

Castle Lite: A brand narrative of imagined communities and included consumers

ABSTRACT

One of South Africa's most successful recent branding initiatives is the rebranding and repositioning of SABMiller's Castle Lite beer. Light beer branding has a long and successful history in the United States, where brand names like Bud Light have long held a significant market share. However, sales of Castle Lite were low, leading into 2009. SABMiller's approach to bolster sales was to build a narrative around the brand that moved away from the concept of 'light', or 'low calorie', or even 'low alcohol' and reframe the consumer perception of this beer around the symbolic value of 'Extra Cold Refreshment'. This article examines the means through which Castle Lite consumers were invited to form a unique, imagined community of beer drinkers through a number of media formats. It offers advertisers, academics and brand managers a concise case study that illustrates how a failing brand can be relatively quickly repositioned to dramatically increase market penetration, consumer brand knowledge and overall sales.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to examine the means through which the South African company SABMiller created one of South Africa's most successful brand narratives: the 2009-2012 rebranding and repositioning of SABMiller's Castle Lite brand. This was achieved through a number of careful media initiatives that ultimately reframed the symbolic aspects of the Castle Lite brand to South African consumers. The result of this repositioning was a sudden and dramatic increase in sales of a product that was lagging behind every other premium beer on the South African market. The use of multi-platform media to create a compelling narrative around this struggling brand was crucial to the brand's success. SABMiller's related branding strategy is an important record of how modern multi-modal media advertising and branding strategy can make a dramatic difference in how consumers relate to a brand that has lost its appeal to its target market, offering practitioners in the field a means of effectively "turning around" a flailing brand or, in this case, brand extension.

1. CONTEXT

Light beer branding has a long and successful history in the United States, where brand names like Bud Light have held significant market share for decades. Sales of Castle Lite, the light beer brand extension of the company's Castle Lager brand, however, were low in South Africa leading into 2009, only a decade and a half after the brand's introduction to the market.

Light beer is almost entirely a marketing construct. There is no accepted worldwide definition of what a light beer actually *is*. The terms 'light' or 'lite' are technically meaningless, but generally indicate to the consumer that the beer is a lower alcohol and calorie (kilojoule) version of a premium lager. Many brewers lower the caloric count of the beer by halving the Alcohol By Volume (ABV), although this is by no means a standard procedure. Light beers generally range from 2.5-5.0% ABV (Beer Advocate, 2008), though many so-called light beers have almost the same amount of alcohol as regular lagers. Bud Lite, for instance, has an ABV of 4.1 as opposed to Budweiser, its non-light counterpart, at 5.0 ABV (Real Beer Media, 2014).

The care that SABMiller takes to protect and support the Castle brand is immense, not least because it is the only beer brand in its catalogue that has a South African origin. South African consumers have traditionally seemed to shy away from the concept of a light beer, despite the fact that Castle Lite beer has 4% alcohol by volume (compared to 5.5% ABV in the company's related product, Castle Lager) and more calories than Bud Light, one of the best-selling beers in the in the United States (Beer Advocate, 2008). As the terms 'light' or "lite" have no measureable technical definition applicable to beer, they may be considered abstract concepts. Nonetheless, despite the fact that this beer is only fractionally different than the other premium lagers on the market, the Castle Lite brand (and light beer brands in general) had very little resonance in this market since the brand's introduction into the South African market in 1994 (Forman, Murray & Janse van Rensburg, 2013).

To reintroduce the product to the market, the approach the company took was to build a narrative around the beer that moved away from the concepts of 'light' or 'low calorie' or even 'low alcohol' and reframe the consumer perception of this beer around the concept of 'Extra Cold Refreshment'. The idea of 'Extra Cold Refreshment' was instated through the entire marketing mix. It was a relatively simple and seemingly common-sense adjustment that resonated with customers, creating such interest in the brand that between 2009 (the inception of the Castle Lite campaign) and 2012, sales of the beer rose a cumulative 68% (South African Breweries, 2013:53). This rise in sales rendered the product SABMiller's best performing premium beer brand, with its growth continuing at a rate of 20% throughout 2013 (Reynard, 2013).

