

Guinness is the “Pumpkin Spice Latte” of St. Patrick’s Day

Analyzing St. Patrick’s Day Sentiment in Social Media



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Researchers



Dr. Jin-A Choi

Assistant Professor, School of Communication and Media

Dr. Choi received her PhD from the Stan Richards School of Advertising and Public Relations at the University of Texas at Austin. Dr. Choi’s scholarship focuses on target advertising celebrity/social media influencer endorsements, digital advertising, text mining, and data analytics. Her research has been published in journals such as Journal of Global Marketing, Communication Studies, and others. Dr. Choi teaches a variety of undergraduate and graduate courses such as Social Media Analytics, Influencers and Opinion Leaders and Integrated Communications.



Dr. Bond Benton

Associate Professor, School of Communication and Media

Dr. Benton’s doctorate is from the University of Vienna with his dissertation focusing on the influence of culture on meaning. A particular focus of Dr. Benton’s research is the interaction of media, branding, and cross-cultural communication as it relates to the values and decisions of constituencies. Dr. Benton’s essays and research articles have appeared in journals and anthologies including The Journal of E-Learning and Digital Media, Public Relations Tactics, and many more. His first book, The Challenge of Working for Americans: Perspectives of an International Workforce, was released in 2014.



Dr. Yi Luo

Associate Professor, School of Communication and Media

Dr. Luo has conducted research in the areas of organizational change, sensemaking, leadership, social media and communication management, activism, organizational justice, and global public relations. Dr. Luo received her Ph.D in Communication from the University of Maryland, College Park. Dr. Luo’s research has been published or accepted to be published in Public Relations Review, Journal of Public Relations Research, among many more. Dr. Luo teaches a variety of courses in organizational communication and public relations such as Cases and Campaigns, Communication Theories, Communication Research, Global Public Relations, Public Relations Ethics, New Media Applications in Organizations, and Digital Production.

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Guinness is the “Pumpkin Spice Latte” of St. Patrick’s Day:

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Seasonal connection to products and experiences permeates modern consumption. For example, “pumpkin spice” is frequently linked to the changing of the fall season with Starbucks ubiquitous “Pumpkin Spice Latte” serving as a marker of time and seminal fall experience for consumers (Choi, J., Luo, Y., and Benton, B., 2022). While other holidays are associated with non-branded consumption (turkey at Thanksgiving, chocolate for Valentine’s Day, etc.), Starbucks’ unique positioning of pumpkin spice has allowed the company’s product to effectively be folded into the tapestry of associations with the coming of autumn.

Similarly, Guinness beer has cultivated an association with St. Patrick’s Day that has allowed their beer to become intrinsically linked with the experience. According to [Business Insider](#), in 2020 Guinness was served 819% more often on St. Patrick’s Day than any other day of the year – which totals 13 million pints of Guinness sold in a single day. As such, evaluation of the extent of this connection in social media posts made around the time of the holiday is merited. Broadly, collected data suggests that there is a positive association between Guinness beer and St. Patrick’s day that surpasses other product associations (including the notable “Shamrock Shake” from McDonald’s).

The Product Becomes the Season: Results Overview

During the observation period of February 1 to March 8, over 16,000 social media conversations were collected on X. The volume of social media conversations related to Guinness beer and St. Patrick’s Day saw a 25% increase across various platforms. As the holiday approached closer during the period of March 1 to March 8, positive sentiments, such as

