

**REMAINING COMPETITIVE IN TODAY'S SIGNIFICANT SHIFT IN CONSUMER
CONSUMPTION PATTERN OF LAGER AND CIDER BEER: CASE OF DELTA
BEVERAGE GWERU, ZIMBABWE**

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ABSTRACT: *After the introduction of the multi-currency system, in 2009, with the \$US dollar as the common currency, there was notable improvements in the economy of Zimbabwe, which also resulted in considerable shifts in the alcoholic beverages industry as well as significant shifts in the consumption behavior of consumers. This research looked at 1) relevance of age and consumption patterns 2) gender gap and alcoholic beverage consumption patterns 3) changing role of women and alcohol consumption related behavior. The aim of the research was to come up with current typical alcoholic beverage consumption pattern which will enhance the strategic and tactical approach for Delta beverage Gweru and the national market as a whole as well as improve the understanding of consumer behavior on an academic perspective*

KEYWORDS consumption patterns, consumer behavior, lagers, ciders

INTRODUCTION

A consumption pattern is that aspect of a lifestyle that relates to the nature and amount of the different goods and service that the households consider as adequate for fulfilling their needs. Consumption patterns are based on the basic principles of economics that deals with the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. Mshakur (2008) noted that the ability to anticipate the trends in consumer consumption patterns is vital to any company desiring to be a leader or major factor in their industry. Millions of dollars are spent each year in research and analysis to determine or to create trends in, not only who the company's customers may be, now and in the near future, but also, what will those customers want to buy, and why.

Researches by Pianna, (2001), Schiffman and Kanuk (2009), Suttle, (2014) among others have shown that most organization rely on demographic factors thus age, gender, sex, income, occupation, and education, when they want to segment their market. However on the other hand Pianna (2001) also argue that one should not entirely rely on demographic factors only. Boulanger (2008) says consumption clearly relates to how one satisfies their need and want. This research therefore looked at both demographic factors and other factors influencing the consumption patterns like changing role of women and marketing of alcohol beverages to women.

Local alcohol legislative measures in particular, the Liquor Act Vol 14 No.12 which prohibits selling and marketing of alcoholic beverages to persons under the age of eighteen, increase of foreign products like Heineken, Savannah and Windhoek lager, decrease in disposable income from 2013 and increased duty on lager beer from 40% to 45%, changing consumer needs and tastes

have sharpened competition at Delta beverages. To be successful in such times now demands new perspectives on competitiveness. Literally, competitiveness describes the ability of firms and industries to improve or protect their position in relation to competitors which are active in the same market. Therefore competitiveness of a firm can be taken as its ability to do better than comparable firms (Lall, (2001), thereby prompting the researchers to look at how age, gender gap and the changing role of women towards the consumption of lager and cider can influence firms' competitiveness.

The relevance of age and consumption patterns

Age is one of the major demographic elements which affect how a company's products and services are more likely to appeal to certain age groups, Suttle, (2014). Marketers of different products on the market usually segment their consumers by age and the major reason being that people of the same age are going through similar life experiences and therefore possess so many things in common which may also lead to similar consumption patterns. Brand preference varies with the age of the consumer, and marketers have found that age is a very useful demographic variable to the extent that some marketers have prospered by creating a niche market around age, Schiffman and Kanuk, (2009).

Kotler and Armstrong, (2007), also supports that age is an important factor in terms of consumer buying behavior as the needs for people in different age groups are different. However the authors noted that even sometimes if individuals are of the same age, the consumption pattern can differ due to several reasons. For example a bachelor would prefer spending lavishly on items like beer, bikes, music, clothes, clubs, parties, and wouldn't be much interested in buying a house or insurance while on the other hand an individual with a family at the same age would be more interested in products benefitting the family and securing the future. Marketers usually employ the concept of cohort analysis, Blackwell et al, (2006), as fundamental to understanding changing consumer markets. The authors defined a cohort as any group of individuals linked as a group in some common way usually mostly by age. The key to cohort analysis therefore, is examining brands preferred by a cohort as well as the influences that are shared by the group.