According to Kuben Nair, Marketing Manager at SABMiller in charge of Strategy and Innovation around the Castle Lite brand, the stated goal of the campaign was to appeal mainly to "25 to 35-year old urban black males, an emerging up-and-coming group with a progressive mind-set" (personal communication, April 9, 2014). The campaign was to "tap into" this group with the concept of 'Extra Cold Refreshment' which, according to Nair, "spoke to a simple insight, a simple truth that was differentiated and executed in a fun and refreshing manner [which] resonated strongly with the target market" (2014). The end result of the growth of the brand was that it is now "significantly more than twice the size [it was] 4 to 5 years ago" (2014).

The repositioning of the Castle Lite brand was accomplished by redesigning the packaging of the Castle Lite product, and to ensure that it was served to customers in restaurant settings from 'Sub-Zero' branded refrigerators:

The packaging was re-designed to use more silver and, [more] importantly, the cold indicator was implemented on the packs. [It is] a thermo-chromic indicator that turns blue when your Castle Lite is cold. The key icon for this was a snow castle; the iconic Castle icon housed within a snowflake. To truly deliver the promise, we launched thousands of bespoke branded fridges that kept Castle Lite colder than any other beer.

(personal communication, April 9, 2014).

The advertising campaign was carried out across multiple platforms, with a heavy concentration on television advertising that was mirrored on YouTube. The company also erected what they refer to as "impactful outdoor advertising" with cold themes such as "creating a winter wonderland or faux snow around the billboard" (personal communication, April 9, 2014). Print and radio adverts were launched and a series of competitions with "instant prizes like cash and custom cooler boxes to keep your Castle Lite cold" (2014). Nair claims that "It was important to integrate and link all the elements together with a consistent theme – a call-to-action to 'Unleash The Extra Cold Refreshment'" (2014).

The advertising would turn out to have numerous platforms that all promoted the 'Extra Cold Refreshment' concept. But, more importantly, the company would change what exactly that 'Extra Cold Refreshment' actually meant into something that was far more than just a cold beer.

It would, in fact, reframe the term 'refreshment' into many related meanings, all based on the consumption of this particular beer brand. This meant, firstly, that the brand's symbolic values had to be repositioned.

2. REPOSITIONING THE CASTLE LITE BRAND

Brands have a distinct "value system" or "symbolic values" as experienced by consumers (De Chernatony & Dall'Olmio Riley, 1998:421). Klopper and North (2011:10), in their South African textbook on brands entitled *Brand Management*, quote Burgess (1998:10) who asserts that "consumers use brands to form associations with deep-seated values and emotions in an attempt to simplify the decision making process". This "intangible" benefit is a long term strategy that must "continuously be refined to adapt to changing consumer requirements" (1998:10, cited in Klopper & North, 2011:10). The former intangible benefit of Castle Lite was the fact it offered fewer calories and slightly less ABV per serving; these are qualities that, as we have seen, ultimately did not resonate with local consumers. Nonetheless, starting in 2004, the brand was marketed as 'The Right Choice' with the tagline "The one to have when you are having more than one", in a campaign that would define the brand for four years (Tracey O'Brien Publicity, 2004). By 2009 this brand positioning had been found to be ineffective. Kuben Nair states that, "The proposition that was Castle Lite being 'The Right Choice' didn't resonate and engage with consumers and was not particularly differentiated" (personal communication, April 9, 2014). Accordingly, the new campaign (which uses classic strategies of narratology) was meant to move the symbolic values of Castle Lite from the functional benefits of 'light' and making 'The Right Choice', to a beer that offered 'Extra Cold Refreshment'.

