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Examining the use of Gender as a Segmentation Variable in the Central Asian Region: Evidence from Consumer Beverage Consumption Patterns

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Abstract: The purpose of this research is to examine gender differences in beverage consumption, usage occasions, and consumption motives within the Kazakhstan market. The results show that while freshly prepared tea is the most consumed beverage for both males and females, men are more likely than expected to drink alcohol, soft drinks, and sparkling water, while women are more likely than expected to drink bottled still water. Additionally, the results indicate gender differences in usage occasions and consumption motives. The evidence therefore supports the continued use of gender-based market segmentation and product positioning strategies in the beverage market of Kazakhstan.

Keywords: Gender, Market Segmentation, Usage Occasions, Consumption Motives, Central Asia, Kazakhstan.

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INTRODUCTION

Central to the practice of modern marketing is the process of market segmentation, enabling a company to tailor their offerings to the needs and preferences of one or more specific groups. Although several factors are essential in determining the effectiveness of any segmentation variable, two of the most critical are identifiability and responsiveness (Brusco, Cradit, and Stahl 2002). In other words, the criteria used to identify a segment should be easy to recognize, and the resulting segment should be responsive to a company's marketing efforts. This is why most traditional approaches to the segmentation of consumer markets tend to incorporate fundamental demographic variables such as age, income, and gender (Helgesen 2006). Historically, gender has been the most frequently used segmentation variable because it is identifiable and often 'results in successful advertising implementation' (Jung & Hovland 2016, p. 221). However, within the past two decades, theoretical and substantive developments pertaining to gender issues in the humanities and social sciences have led to greater scrutiny of the concept of gender within the fields of marketing and consumer research (Bettany et al., 2010).

'Gender refers to the psychological attributes associated with physiology that are socially constructed in an individual's identity' (Friedmann & Lowengart 2019, p. 408). In recent years we have observed significant social transformations regarding the concept of gender as the 'socially constructed' component of the definition has begun to take precedence over the physiological aspects of the concept. Specifically, especially in Western nations, gender identity is increasingly perceived in a less binary way. Rather than emphasizing the simple biological dichotomy of male/female, researchers now recognize that many consumers may instead self-identify along a broader continuum of masculinity and femininity (Bettany et al. 2010). Researchers have also argued that cultural shifts in gender attitudes have broadened the appeal of gender-neutral products, making gender-neutral marketing economically viable (Fine and Rush 2018). Consequently, some marketers, such as those in the fashion industry, have begun to adapt to this trend by dedicating collections to genderless or gender fluid garments (Kulaga & Cedrola 2022). A similar trend has taken shape in the toy industry, as many marketers have sought to expand the appeal of traditionally gender-typed toys by eliminating gender stereotyping (Fine & Rush 2018).

As gender-neutral marketing has continued to gain traction, practitioners have even begun to question the continuing viability of gender as a segmentation variable (Prokopets 2022).

Within the Central Asian region, there are a high prevalence of patriarchal families that subscribe to traditional gender roles. As such, ‘women lack elementary power in their households on a daily basis,’ and there remains a ‘deficit of women’s independent decisions in families’ (Lipovka et al. 2023, p.383). Instead, the family is inextricably associated with a woman’s identity. It has even been suggested that the close intertwining of the woman and the family precludes the existence of women as independent consumers (Lipovka et al. 2023). Undoubtedly, this would be the case for some product categories more than others. In the case of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) such as food and beverages, which are typically purchased for household consumption, the family decision making unit rather than the individual consumer may be the appropriate level of segmentation. For example, studies on FMCG products have shown that neither purchase involvement (Quester and Smart 1996) nor the use of different decision-making rules (Verma et al. 2023) vary by gender. As a result, even in regions with conventional definitions of gender, the use of gender as a segmentation variable may be less effective than previously assumed.

Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the entire economy of the Central Asian region was controlled by the USSR. In recent the Central Asian region has sought to expand economic and social development through new trade relations with China, South Asia, Europe, and the Middle east (Gaur 2021). Therefore, as internationalization and economic opportunities slowly unfold, it is important to identify the unique consumption patterns, behaviors, and purchase motives of Central Asian consumers. One important research effort with significant implications for marketers is to determine if men and women truly represent independent market segments. In the present study, we focus on consumers in the Central Asian country of Kazakhstan and on one specific FMCG product category, beverages, to examine the presence of any systematic gender differences in consumption patterns. We also examine any potential differences regarding usage occasions and purchase motivations. We begin with a review of the literature to propose hypotheses on each of these three variables: consumption patterns, usage occasions, and purchase motivations. We then present descriptive statistics on each variable and analyze the impact of

gender on each through a series of cross-tabulations and X^2 tests. We conclude with the managerial implications of our findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

There is increasing skepticism regarding the continued use of gender as an actionable segmentation variable, and many marketers have moved away from gender based promotional tactics (Satinover Nichols & Wehr Holt 2023). According to Friedmann and Lowengart (2019), the use of gender as a segmentation variable may be especially limited for low-involvement products. This is because a product that requires minimal decision-making prior to purchase does not engender a detailed and introspective analysis of the product's alignment with one's self-concept or values. Instead, customers may rely on habitual buying behavior or simple decision heuristics to guide their choices. Thus, 'marketers trying to sell low-involvement products might reconsider when investing resources in differentiating the message for women and men' (Friedmann and Lowengart, 2019 p. 416). In accordance with previous research (Nkwocha et al. 2005; Lang, Lim, and Guzmán 2022), low involvement products can be represented by inexpensive non-durable categories, including food and beverage products. This leads to the first hypothesis expressed in the null form.

H₀₁: There are no significant differences between men and women regarding the types of beverages consumed.

Because some products are more appropriate in some situations than in others, consumer markets can often be segmented on the basis of usage occasion. As summarized by George (2012), 'companies need to realize that their customers are not only different from each other but are also different from themselves at different times' (p. 293). Studies on usage occasion have revealed that five distinctive elements can contribute to the uniqueness of any given usage occasion (Desai and Hoyer 2000). First, usage occasion can be defined by the activity, or a 'stereotyped sequence of actions undertaken to achieve goals' (Desai and Hoyer 2000, p. 311). Secondly, a usage

occasion can be based on temporal factors such as the time of day or the day of the week. In addition, antecedent states, which include momentary moods or conditions, can be the basis for a usage occasion. Location, such as product usage at home versus at work, can also define a usage occasion. Finally, usage occasions can be dependent on either other people or distinct objects that are present in a situation.

Several studies have shown that usage occasion segmentation can be an effective strategy to target consumer groups and increase sales. Dubow (1992) was the first to empirically demonstrate the effectiveness of occasion-based segmentation in a beverage category. Similarly, Neal and Wurst (2001) suggested that firms which invest in segmentation strategies according to usage occasion may be more likely to uncover the needs and wants of market segments. Therefore, one basis for gauging the effectiveness of gender as an actionable segmentation variable is to examine the possible relationship between gender and usage occasion. Thus, we offer the second hypothesis, also expressed in the null form.

H₀₂: There are no significant differences between men and women in the usage occasions during which beverages are consumed.

Although occasion-based segmentation may be capable of giving customers what they want when they want it, segmentation based on consumer motives may be an even more concise and powerful factor than usage occasion (Palma et al. 2014). In fact, evidence reveals the importance of self-interested motives as a key driver for all consumer segments (Eberhart & Naderer 2017). Moreover, motives not only influence what people buy, but also how they buy, when they buy, and how much they buy. For example, the increasing desire for quick and easy consumption has led to the enormous worldwide growth in on-the-go food and beverage consumption (Benoit, Schaefer, and Heider 2016).

In the case of alcoholic beverages, research indicates that gender can directly predict consumer motives for consumption, including 'social, enhancement, coping and conformity drinking motives' (Heim, Monk, & Quraeshi 2021 p.821). Consequently, marketers frequently

employ creative strategies emphasizing gender-specific motives and emotional appeals for advertising campaigns within this beverage category (Jung & Hovland 2016). In the Kazakhstan market in particular, there is strong evidence that consumer motives influence consumption patterns as many Kazakhstani consumers are reported to be consumer ethnocentric, preferring local brands over equivalent foreign products (Ahmad & Richard 2014). Recognizing the importance of consumer motives, and the possible interaction between gender and consumption motives, we offer the final null hypothesis.

H₀₃: There are no significant differences between men and women in the motivations for selecting beverages.

METHODOLOGY

The Central-Asian country of Kazakhstan is a nation of more than nineteen million residents (Worldometer 2023). Kazakhstan is a relatively large emerging and transitional economy. In fact, with a GDP per capita of USD 9800 in 2019, Kazakhstan is the second largest economy among the nations derived from the former Soviet Union (Konings et al. 2023). The contribution of government owned firms to GDP in Kazakhstan has steadily decreased over the past twenty years to just 15% in 2019 as there has been a surge in private enterprise and entrepreneurship (Konings et al. 2023). Thus, as an emerging economy, Kazakhstan has experienced an expanding consumer market and a corresponding increase in the introduction of consumer-oriented products and brands, both foreign and domestic, to serve those consumers.