For instance (Blackwell, Engel and Miniard, 2006) identified the young age group as those whose age range between eighteen and twenty five years and generally termed the "Generation Y". They tend to be fickle and very unpredictable. They are likely to switch brand preferences more quickly than other groups because of the need to stay on top of trends and be accepted by their peers. Research indicates that what teens like best about consumption is being with friends. This suggests that companies should focus some of their marketing effects on opinion leaders within teen groups and also use social appeals when advertising. Therefore having an understanding of the changing age distributions in a population and its effects on consumption patterns provides useful insight on products and brands that will be bought now and in the future

The gender gap and alcoholic beverage consumption patterns

Schiffman and Kanuk, (2009), noted that due to the gender convergence gap, sex roles have been distorted and as such gender is no longer an exact technique in distinguishing customers in most brand classes or categories. In the African context women who consumed alcoholic beverages

were originally observed in minority groups and under very negative descriptions but currently this is now a common and more socially acceptable situation.

However, gender has, for quite some time been a straight basis for market segmentation because of significant differences that have been noted between both males and females. Men and women behave differently and consumption has been the main framework in which such differences often become evident and this is according to Kolyesnikova et al, (2009). Authors like Worth et al, (1992), Chang, (2006), and Gould and Weil, (1991), came up with several researches which discovered that gender identity can be used to analyse consumer buying patterns. Kolyesnikova et al (2009), however, insists that less is still known about how specifically social norms differ between males and females and how these differences relates to consumption. European Centre for Monitoring Alcohol Marketing (EUCAM), (2008), published results showing that alcohol consumption for women was still shown to be less than that of men in the UK.

In the article, on Trends in alcohol Marketing, nevertheless, it is noted that the alcohol consumption of women had also increased significantly mostly due to the fact that female celebrities have publicly celebrated their ability to drink more and as much as men or even quicker than men. Historically, according to Bloomfield et al, (2006), in an article on women and health in the EU, noted that women have consumed alcohol less often and in lower amounts than men. However, over time, the changing societal role of women and lessening of social taboos have led to a rise in the frequency and level of alcohol consumption among women. Increasingly, young women in Europe are becoming more frequent binge drinkers. A 2003 newspaper article based on a study by Datamonitor cited in an article by Institute of Alcohol Studies, (2013), revealed that the binge drinking culture was 'on the rise' among young women. The number of litres per capita of alcohol consumed by 18 to 24 year-old females rose by 31 litres from 172 litres in 1999 to 203 litres in 2003, nearly twice the UK average for women at the time. This is found to have mostly happened in most European countries although Zimbabwe is not entirely left out in this dynamic gender convergence gap and driven by several factors which might be due to globalization social networking such as LinkedIn, twitter and Facebook has led to the infiltration of the western culture into Zimbabwe.

The changing role of women and alcohol consumption related behavior

Women's roles in society have been on the increase together with the legislation that now advocates for equal employment for women have contributed to a sharp increase in the number of working women than in the past. Though some scholars argue that increase in working women would reduce consumption of alcoholic beverage brands as employed women are said to be less active in consumption than their unemployed counterparts, the overall net effect is more likely to reflect an increase in consumption due to increased disposable income for leisure purposes, and financial freedom which directly translates to alcohol consumption. Office for National Statistics (ONS), (2012), in the UK, which provided statistics in General Lifestyle survey, (GLS), revealed that the culture of drinking to excess also made its way into the workplace, where marked changes in attitudes and behaviour towards alcohol saw women in various professions taking advantage of the increased number of opportunities to drink than previous generations.

Furthermore, with the number of women at work at historically high levels, and the gender pay gap narrowing over recent decades, the notion of women sharing a drink with colleagues after work has become more socially acceptable. It is for reasons such as these that the workplace has had an important influence on female drinking habits; GLS statistics show that in 2011, women in managerial and professional positions in particular not only consumed more units of alcohol than the average female, but also drank more frequently during the week.