The symbolic values of 'coldness' or 'cold' have a clear emotional impact on consumers, not least because lager beer, as it is brewed in South Africa, is meant to be served cold. South Africa's warm climate means that this aspect of 'coldness' carries a stronger resonant meaning than might be expected in North America or Europe, where a beer might be preferred because it is 'refreshing' or, as was the case with Budweiser's famous 1999-2001 advertising campaign, 'authentic' and 'true' (Watts & Orbe, 2002:1). The Castle Lite campaign took the 'ice-cold' concept to an extreme, promising beer drinkers that it would be the coldest beer they could order at the bar, with an average temperature of -4 degrees Celsius (personal communication, April 9, 2014). This concept of coldness might be considered a "functional characteristic or attribute" (Klopper & North, 2011:9), but it is the 'promise' of coldness and the campaign's emphasis on the search for coldness and cold environments that turned it into a *symbolic* and *emotional* value. As Klopper and North point out, emotional values and experiences with brands are "the grand total of the emotional 'added value' the product or service holds, apart from its inherent quality and functional purpose" (2011:11). Klopper and North also posit that a "symbolic value of a brand is neither an inherent attribute of the brand nor does it exist outside the communication, behaviour and attitude of the business or how these are perceived by the stakeholders" (2011:186). This became, in effect, the major focus of the brand in terms of its intangible, emotive aspects. Most beers served in South Africa are served cold, and certainly all of those made by SABMiller. SABMiller turned this common functional attribute into an emotional attribute and a symbolic value for the Castle

Lite brand by offering a beer that is just slightly colder than customers might be accustomed to. According to Nair, “The extensive re-launch of Castle Lite, re-imagined with the Extra Cold platform, was based on the simple insight that consumers experienced drinking beer at very cold temperatures being the most refreshing. This gave Castle Lite a differentiated angle to the generic benefit of refreshment” (personal communication, April 9, 2014).

3. THE EMOTIONAL BEER BRAND, THE EMOTIONAL CONSUMER

South African researcher Eric Du Plessis focuses his analytical attention on emotion as it applies to advertising and brand management. At the beginning of Chapter 8 of his book *The Advertised Mind* (2005), Du Plessis describes the problem some researchers have with attributing human emotion to the intangible symbolic values of a brand: “We need to look carefully at what emotion is, before we can bridge the gap between the instinctual fear response that we make when we encounter a snake, and our mild fondness for one brand of shampoo over another” (2005:79). Of course, in this case, we are discussing the fondness a consumer may have for one beer over another. Nonetheless, exactly what would prompt a beer drinker to attribute such importance to coldness (and all the emotional meaning it conveys) that it would be the deciding factor in a purchase? Du Plessis (2005:81) quotes Fehr and Russell (1984:464) in observing that “Everybody knows what an emotion is, until asked to give a definition.” Du Plessis, a neuroscience scholar who works extensively in the field of advertising and branding, posits that “emotion is critical to advertising because it is critical to all human thought”. In *The Advertised Mind*, Du Plessis (2005:83) takes his cues from Oatley and Jenkins (1995:100) in saying that “attention, for instance, is a result of the emotion, not its cause.” Oatley and Jenkins conclude that “advertising does not first get attention, and then create an emotion. Advertising creates an emotion, which results in attention” (1995:100, cited in Du Plessis, 2005:84). Here, Du Plessis supports Oatley and Jenkins’s thesis that emotion drives all advertising because human beings make so many apparently rational decisions on a purely emotional level. “Advertising works by establishing feelings, associations and memories in relation to a brand. These associations must come to mind when we think about a brand, ideally when we are considering a purchase” (Oatley & Jenkins, 1995:100). Du Plessis (2005) concisely explains why the basic elements of a brand must contain an emotional, “irrational” component that is best referred to as “symbolic value”, as we have seen above. Bhat and Reddy (1998:32) argue that “positioning a brand through a clear and consistent image-building campaign has been the cornerstone of brand marketing practice.” Their interpretation of ‘brand concept management’ (BCM) is taken from the research of theorists and practitioners such as Gardner and Levy (1955); Park, Jaworski and MacInnis (1986); and Ries and Trout (1986).