The urban population of Kazakhstan was chosen as the sampling frame for the study. The sample included the entirety of a long-term panel of consumers in Kazakhstan. The consumer panel is operated by an independent marketing research agency and the data set used in the current study was originally collected for a global FMCG company operating in the region. Often involving proprietary data, which may restrict the depth of reported finding, consumer panels are nevertheless an increasingly popular method for collecting both behavioral and attitudinal data for

academic research studies involving FMCG products (Koll and Plank 2022). For this project, the long-term panel of consumers included respondents from Almaty, the largest city in Kazakhstan, as well as from eight additional urban areas: Aktobe, Astana, Atyrau, Karaganda, Pavlodar, Shymkent, Taraz, and Ust-Kamenogorsk. The geographically representative sample included 2,040 Kazakhstani residents in the 12–59-year-old age range, the target market for the client firm and the age range that contains two-thirds of the urban population. Gender was self-selected by respondents, with 1040 respondents (50.98%) identifying as male and 1000 respondents (49.02%) identifying as female.

The data were collected through personal interviews conducted between 2017 and 2018. It is important to note that this time frame was prior to the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which skewed consumption behaviour in many markets, including the beverage category. For example, recent research by Chenarides et al. (2021) reveals that the majority of consumers altered purchase patterns during the pandemic as a result of both out-of-stock conditions and disruptions to their daily patterns. Therefore, the time frame studied is reflective of the pre-pandemic consumption norms. The data also included both quantitative and qualitative responses as consumers reported the type and weekly volume of beverages consumed, the occasions for their beverage consumption, as well as their consumption motives.

Beverage type consists of the ten leading categories of beverages. These categories included freshly prepared tea, tap water, alcohol, dairy & soy, bottled still water, soft drinks, sparkling water, ready-to-drink juice, ready-to-drink lemonade, and ready-to-drink tea. Table 1 reveals the popularity of each beverage by gender and as a proportion of total weekly consumption volume. As noted in Table 1, these ten beverages accounted for 95% of total beverage consumption for males and 92% of total beverage consumption for females. One noteworthy finding is that coffee is not included among the top ten beverages consumed, as coffee drinks account for less than 1% of total drink volume in Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, at the time of the study, coffee was one of the fastest growing beverage categories in the world (Maamoun 2019). In addition, energy drinks have been surging in popularity for several years (Spano 2022), yet the share of volume for this category was also not among the top ten drinks in Kazakhstan at the time of the study. Note

that Table 1 refers to volume consumption, while Table 4, which follows, refers to simple consumption: yes or no, and reveals the statistical differences of the drinks categories by gender.

Table 1. Product Category Consumption by Gender

<i>10 Top Types of Beverages</i>	<i>Proportion</i>	
	Male (% of total volume)	Female (% of total volume)
Freshly Prepared Tea	43	46
Tap Water	12	12
Alcohol	13	6
Dairy & Soy	6	7
Bottled Still Water	4	7
Soft Drinks	6	4
Sparkling Water	4	2
Ready-To-Drink Juice	3	3
Ready-To-Drink Lemonade	2	3
Ready-To-Drink Tea	2	2
<i>totals</i>	95%	92%

Respondents were also asked to identify and describe their beverage usage occasions. The occasions were derived from both the market research company, which specializes in drinks research, and from the panelists themselves. The at-home and away-from-home groupings were simple characteristics of the occasions. The findings indicate that about 80% of beverages are consumed at-home, while 20% are consumed out of the home. Fourteen distinct usage occasions were identified. These included nine at-home occasions and five away-from-home usage occasions. The largest proportion of beverages (13.2%) were consumed during the at-home usage occasion categorized as ‘The Daily Unwind’. This occasion typically occurred after the workday with respondents indicating that the chosen beverage, often freshly prepared tea or even alcohol, was consumed for the purpose of ‘unwinding’ or ‘de-stressing’. A further 12.4% of weekly beverage consumption occurred during the occasion defined as ‘Meal or Snack Time’. Respondents typically described this usage occasion as ‘eating alone at home’ or ‘having a snack’. This contrasts with other usage occasions that involved either additional people or complete meals.