It is argued by Solomon, (1994), that modern women now play a greater role in areas regarded traditionally to be for male purchases. For example, according to Solomon it has been noted that approximately 40% of all condoms sold are bought by women whereas traditionally they were bought by men only and this is the same on alcoholic beverages. Kolyesnikova et al, (2009) noted that females were more active in the purchasing of wine for reciprocity reasons. Showing gratitude and as an obligation were identified as the main predecessors of consumer reciprocity. This therefore means that even those women who do not drink alcoholic beverages can take a role in alcoholic beverage brand choice.

Borgonovi and Huerta (2010), cited in an article by the Institute of Alcoholic Studies (IAS), (2013), says the link between status and consumption appears to go further than the drinking habits of female high-fliers as there is evidence to suggest an association between education and consumption levels. They further say that a year 2010 study based on the drinking habits of individuals born in 1970 found that the more educated women are, the more likely they are to drink alcohol on most days and to report having problems due to their drinking patterns. The relationship is stronger for females than males.

The authors offer a set of explanations for the positive association between education and drinking behaviours which they say include a more intensive social life that encourages alcohol intake, a greater engagement into traditionally male spheres of life, a greater social acceptability of alcohol use and abuse, more exposure to alcohol use during formative years and greater postponement of childbearing and its responsibilities among the better educated, and smaller underreporting. The choice of a career as well as educational background therefore have an influence on consumer behavior and, for consumers under thirty, most women and men have similar careers and educational backgrounds. This therefore implies more women are involved in alcoholic beverages consumption. Manufacturers should start thinking about adaptive marketing strategies because with such a background, it is worth noting that alcoholic consumption among women is highly predictable.

Marketing of alcoholic products towards women

With female alcohol consumption increasing brands and manufactures are targeting women more within this sector. A product that was only marketed to men, currently involves women in the advertisements to highlight that they may also enjoy the product, for example like the Redds adverts. According to the Beer Institute, 25% of beer consumers are women. Some brands are beginning to target women through new product development and marketing and this is according to a research by EUCAM, (2010). Beverages manufacturers are trying to seduce women to buy more alcoholic beverages by creating new products and by advertising with a slightly different feeling which is more feminine as well. The proliferation of the drinks market with alcoholic

beverages designed and advertised specifically towards women has also contributed to increased consumption levels over the years. A 2008 report on Trends in Alcoholic Marketing by the European Centre for Monitoring Alcohol Marketing (EUCAM) noted the changes in the alcoholic beverages industry, observing that executives of several companies saw the increasing affluence of women as an opportunity to develop a marketing strategy aimed at attracting more women to spend their disposable income on alcoholic beverages.

Apparently alcohol producers believe that if you want to attract women you have to make your alcoholic beverage sweet. Typically “female” alcoholic drinks are produced to taste sweeter and have lower alcohol content (Alcohol by Volume) than male ones; examples include fruit beers, wines, and liqueurs. Female role models, often celebrities, and attractive males are hired to advertise them, portraying the products as fashionable, glamorous and desirable for independent and fun-loving women. In some cases, alcoholic drinks are advertised alongside items such as handbags, make-up, and heeled shoes, in an attempt to associate the brand more closely with the lifestyle of an aspiring young female, EUCAM (2008).

In AAI (2013) it was discovered that recently, alcohol advertising has targeted women by marketing certain alcohol beverages to women, such as alcopops, spirits and wine. These products typically have high alcohol content. Products historically consumed by men such as beer are increasingly also being marketed to women. About 25% of beer consumption can be attributed to women. In EUCAM (2008), they say that alcohol marketing to women uses a variety of techniques such as TV programme sponsorship, fashion blogs, social media and special events like girls’ nights in/out. Companies promote alcohol to increase brand awareness and to get female customers to personally connect with the product. In Ireland, for example, one company depicts Thursdays as the girls’ night out, setting up beauty bars, giving fashion advice and offering free alcoholic drinks. Alcohol companies are developing products specifically for women such as fruit flavoured beer to deal “with the factors which make beer unattractive to women which are taste, smell, and the fairy-tale that beer makes fat” (Van den Berg, Heineken Netherlands). Heineken published an advertisement for its drink Wieckse Rosé in Pink Magazine that encouraged increased funding for breast cancer research and awareness, despite the link between alcohol consumption and breast cancer, EUCAM (2008).