The brand concept meaning can “be either symbolic or functional” (Bhat & Reddy, 1998:32). Functional brands “satisfy immediate and practical needs”, while “symbolic brands satisfy symbolic needs such as self-expression and prestige, and their practical usage is only incidental” (1998:32). Of course this strict duality raises a “number of interesting issues” (1998:32). Bhat and Reddy (1998) question whether symbolism and functionality, as far as brands are concerned, are actually two separate elements. Perhaps it would be better to think of these aspects of a brand on a scale where functionality segues into emotional (symbolic) value. This would certainly be

relevant to the Castle Lite brand, where the functionality of “cold” or even “extra cold” (almost ubiquitous in the world of South African beer branding) has been equated with refreshment. The quality of ‘being cold’ therefore straddles both functionality and symbolic value. More than that, Bhat and Reddy (1998:32) note that there is simply no way to assess “functionality” versus “symbolism” as far as a brand is concerned. They first examine the so-called ‘rational model’ of consumer decision-making, which suggests that consumers judge brands on the basis of their utility via objective criteria such as miles per gallon. Bhat and Reddy (1998:33) point out that a number of researchers contend that ‘the rational’ is appropriate only for goods that consumers value for their “tangible and utilitarian benefits”, but does not explain goods that consumers buy to satisfy their “emotional wants”. The satisfaction of these “emotional wants” means that “individuals use personal or subjective criteria such as taste, pride, desire for adventure, and a desire for expressing themselves, in their consumption decisions” (1998:33). These are, in turn, usually referred to as “hedonic benefits” (1998:33). Their research indicates that “brand functionality and symbolism are distinct concepts in consumers’ minds” and that “consumers do not have any trouble accepting brands that have both symbolic and functional appeal” (1998:40).

4. ‘COLDNESS’: FROM FUNCTIONAL TO HEDONIC BENEFIT

Castle Lite seems to have provided researchers with an opportunity to witness how a functional benefit like ‘coldness’ can be reframed in the mind of the consumer as a hedonic benefit. As we examine the brand programme of Castle Lite, it becomes obvious that ‘coldness’ is positioned in the minds of consumers as something fun and representative of adventure, humour and friendship. One might note from the outset that South Africa’s relatively mild climate provides the perfect environment to create a hedonic benefit out of coldness. Most South African beer drinkers, unlike their counterparts in Europe and North America, rarely experience sub-zero temperatures, and thus there are few negative associations in place in the local consumer’s mind in this respect. The concept of coldness, possibly related from an emotional point of view to ‘being cool’ or even “chilled” from the point of view of the consumer, is humorously represented in the Castle Lite branding material. SABMiller’s initiative for Castle Lite shifts the symbolic benefit of a cold beer into the realm of ‘being cold’ by making *the state of being a cold human being* appear amusing, fun, and even provocative.

This campaign to move the functional aspect of coldness into a hedonic and symbolic benefit was carried out across multiple platforms, including television, print, outdoor signage, and point of sale. At the end of 2013, social media platform Mxit was also utilised to push awareness of the new 440ml bottle, which was introduced in the same year. A downloadable application was created that was aimed at the target market of 18 to 25-year old drinkers who could discover how to win various prizes and share news of the competition, and the brand, with friends.

Castle Lite aired a branded logo on Splash Screens every Wednesday evening to target consumers. This resulted in the campaign delivering Splash Screens to 568,182 registered users, totalling over 6.7 million page views, 2.8 million impressions and 97,922 clicks in August alone (The Media Online Reporter, 2013). Thanks to Mxit, the Castle Lite app attracted 75,864

registered users in just two months, at a cost of R1.66 per user calculated on the Splash Screen budget (2013). The company also created a series of viral commercials designed to entertain the viewer, that quickly became one of the most viewed YouTube video series in South Africa (Giant Films, 2013). This is in line with their concept of telling stories and entertaining people in order to promote the brand. In a purely episodic format, the 'Ice Breakers' campaign followed a group of characters whose sole purpose was "discovering new methods to get Castle Lite to optimum drinking temperature" (Giant Films, 2013). All of these videos were designed to go viral.

