

Sex and alcohol in Nigeria: Marketing tactics send dangerous messages to young drinkers

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Nigeria has a high rate of heavy drinking among young people. One study found that [55.8%](#) of teenagers between 15 and 19 years old had engaged in binge drinking in the past month.

The [World Health Organization](#) has shown that strictly limiting [alcohol advertising](#) and reducing alcohol availability are among the most effective measures to prevent heavy alcohol consumption.

But Nigeria has few [regulatory measures](#) to govern brand advertising of alcohol.

I am a medical and public health sociologist with many years' experience of studying alcohol marketing and its effects on young males and females.

In a [chapter](#) from my recent book [Reconfiguring Drinking Cultures, Gender, and Transgressive Selves](#), based on three years of research, I looked at how the alcohol industry in Nigeria practices reckless branding.

Alcohol companies and their marketers have gone to extremes. They openly advertise their drinks as [aphrodisiacs and sex-enhancers](#).

The various arms of government and regulatory agencies need to regulate alcohol branding through policies that are comprehensive and effectively implemented.

'Being an elder'

Historical accounts in [Nigeria](#) have shown that young people were culturally restrained from drinking palm wine in many traditional communities because "[alcohol consumption was a sign of being an elder](#) ." Young people were considered too immature to handle alcohol and were expected to focus on self-development.

Even among adult men who usually consumed alcohol, drunken behavior was rare and often stigmatized. For example, among the Onitsha

indigenous community in south-east Nigeria, those who became regularly drunk were regarded as a nuisance. People avoided intoxication so as not to [drag their names in the mud](#).

Things are very different today.

Alcohol can be bought and consumed 24 hours a day. The country does not have [regulations](#) stipulating opening and closing hours for bars and pubs.

There are no laws or policies that prevent drinking outlets from [selling alcohol to intoxicated patrons](#). No matter how drunk a patron is, sellers will continue to serve them alcohol as long as they can pay.

This lax oversight has empowered the industry to get away with advertising that is overtly sexist and in extreme instances encourages [sexual violence](#) against women.

Alcohol and sex

Some brand names and descriptions on labels represent the male sexual organ as a weapon and the female sexual organ as a territory to be conquered and kept under control.

"Copulation" and "bend over" are translations of drinks with highly sexualized branding targeted at young drinkers.

The drink Action Bitters is targeted at the "class of consumers who desire it for its quality restorative and aphrodisiac values." Another drink, Ko Duro Soke, means "let it stand straight," referring to a man's sex organ.

Male domination and sexual violence are also endorsed with names such

as Fapataya (tear the panties) and Dadubule (force her to lie down).

Pakurumo (bend over) represents using submissive [sexual positions](#) to keep control over women.

Young drinkers are certainly making a connection between alcohol and sex.

A 2020 [study](#) among [secondary school students](#) revealed that 33.6% of them had consumed sachet alcoholic bitters before their last sexual encounter. Alcoholic bitters are packed in plastic sachets and small bottles, making them cheap, available and easily accessible to buyers, including minors.

Some of the [adolescent participants](#) in my own research confirmed that using alcoholic bitters for sex enhancement was common among young Nigerians.

I interviewed 72 young people, both male and female. One of the male participants remarked: "It is obvious almost everybody uses alcohol for sex."

Another added, "There are some kinds of gin like Action Bitters, One Corner Bitters and Orijin Bitters ... all those bitters are good for sex."

Young women shared similar views, although most of them attributed these to alcohol consumption among men.

Some of them blamed producers and marketers for spreading information on how alcoholic bitters enhanced sex: "It (herbal alcoholic bitters) is good for sex; the product has a lot of adverts that if you use the product, you will get a lot of strength and you will last long in bed."

Another young respondent said, "They say that if you go to bed and meet your sexual partner, you will perform well. So, because of the Action Bitters' adverts, my friends would take it excessively just to have sex."

Drinking games

Another form of irresponsible marketing is [drinking games](#) in public.

Open trucks blast out loud music to [promote sales](#) by drawing people's attention to their brands. Young brand promoters walk beside the truck, inviting bystanders to take part in competitions such as who can drink the fastest.

The winner is rewarded with more alcohol, money or both.

Previous studies in [Nigeria](#) and [other countries](#) have shown that drinking games can result in public drunkenness and alcohol overdose.

How to stop irresponsible branding

As a country that currently does not have any policies to [control](#) alcohol sales, consumption and branding, Nigeria urgently needs to take action, guided by international best practices.

Government has made little effort to deal with the problem of heavy drinking.

One glaring example was the response by legislators after Nigeria's National Agency for Food and Drug Administration announced that alcoholic beverages sold in sachets or bottles of less than 200ml would be banned. The Federal House of Representatives, Nigeria's lower chamber of the national assembly, [asked](#) that the ban be suspended

"pending investigation."

To date, [the suspension of the ban has not been reversed](#).

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