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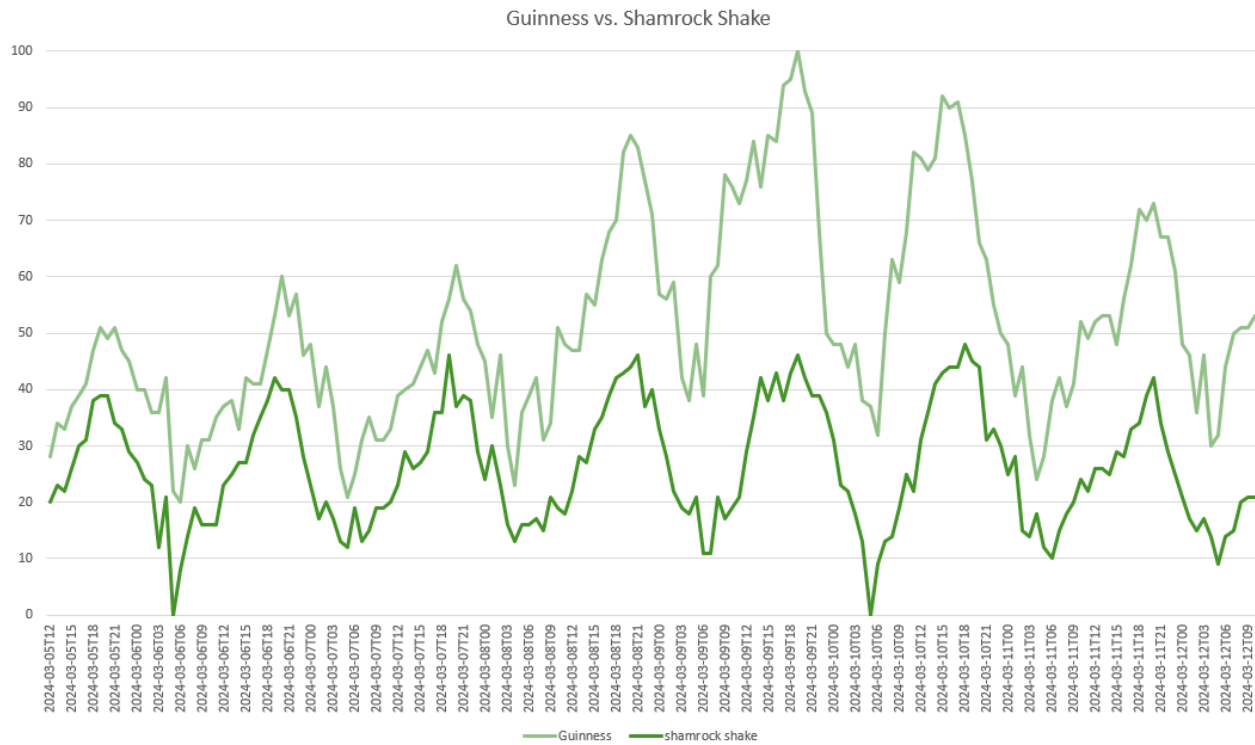
excitement and joy, became more pronounced. Most social chats exhibited a happy mood as evidenced by the 62% joyful sentiment. Social media users raved about the fresh taste of Guinness, the drink’s “restorative power,” and even the brand’s new non-alcoholic beer, Guinness O. The term “Guinness brewery” enjoyed a 48% increase in mentions among social conversations since March 1.

Interest in a similarly themed product for St. Patrick’s Day, McDonald’s “Shamrock Shake,” also spiked in the runup to the holiday, although results showed a mix in sentiment and less of a clear linkage to McDonald’s as a brand. From February 1 to March 8, over 16,000 social media posts were collected on X via keywords and hashtags relating to St. Patrick’s Day and the Shamrock Shake. Interestingly, the highest peak as St. Patrick’s Day approaches was not in March as expected, but on February 5, 2024, when McDonald’s announced that they have brought back the Shamrock shake on their menu along with the Oreo Shamrock McFlurry on February 5. While joy and excitement accounted for approximately 50% of the conversation surrounding the Shamrock Shake, about a quarter of the discussion showed emotions of “disgust.” From stomach aches to vomiting, social media users took to X to share their experience of trying the seasonal shake, especially the one from McDonald’s. While the data indicates that a larger majority simply love the Shamrock shake, sentiment and interest associated with Guinness as the “St. Patrick’s Day Treat” remained much more robust.

Google Trends Analysis, which measures search frequency, reflects this disparity in online activity related to Guinness and the Shamrock Shake in the runup to St. Patrick’s Day.

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Additional Findings

The Drinks of St. Patrick’s Day

The Oreo Shamrock McFlurry was also highly anticipated by McDonald’s goers, though met with less excitement than its original counterpart. Surprisingly, McDonald’s did not dominate the topics of discussion for Shamrock shakes. Instead, the Shamrock shake in general, whether homemade or a variation of the drink, was found to be associated most with the holiday itself, determining March as the “shamrock season.” Irish drink recipe ideas, green drink recipes (i.e., the Matcha Avocado Walnut Smoothie), bar crawls and drink specials were discussed prominently. About 15% of the social media conversations were regarding promotions for pub crawls, all-day drink specials on St. Patrick’s Day, and green beers. This is likely as beer is perhaps the most consumed alcoholic adult beverage during St. Patrick’s Day.