These videos, however, may also be considered counterintuitive. For instance, in the *Castle Lite Extra Cold Summer commercial*¹, we see a group of characters gathered around the pool during a warm summer's day. Into this scenario drives the Castle Lite ice truck. The characters are squirted with cold liquid (possibly beer, possibly water), and a frosty haze settles over the party as a series of characters leave the truck that literally cools off the party. The truck seems to have a means of making it snow at the party, and this livens things up enough for people to start dancing. This truck is an iconic construct. It is carefully framed as a place where dancing and partying takes place. The people who drive the ice truck are not dressed for cold weather; instead they are dressed for balmy summer socialising. A South African celebrity, DJ Milkshake, addresses the viewer directly and introduces the Castle Lite ice truck in the Internet and TV ad *Castle Lite Presents: The Ice Truck*. It is referred to as "the world's most refreshing ice truck", further equating the hedonic value of "refreshing" with "ice" and "cold". The ice truck is presented as "Castle Lite's new ride", which makes the brand into a character that can be brought into social situations in a vehicle, and further presents the idea of 'coldness' as fun.

Most commercials for the brand introduce the various elements of the Castle Lite brand through showing us a party that is already happening. The clear appeal of the product is the suggested inclusion into the festivities the viewer is offered. Just as important, the characters in every online and television commercial have equated 'cold' with fun. The truck features snow cannons and a "twerk-activated vending machine", where partygoers dance for beer that comes from a frost-misted refrigerator (Castle Lite SA, 2013). Furthermore, in the *Castle Lite Presents: The Ice Truck* online commercial we see a partygoer, dressed in white snow gear and goggles, take a beer from a bar-fridge only to discover it is not cold enough to drink, thanks to the blue indicator on the bottle. The bottle is inserted into a "Stage 2 Cold" cooling machine (an obvious mechanical special effect), an indicator is consulted as the bottle is duly showered with rime, and after a moment the beer is duly deemed cold enough to drink. The indicator, of course, is a branding mechanism to remind consumers that the symbolic value of 'Extra Cold Refreshment' is "guaranteed".

5. LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL ON AND ON: A COOL STORY OF NATION-BUILDING

The advertisement is laden with multiple solicitations to the viewer to become part of this narrative of 'ice-cold fun' and partying. The first direct solicitation to the viewer is also an invitation to

¹ To view this video, please visit http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2_DxOJirp0

build the viewer's own experience into the activities on the screen. The viewer is almost always referred to in the plural, as if DJ Milkshake, the host of the party we see on the television or computer screen, is speaking to another group of people in which the viewer is a member. The assumption that the viewer is *already part of a crowd of interested beer drinkers* offers the viewer the opportunity to consider herself or himself not as an individual consumer, but as a member of the larger, unseen, community of consumers. The assumed target audience clearly seems to be young, urban, black males and females, the stated target of the campaign itself. DJ Milkshake talks to the viewer and his or her own group, while giving a tour of the truck and the goings-on at the party, which is clearly being held on a film set peopled with actors meant to resemble similar characters to those purportedly addressed. This solicitation to the real viewer and his *imagined cohort* to join an *imagined party* is in fact an invitation for the viewer to become part of the symbolic values of the Castle Lite brand itself.

