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Big Game, Big Beer, Big Star (Matt Damon), Big Scam AB InBev Marketing Masquerades as Philanthropy

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (February 1, 2018) – [Alcohol Justice](#) is reporting that as the US prepares for Super Bowl LII, AB InBev prepares to leverage American hardship to sell more booze. The Belgium-based, Brazilian-owned megabrewer, which holds multi-year, exclusive beer advertising rights for the event, intends to push two of its brands using charity—hiding the destructive effects of alcohol behind heavily branded interventions in domestic and international tragedy.

This is not a new tactic for Big Alcohol. Many booze manufacturers like to push [“pink ribbon”](#) campaigns that raise nominal amounts for breast cancer charities, while providing thousands of dollars of publicity for the brand—and masking the very real role alcohol use plays in breast cancer risk.

In AB InBev’s case, however, the equation is complicated by its status as a megabrewer. It is running campaigns for at least five different sub-brands during the big game from the goofy medieval “Dilly Dilly” ads that target youth to superhero actor Chris Pratt’s turn in the more fitness-oriented Michelob Ultra spots (that, um, also target youth). That makes the ostensible corporate altruism permeating the ads for Stella Artois and Natural Ice all the more cynical.

The Stella Artois campaign, “Buy a Lady a Drink,” raises money for actor Matt Damon’s [water.org](#), which provides safe drinking water in the developing world. This is a laudable goal, and were Stella to simply pay to advertise for [water.org](#) and urge viewers to donate, it would be an act of true philanthropy.

However, Stella does not solicit donations, nor does it direct kind-hearted individuals to a donation page. Instead it urges viewers to buy branded “chalices” (possibly some synergy with the not-at-all philanthropic Bud Light monarchy), with a cut from each sale going to the charity. Not only does this mean that the self-evident way to get involved is to submit to Stella’s marketing, Stella may even be deriving a profit from the sales of these beer glasses even after the donation is taken into account. Simply delivering the money up-front to [water.org](#) without the junk branded glassware would be more efficient.

It would also prevent AB InBev from generating a smokescreen for their global marketing strategy: increase alcohol consumption in lower- and lower-middle income countries. Alcohol-related harm and death is a real and growing problem in the developing world, and Matt Damon is complicit—delivering the residents of poverty impacted countries from the dangers of untreated water only to turn them over to global alcohol giants.

“The nature of Big Alcohol is to sell more alcohol to more people,” said Carson Benowitz-Fredericks, Research Manager for Alcohol Justice. “So, when you think of them making a profit—even a tiny one—off these pretentious beer glasses, and then plowing that right back into higher rates of harmful drinking, it starts to seem a bit like blankets full of smallpox.”

For evidence of what harms the alcohol companies can do when unchecked and able to deliver mass quantities of product at low price points, look no further than... college. Binge drinking is epidemic; 20% of college students may have an alcohol use disorder, and 2/3s of those who drank in the past month binge drank. Most importantly, the majority of college students are under the legal drinking age of 21. AB InBev’s Natural Ice and Natural Light have a large following on college campuses for being cheap, relatively high ABV, and readily available in large cases. AB InBev is well aware of this; it has even launched a side line of flavored malt beverages named Natty Rush, appropriating the collegiate nickname.

For Super Bowl LII, Natural Light is offering to cover some students’ outstanding loans, with a catch: anyone “applying” for this boon has to make a video featuring the product. The offer itself is presented through a vaguely nostalgic ad featuring an in-dorm slip-n-slide. Dorms, of course, are where mostly underage students tend to live in their first few years in school. Not content for the young-eye bonanza of Sunday’s championship game, AB InBev is shamelessly cementing its bargain-basement product as the go-to for underage drinking.

“Big Alcohol gets away with voluntary regulations and claims they are always doing the right thing,” stated Michael Scippa, Director of Public Affairs for Alcohol Justice. “But then they go on the world’s largest televised stage and tell people the best times of their lives came from underage drinking. When they say they want to do good, it’s impossible to take them seriously.”

Given the access to legions of young eyes, the ongoing issues with booze and the NFL, and the international efforts to push back against Big Alcohol’s stranglehold on athletics, it’s long past time for AB InBev to exit sports marketing entirely. If it honestly wanted to make a positive change, it could donate out of the goodness of its heart—not the effectiveness of its marketing.

For more information, go to AlcoholJustice.org

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