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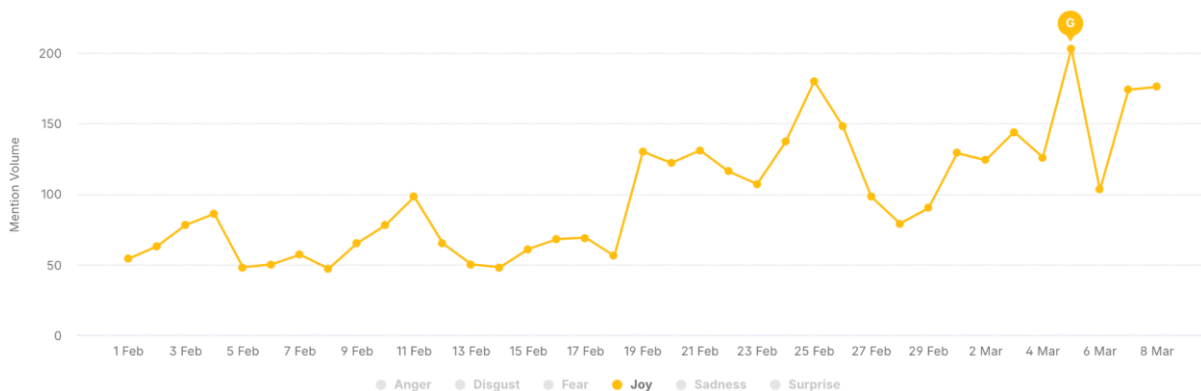
Joy of Pairing Guinness and Food

Interestingly, individuals expressed their excitement of elevating the traditional holiday recipes with Guinness for celebration, adding this signature holiday drink to dishes such as Shepherd’s pie, drumsticks, muffins, bread, beef stew, beef roast, burger, marshmallows, or chocolate cakes. Over half of social posts (i.e., 54%) centered around cooking with Guinness. The appeal of this Irish beer apparently has been extended to a special cooking sauce for the holiday. Social chats about Guinness and cooking accounted for Users expressing their joy and pride to discuss and share their creative recipes of Guinness-flavored dishes and desserts. Surprisingly, among all social conversations related to Guinness and food, Guinness-flavored chocolate witnessed the highest surge, a staggering 91%. Love for Guinness-flavored chocolate seemed to be the dominant winner over other Guinness-flavored food.



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Brand Collaboration with Jason Momoa

As a favorite drink for St. Patrick’s Day, Guinness was keen to seize the spotlight by rolling out a new action-packed commercial featuring Jason Momoa, the Aquaman star, and his mother, to expand the global brewer’s universal appeal. Momoa has publicly declared his love of this Irish beer brand for decades (Lepitak, 2024), which made him an ideal endorser for the brand. The humorous short “Lovely Day,” also co-written and co-directed by Momoa, starts with an anxious Momoa drinking a glass of Guinness in a bar as he opens a letter. He then races excitingly through the streets to another bar to ecstatically profess his 2% Irish ancestry, prompting the whole bar to cheer on with a Guinness (Lindenberger, 2024). This new ad campaign was first released on social platforms on March 7, 2024 prior to its landing on television screen on March 11, 2024. Debuting this new ad campaign for St. Patrick’s Day on digital platforms created a firestorm among social media users, as the social chats mentioning “Jason Momoa” and “Guinness Ad” showed a remarkable 97% and 92% spike respectively, emerging as two of the most trending topics on social media.

Social media users responded enthusiastically about the Momoa-Guinness collaboration, showering Momoa with praises for his talent in acting and directing, the close bond with his mother, and his pride to have Irish blood. In addition to discussing the appealing story embedded in the ad and Jason’s partnership with Guinness, social chatters were particularly enthusiastic about those behind-the-scenes footages that have revealed Momoa as a cool, reliable son, and father, rendering him a beloved brand endorser among Guinness lovers who value family bond and cultural lineage. Guinness fans exuberantly gushed this Momoa-Guinness commercial as being “*brilliant, cool, special, rollicking.*” Tellingly, many fans of this new Guinness ad ended their social posts with the catchy slogan from the commercial: “We’re drinking Guinness.” Apart from Momoa’s charming Hollywood glamor, this explosive surge of

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social chats about this new Momoa-Guinness ad might also benefit from the iconic stout’s larger St. Patrick’s Day celebration initiatives that allow consumers to trace their lineage to the famous Guinness Storehouse through digitalized records (Karlovitch, 2024).