Sarah Britten, in her dissertation *One Nation, One Beer: The Mythology of the New South Africa in Advertising* (2005), looked deeply into the connection between advertising and nation-building in the New South Africa. She also analysed the purposeful way that SABMiller, then called South African Breweries (SAB), "depicted racial interaction in its beer advertising during the 1980s partly because the company was looking to a non-racial future, and partly because the majority of the target responded positively to the new direction in communication" (2005:8). It was in beer advertising, and possibly in advertising in general, that South Africans could first see themselves as part of a racially harmonious grouping. She was attracted to the advertising of SAB in particular because "for several reasons, relating in part to the nature of the product category (the consumption of beer being inherently social) and also to the self-conferred status of South African Breweries as a company emblematic of the South African corporate sector, beer advertising is where the rainbow nation myth is seen to best advantage" (2005:15). Britten points out that since the mid-1980s, SAB had become the foremost promoter of a non-racial society in its advertising after discovering that consumers viewed multi-racial advertising in a positive light (*Financial Mail*, 1990:52 in Britten, 2005:147). She quotes Alex Holt as saying that the hopeful, optimistic multi-racial society depicted in SAB's advertising showed the brand preparing "for a future reality that big corporations such as SAB possibly already foresaw as inevitable: the collapse of apartheid and its pillars, among them, the Group Areas Act" (1992:20 in Britten, 2005:147). The presentation of irreverent, multi-racial advertisements was firmly supported by the black community. However, market research performed by SAB in the 1980s indicated that 85% of whites and almost 100% of blacks surveyed supported a move towards a policy of showing whites and blacks consuming beer together in SAB advertising. Britten points out that the effect positive response from consumers was overwhelming:

Whether such situations were artificial or not, they were powerful depictions of a possible non-racial future for South Africa: a survey published in the *Sunday Times* in 1988 revealed that 65% of black South Africans and 35% of white South Africans believed that multiracial advertising would have a positive impact on race relations in South Africa.

(Sinclair & Barenblatt, 1993:64, in Britten, 2005:147).

Britten suggests that “not only did multiracial advertising of this kind allude to the possibility of political change, it demonstrated what a post-apartheid society might look like, and what it might be like to live in it” (2005:147). SABMiller has not moved away from this policy of showing white people and black people socialising together in a light-hearted, stylised atmosphere as a means of growing its primarily black consumer base.

The solicitation to join the imaginary ‘party’ also has multiple facets to it that allow the viewer to find entry into these imagined symbolic values of the brand and, arguably, an idealised version of South African society in general. For example, viewers can ‘activate’ the ice truck from their own mobile phones. This ‘activation’ command (supposedly) fires off the snow cannons into the never-ending party the truck represents and its community of always happy, always drinking, Castle Lite branded partiers. The commercial then ends with the injunction to viewers to visit the Castle Lite website² to discover when the ice truck will come to a bar near them, and to educate themselves further about the beer and the truck. A further injunction to the viewers is to “subscribe to the Castle Lite (YouTube channel)”: “C’mon guys, just subscribe to the Castle Lite channel.” Thus the viewer is immediately asked to interact with the brand via four online spaces, after having been addressed and guided through the commercial itself. Categorically, the unspoken, fifth means of joining the party would be to purchase the product itself.

Each online platform (the website, the YouTube channel, the Twitter feed, and the Facebook page) offers an entry point into an on-going party, a narrative of ‘cold’ and ‘fun’ that seems to continue from commercial to commercial. The ice truck exists, this is not disputable, but the party as seen in the commercial has been fabricated and obviously so. The party itself has its own narrative, where men and women silently dance in what seems like slow motion to music only they can hear. Inserted into the advertisement are mini episodes of ‘twerking’ and public drinking that liven things up. DJ Milkshake, as he addresses the viewer, is followed around the set by a woman who seems immersed in her own, private good time, only half paying attention to Milkshake’s exhortations to the viewer. He repeatedly asks the viewer to “do it”, as he shows them the various online channels by which they can participate. At one point he repeats himself three times: “do it, do it, do it”. The key is to activate the consumers, have them move through the various scenes of the advertisement.