Ander, Peter and Ben Baumberg of the Institute of Alcohol Studies in the UK, (2006), reported on Alcohol in Europe: A Public Health Perspective and notes that “light” products appeal to women who are conscious of their weight and calorie consumption. Famous actresses are deployed as spokes-women for various female targeted alcohol beverages in order to portray drinks as glamorous and sophisticated. The alcohol industry launches “light” or “diet” alcoholic beverages in response to demand for products with low calories as a way of dealing with high rates of obesity as women are health conscious.

Their research has shown there are relevant advertisements appeals that are specifically targeted at women and show that women also enjoy alcoholic beverages. Alcohol Action Ireland (2013), noted that different techniques are employed to target various subsets of women through clever marketing strategies appealing to younger and older women. For example, to appeal to younger women, companies are depicting attractive men in sexually suggestive advertisements. Other

advertisements depict women mimicking historically male behaviour while enjoying beer to show that women can “keep up with the boys.”

Beside the image that women also enjoy alcoholic products like men, therefore high quality drinks which reflect a more sophisticated image are produced to appeal to women who seek sophistication in their consumption of alcoholic beverages. Nuvo by Diageo, is a pink alcoholic beverage which is packed in an elegant bottle whose design was inspired by luxury perfume brands, according to Diageo Corporate Info, (2012). However, in some countries alcohol use of women is lower than their male counterparts. A concern is that promoting alcohol to women could lead a large part of non-alcoholic beverages drinkers or moderate drinkers into a drinker or heavy drinker. In an article in EUCAM (2008) newsletter and Alcohol Action Ireland (AAI), (2013), it was noted that following the example of the tobacco industry, the alcohol industry increasingly targets their promotional activities at women to increase their market. Around 2.2% of their new products are aimed at women, compared to 1.1% at men. For instance, in the UK, Coors has a department focusing on beer development and marketing towards women with the aim to create “a world where women love beer as much as they love shoes.”

METHODOLOGY

The research used quantitative and qualitative data collection methods through the use of questionnaires and interviews. Delta beverage Gweru was used as a case study. The sampling units comprised of lagers and ciders consumers (90, male and female) of above 18 years of age and were either identified at point of consumption (sit-in) outlets or as shoppers (take away) outlets. Management (5) and employees (25) of Delta Beverages were also included particularly those in the Sales department to try and provide information on how age, gender and changing role of women in alcohol consumption is affecting company competitiveness as well as look at the tools which they think can be used to build and maintain company position in the market. As such the research has an outcome about alcoholic beverage consumption patterns that can be generalized for the whole of the Gweru market, and with estimated degree of confidence to inform strategy formulators.

FINDINGS

Age and consumer related behaviour

During the interviews, using questionnaires, respondents were asked to indicate their age range. Data presentation on the age distribution of consumers is presented in fig 1 below;