Branding through CSR

Shifting away from creating brand appeals through products, corporations have increasingly focused their branding efforts through building meaningful, positive, and long-term relationships with stakeholders not just limited to customers (Golob & Podnar, 2019; Mason et al., 2021; Verčič & Ćorić, 2018). Given the importance of building brand attributes through social interactions with their environment, brands have been actively involved in charitable or philanthropic initiatives to shape their unique brand identities in a meaningful, attractive way to elicit stakeholders’ support (Maon et al., 2021). Indicated from the data collected in this study, Guinness is astute to “capitalize” on the organically formed brand attention (due to its association with the upcoming St. Patrick’s Day) through promoting its programs on corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Since March 1, the term “*Guinness gives back initiative*” has had a steep increase of 59% in the volume of social conversations. Particularly, Guinness has partnered with Joe Burrow Foundation (Joe Burrow, a quarterback from Cincinnati Bengals) and other community nonprofits (e.g., La Soupe) to address some dire social issues such as food insecurity and mental health. During this observation period, social chats acknowledged Guinness’s generous donation (\$500K) to Joe Burrow Foundation and its participation in community events in collaboration with La Soupe to repurpose excess food to feed those in need. Social media users loudly expressed their appreciation about Guinness’s genuine commitment in shaping positive community impact through its charitable initiatives. As evidenced from the social conversations,

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these CSR activities from Guinness seemed to have effectively reinforced the brand’s identity as a caring, responsible brand with consistent dedication to fight against social ills. Especially, on March 5 the joy sentiment toward Guinness reached its all-time high in a two-month period following the brand’s “Guinness Gives Back Initiative” event partnering with Joe Burrow Foundation and La Soupe Cincinnati on March 4, 2024.

Conclusion

Joy appeared to be the dominant sentiment identified in the public conversations on X regarding the two popular St. Patrick’s Day’s drinks, with Guinness surpassing enthusiasm towards McDonald’s Shamrock Shake. Excitement and anticipation for the consumption of the Irish holiday’s two signature drinks, Shamrock shake and Guinness, was identified clearly from our data, however. Social media users were excited to not only try these drinks but also share recipes of Guinness-flavored food and desserts as well as recipes for homemade Shamrock shakes. Surprisingly, apart from the announcement that McDonald’s is bringing back their green shakes early in February for the “first green of spring”, social media conversations regarding McDonald’s flowed from fans and users themselves. However, Guinness, an iconic Irish stout brand, turned holiday toasts into a prime opportunity to reinforce its brand identity by launching a new advertising campaign partnering with the Aquaman star, Jason Momoa, as well as engaging in meaningful corporate social responsibility initiatives to fight against food insecurity and mental health. Raving comments for the new campaign collaboration and appreciation for Guinness’s commitment to bringing positive impact to local communities attested to the effectiveness of Guinness’s targeted branding strategies. The Irish brewery giant seems to have successfully caught the attention of beer lovers while focusing on its distinct identities, a quintessential brewery proud to celebrate its cultural heritage and prioritize the well-being of its community.

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About the School of Communication and Media: Founded in 2012, the School of Communication and Media offers a range of dynamic programs in communication and media to a talented and diverse student population of over 1,800. Offering degrees in film and television, social media and public relations, advertising, journalism and digital media, sports communication, communication and media studies, animation and visual effects, and an MA in public and organizational relations, the School prepares the next generation of communication and media practitioners and leaders. The School houses award-winning student programs that include WMSC Radio, The Montclarion newspaper, Hawk Communications Agency, the Red Hawk Sports Network, Hawk+ OTT streaming platform, and News Lab, as well as the Center for Cooperative Media, which serves the public by working to grow and strengthen local journalism. Student projects and programs have recently received national recognition from PRSSA’s Bateman Competition, an Edward R Murrow Award, several Marconi Award nominations, and a College Television Award from the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences.



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