The question that one might ask is, simply, “why would the consumer ‘do it’”? Why would he or she press the button to scroll through the commercial, join the “Twitter experience”, or sign up to the YouTube channel? The evidence from SABMiller is that consumers did indeed interact with the campaign, which has increased otherwise flagging sales and utterly reinvigorated the brand. In answering this question, we come across one of the most interesting ways in which a consumer understands the brand. At the most basic level, the consumer is being asked to utilise the media under his or her control to enter the party narrative. The consumer is encouraged to find out more about what is happening as the party is turned into a number of episodes with the general theme of ‘finding coldness’. The promise of an entertaining story is one lure, whilst, at

² www.castlelite.co.za

the same time, the viewer is encouraged to imagine that he or she will find inclusion with a larger (again, imagined) group of consumers. Being one of the thousands who 'like' the product on Facebook (265,457 'likes' as of this writing) or 'follow' it on Twitter (14,900+ followers as of this writing) offers consumers a kind of community, of course, but the brand is bigger than these. All of those 'likes' and 'follows' are placed by viewers hoping to gain a kind of figurative entry into the mythical party and narrative shown on the screen. The ever-developing, engaging story *demand*s viewer inclusion, not simply the viewer/consumer passively watching the advertisements. 'Likes', 'follows', 'subscribing' and of course 'drinking' are all results of actions that consumers are invited to take part in so that they may discover more about the Castle Lite narrative, and to include themselves in it.

The Castle Lite narrative promises unending entertainment and fun, and suggests that the consumer could become part of the action via the Internet or through buying the product and interacting with the various brand icons like the ice truck. This truck does indeed travel around the country, and offers a kind of symbolic evidence that the world shown on the television, computer or smartphone screen might have a real-world possibility. This strange other world of cold, partying and snow is a simulacrum of an idealised vision of social achievement (cf. Britten, 2005). It is a world that is filled with beautiful people who endlessly enjoy themselves in a comfortably multi-racial setting. Added into this is the unexpected presence of cold, snow, ice and frost; but because these are contextualised in a familiar but imaginary environment, they become part of the narrative and part of the experience we have with the product itself.

6. THE ICE TRUCK AND THE PORTABLE NARRATIVE

The ice truck is brought along to numerous Castle Lite related events as part of an experiential marketing campaign that dovetails with the so-called 'above the line' (television, internet, print, outdoor) advertising efforts of SABMiller. The constructed experience that the viewer sees in the commercials is meant to be recreated around the icon of the truck. Elizabeth Moor (2003), in her article *Branded spaces: The scope of new marketing*, reflects on why this kind of marketing is so valuable, especially for alcohol brands. In her analysis of a similar campaign conducted for the Irish beer brand Guinness, she notes that experiential branding efforts (such as bringing the ice truck to venues around South Africa), coincides with "current attempts to approach consumers in an expanded range of everyday spaces, which in turn are often organized around the promotion of brands rather than specific products or services" (Moor, 2003:40). Moor quotes marketing manager for Guinness Ireland thus:

Diageo [parent company to Guinness] will effectively in about a year or two years' time be a drinks company, a big drinks company. But they are quickly realizing that actually you can't think of drinks as just drinks, you need to think of drinks as part of leisure, and you need to be thinking about how drinks compete with cinema, with going out, with eating, with all sorts of other stuff.

(Moor, 2003:44)

She points out that the strongest brands are “increasingly those built around ‘values and beliefs’ rather than product specific qualities” (2003:44). The experiential nature of the ice truck experience means that participants in ice truck events will not only make positive associations with actually acquiring and consuming the product, but they will also participate in its branding by sharing pictures of themselves at the event, or by having themselves photographed and videoed while at the event. Of course, souvenirs and other give-away products will be handed out to make the experience “portable, facilitating the movement of bodies and objects from one context to another by miniaturizing the original site (through metonymy) and incorporating it within the individual life-narrative” (Moor, 2003:49). The key is to make consumers think either one of two things: “I was there!” or “I wish I was there!” (Moor, 2003:50).