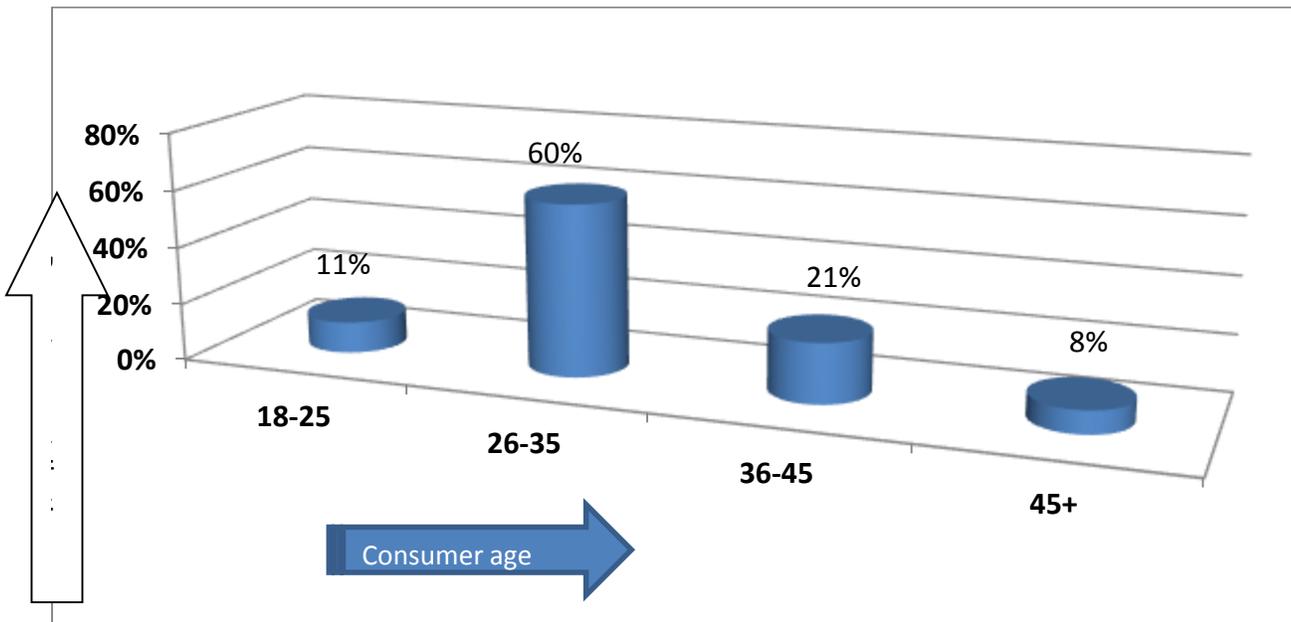


Fig 1 Alcoholic beverages consumer age distribution

The results reveal that the modal age range is 26-35 years (60%) and is followed by those between 36-45 years (21%). Those above the age of 45 years represent only a smaller but significant group of 8% of the drinking population. Another smaller significant group of 11% of alcohol consumers was revealed in the age group between 18-25 years, who are mostly college and university students

Gender and consumption related behaviour

Analysis of the contribution of females and males in the alcoholic beverage consumption are summarized on fig 2 below.

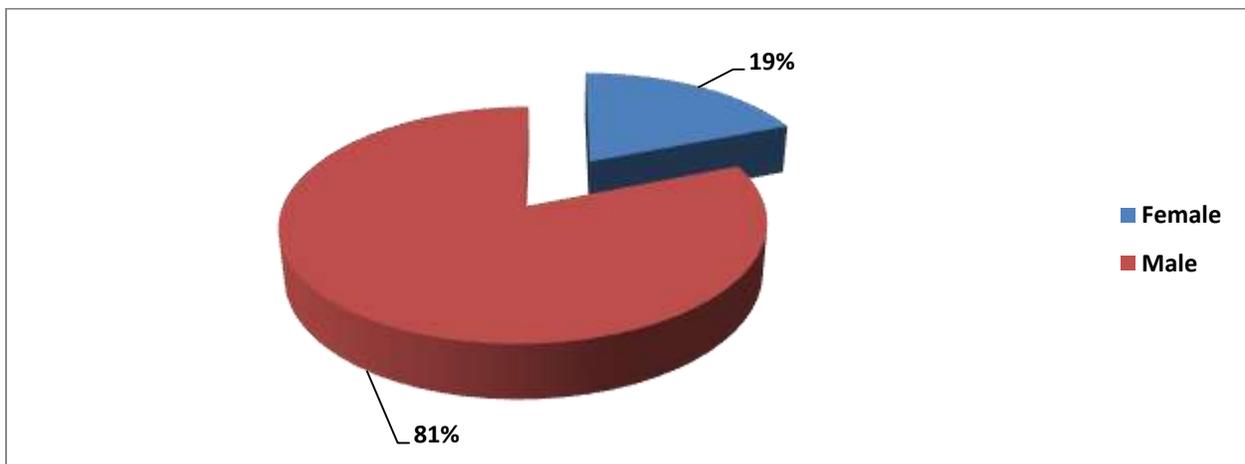


Fig 2 Alcoholic beverages consumer gender contribution

The findings from the survey results reveal that females contribute 19% of the drinking population while 81% are male.

