions towards the Stella brand, even amongst those who were either non- or very occasional beer drinkers or said they preferred wine. On the other hand, most participants felt alienated by and either didn't understand or very strongly disliked the Fosters and Carlsberg advertising that was seen as not relevant to them or that was perceived as very male-oriented. In this case, individual and normative barriers were not overcome. In relation to the Foster's and Carlsberg commercials, some said that they 'just didn't get it' or 'hated it'. This resulted amongst some participants in a surprisingly intense dislike of those brands and strongly negative attitudes towards purchasing them.

Second; the women's respondents' liking and positive purchase attitude towards the Stella beer brand was enhanced because they thought they could feel comfortable and also strongly identify with the content of the advertising - in this case the woman in the commercial and the situation she was portrayed in. They used terms such as, 'glamorous', 'confident' and 'in control' to describe the woman in the commercial which invoked a sense of inclusion, identification and even empowerment and, for most respondents, greatly enhanced their positive attitude and purchase intention towards the brand. For the Fosters and Carlsberg commercials the respondents clearly could not identify with either the situation or characters and their response was not just indifference but active dislike. They used negative terms such as 'loutish', and 'too manly', for example, to describe the Foster's advertisements and 'boring' and 'wouldn't want to go there' to describe the Carlsberg commercials.

Third; sophistication and subtlety in advertising content were important as key emotional factors and moderators in attitude change and positive purchase intention for the female participants. They responded very positively to the content of the Stella commercial which they considered to be sophisticated and 'classy' in terms of the message cues which included an aspirational lifestyle and status. They also strongly liked the techniques used such as humour that was relevant and subtle, and also storytelling, which enhanced their sense of involvement with the brand. However, they also generally expressed a surprisingly strong dislike - even disgust in some cases - as well as negative purchase intentions towards the humour displayed in the commercials for Foster's and Carlsberg. Some described the content as 'stupid and dumb', while at the same time acknowledging that this type of humour would probably appeal to men.

Theoretical Implications:

The paper provides insights from empirical research which show that while female responses to beer advertising seem to broadly concur with the literature on more general gender differences in advertising responses, there are also further dimensions of female responses that are explained by key aspects of the MIP and EL models, emphasising cognitive and also peripheral and emotional processing.

Practical Implications:

In the context of women being the future growth market for beer in the UK, the findings of this study provide useful insights for brand managers who wish to develop marketing communications strategies for beer brands that are aimed at female consumers.

Limitations:

The main limitation of this study is that it is exploratory and based on focus groups and interviews with a small sample of interviewees. In addition, the commercials of only three brands were examined and respondents were shown only one commercial from each brand (five short commercials in the case of Foster's). A wider study could be conducted and further qualitative and quantitative research could also explore the issues raised here in greater depth.

Originality / Value:

The paper's findings contribute towards addressing a significant gap in the knowledge and literature about women's responses to television advertising produced by beer brands in terms of attitudes and purchase intentions towards the brands.

Keywords: Beer Brands; Television Advertising; Consumer Attitudes; Purchase Intention

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