This idea of a free-form narrative that becomes “portable” comes from the work of Susan Stewart: *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (1993). Firstly, Castle Lite advertisements solicit involvement by showing an idealised representation of the good times that are possible within the symbolic values of the Castle Lite brand. Then, consumers are invited to experience these as best they can within a controlled environment, while at the same time sharing their experiences. This sharing of events that are miniaturised and placed into participants’ personal narratives creates, in turn, a so-called “brand community” which is defined by Muniz and O’Guinn as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand” (2001:412). Importantly, “brand communities are participants in the brand’s larger social construction and play a vital role in the brand’s ultimate legacy” (2001:412). In other words, these communities and experiences are all part of the larger, symbolic construction of the brand. Muniz and O’Guinn argue that it is “critical” to note that communities are no longer “restricted by geography” (2001:413). This is not due to the sudden rise of the internet and social networking, but instead the more gradual, historical rise of “railroads, telegraphs, magazines, telephones, and national commerce fractured narrow notions of community and social consciousness” (2001:413). As new communication technologies spread, posit Muniz and O’Guinn, they united “geographically dispersed individuals with a commonality of purpose and identity” (2001:413). This process has been accelerated by the internet and social media and, as Muniz points out, by mass media. “Mass media demonstrated that virtually all of the hallmarks of geographic community could be simulated, if not wholly or substantially replicated, in a mass-mediated world” (2001:413). Muniz and O’Guinn contend that “computer-mediated communication” is simply part of this larger process already underway (2001:413).

For that reason, “many (perhaps most) contemporary communities must be imagined” (Anderson, 1983, in Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001:413). Our entire notion of “community” is being rethought, and Anderson suggests that most communities larger than small villages are “to some extent, sustained by notions of imagined, understood others” (Anderson, 1983, in Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001:413). Bender (1978:145, in Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001:413) defines a ‘community’ as “a network of social relations marked by mutuality and emotional bonds”. This emotional connection to a group – even an imagined group – is what brands such as Castle Lite facilitate, and in turn create what Muniz and O’Guinn (2001:414) refer to as “consumption communities”. They reassure us that “the idea of “communal consumption” is not new at all (2001:414). Consumers have been communally

consuming this since the days of the farmer's market, and a number of brands (Harley Davidson and Jeep, for instance) periodically hold "brandfests" that allow supporters of these brands to meet and interact with each other (McAlexander & Schouten, 1998, cited in Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001:414).

Muniz and O'Guinn, however, were the first to notice that "the study of communal consumption in which members are not physically proximal to one another is almost non-existent, particularly when the communal centre is a mass-produced branded good" (2001:414). Brands such as Harley Davidson have a 'subculture' status in that the brand itself puts users in touch with a tremendous, real and imagined group of Harley users who have been presented time and again to consumers in both pop culture and advertising. But Muniz and O'Guinn (2001:414) believe that brand communities have "an active interpretive function, with brand meaning being socially negotiated, rather than delivered unaltered and in toto from context to context, consumer to consumer."

It is in this imagined group of people who seek coldness, where the ice truck brings good times and consumers are invited to "do it", that the meaning of the Castle Lite brand is socially negotiated. The strength of the brand, and possibly the reason for its tremendous success, lies not in a concrete, delineated proposed meaning but instead in its *communal* meaning. To take part in the Castle Lite brand, in this sense, is to consume it, to "like" it, to follow it, and also, quite possibly, to be consumed by it at least in the imaginative sense. Through the participation in the various elements of the brand and the consuming of its product, the customer is also consumed (or subsumed) into a never-ending party that takes place in the twilight of fantasy and reality. In this case, 'extra cold refreshment' becomes something that is, ironically, rather warm and inviting: an imagined society engaged in an imagined party; a snowy brandfest where the fun need never end. In this sense, the party and the imagined meaning is a never-ending narrative of good times, each chapter leading on to another zany gathering, and another promise of inclusion. Critical reflection would therefore encourage experiential brands such as Castle Lite to continue to find ways to sustain their imagined societies through even more innovation. Cold indicators, trucks, brand channels and vending machines are surely only the tip of the iceberg.

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