Analysis of gender and category preference splits between lagers and ciders

The researcher expects that sample evidence supports the view that there is some association between gender and category preference. In particular, from observation, the researchers strongly suspects that female consumers are more aligned to ciders while their male counter parts are more aligned to lager beer. Gender and category observation results are analyzed on a contingency table as shown on table 1 below:

	Female	Male	Total
Lager	15	52	67
Cider	7	5	12
Total	22	57	79

Table 1: Gender and category consumption statistics

Mere visual inspections of a two way tabulation of data can suggest presence or absence of a relationship. It was interesting to find out that, of the 22 female consumers who responded, 15 of them indicated that they prefer lager beer than ciders.

DISCUSSION

This research ignored consumer information from those below the age of 18 in accordance with the Zimbabwean Statutory requirements. The majority of alcohol consumers fall in the age group 36-45 years, which by observation, is the age group that constitutes most of the people who frequent drinking places. These are consumers who constitute the working class, both formally and informally, and still earn a salary at the end of the month and can afford to spend on alcohol.

On the gender and category preference splits between lager and cider beer, the study revealed that out of the 22 women who responded, 15 of them indicated that they prefer lager beer to ciders. The face value of this information contradicts the general notion that women prefer ciders to lagers and therefore supports research done by Datamonitor that the gender convergence gap is narrowing towards the androgynous or genderless consumer. In other words, the sample data reveals that there is no working relationship between gender and category preference. The research concludes that Zimbabwe is not left out in the rapid gender convergence gap as a significant portion of 19% of women participates in alcoholic beverage consumption. This figure compares well with other European countries such as France where 25% of women partake in alcoholic beverage consumption

Increase in the campaign for equal rights and domestic legislation in favor of women could have contributed indirectly to liberalization consumption and patronage of alcohol outlets by women. Majority of women in Zimbabwe were usually noted to be tasting alcohol during women fellowship parties such as baby welcomes, kitchen top up parties. This situation has also been complemented by the male counter parts taking a more civilized approach by allowing them to drink once-in-a while. The changing role of women and marketing towards women are some of the factors that have affected gender and consumption patterns of alcoholic beverage products.

CONCLUSIONS

The key conclusion derived from the research findings was that lagers strongly dominate the alcoholic beverage market by contributing 93% where as ciders contribute 7%. With regards to consumer age distribution, the research concludes that the majority of alcoholic beverage consumers are in the 26 – 35 years category. Zimbabwean women now feel more comfortable having an alcoholic beverage as refreshment and sharing with their male counterparts after work and the gender laws advocating for women's rights also has contributed as women can now do things which were usually said to be for males only or mostly. Solomon, (1994), says modern women now play a greater role in areas regarded traditionally to be for male purchases. Kolyesnikova et al, (2009) noted that females were more active in the purchasing of wine for reciprocity reasons. This therefore means that even those women who do not drink alcoholic beverages can take a role in alcoholic beverage purchases

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To remain sustainable alcoholic beverage manufacturers need not to segment on the basis of gender. However appealing to gender specifics in alcoholic beverage production and marketing not only hikes budgets but might also destabilize the alcoholic beverage market.
- With 19% contribution of females in alcoholic beverage consumption, beer marketers need to actively involve women alcoholic beverage brand advertising and promotion. To ignore them is to overlook 19% of the customer base.
- Similarly the middle aged consumers need to feature more in alcoholic beverage brand advertising and promotion because they constitute a significant portion of the market.
- Managing today's consumer requires the quantum shift from the old command and control model to understanding consumer's relationship with the brands on a regular basis if the business is to maintain the consumer's vote, build and maintain sustainable competitive advantage, maintain market share and ensure high profitability and growth.
- Against the current instabilities in the macro environment, it is a marketing necessity that customer driven organizations need to align their marketing programs with factors that influence consumer consumption patterns and how they affect performance and profitability.
- Delta needs to constantly track the current brands preferred by consumers including Delta's rival brands and reasons for such preferences such as the current consumer demographics (gender, age, and income), economic and social factors as well as the current consumption life style.

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