A similar proportion of beverages (12.1%) were consumed during the usage occasion classified as 'Routine Habits', which involved 'daily ritual', 'routines', or 'chores.' The 'Comforting Meals' usage occasion, during which 11% of beverages were consumed, is comprised of lunch or dinner consumed in the home, typically described as 'sharing enjoyable time with family or friends.' Representing 9.3% of total weekly beverage consumption is the 'Nourishing Breakfast' usage occasion. Respondents often reported choosing 'healthy, nutritious beverages' that meet the need for 'health and wellness,' and 'aid digestion'. The 'Relaxing Screen Time' usage occasion, representing 8.8% of total weekly beverage consumption, occurs when 'watching TV' or 'surfing the internet'. The 'Nurturing Meals' at home occasion, which was classified by the researchers as separate from the 'Comforting Meals' usage occasion, occurs during lunch or dinner. Representing 6.3% of total weekly beverage consumption, the distinguishing feature of the 'Nurturing Meals' usage occasion is that it is primarily utilitarian/functional in focus and lacks the emphasis on the social or family relationship component. The 'Mental Refreshment' at home usage occasion, representing 1.9% of total weekly beverage consumption, was reported to occur 'while working or studying alone' and described as 'taking a break'. Finally, the 'Energising Breakfast' at home usage occasion, representing 1.7% of total weekly beverage consumption, was identified as distinct from the 'Nourishing Breakfast' usage occasion by virtue of its emphasis on the consumer's need for 'energy and strength'.

The away-from-home usage occasion representing the largest proportion of weekly beverage consumption was the 'Work/School Break'. This was followed by the 'Energy on the Run' usage occasion, which was responsible for 4% of total weekly beverage consumption. Respondents indicated that this usage occasion included consuming beverages while 'walking', 'driving' or 'on the subway'. The 'Socialising' usage occasion, representing 3.8% of weekly beverage consumption, refers to away from home 'fun with friends, colleagues, or family'. The 'Physical Recovery' occasion, responsible for 1.5% of weekly beverage consumption, relates to beverages consumed for both exercise and 'active leisure'. Finally, the 'Fun Meals Away-from-Home' usage occasion represented only 1.2% of total weekly beverage consumption. This final category includes 'eating out in a restaurant with others for fun'. Table 2 summarizes the total weekly consumption volume for each usage occasion, irrespective of gender. Table 2 lists the

percentage of consumption situations by usage occasion and Table 5 reveals the statistical information for usage occasions and gender.

Table 2: Beverage Consumption Volume by Usage Occasion

<i>Usage Occasions</i>		<i>Proportion of Beverages Consumed during the Occasion</i>
At Home Usage Occasions	Daily Unwind	13.20%
	Meal/Snack Time	12.40%
	Routine Habits	12.10%
	Comforting Meals	11.00%
	Nourishing Breakfast	9.30%
	Relaxing Screen Time	8.80%
	Nurturing Meals	6.30%
	Mental Refreshment	1.90%
	Energising Breakfast	1.70%
Away From Home Usage Occasions	Work/School Break	12.90%
	Energy on the Run	4.00%
	Socializing	3.80%
	Physical Recovery	1.50%
	Fun Meals Away from Home	1.20%
	<i>total</i>	100%

Although usage occasions can reveal much about the context and purpose for beverage consumption, additional insight was provided by the assessment of respondent motivations. These were open-ended questions that were categorized later by the market research company. Specifically, respondents were asked to explain the reasons why ‘someone might select one drink over another’. The interviews revealed eight primary motivational explanations, including ‘To feel like I belong’, ‘To unwind’, ‘To relax’, ‘To stay healthy’, ‘To be in a good mood’, ‘To take care of myself’, ‘To avoid boredom’, and ‘To have fun with others’. Table 3 lists the percentage of responses assigned to each motivational explanation and Table 6 reveals the statistical information for motivations and gender.

Table 3: Most Listed Motivations for Beverage Consumption

<i>Motivation</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
To Feel Like I Belong	466	19%
To Unwind	441	18%
To Relax	355	15%
To Stay Healthy	344	14%
To Be in a Good Mood	329	14%
To Take Care of Myself	259	11%
To Avoid Boredom	154	6%
To Have Fun with Others	74	3%
<i>totals</i>	2422	1.00

To test the hypotheses, it is necessary to analyze possible differences in beverage consumption patterns, usage occasions or consumption motives by gender. As such, a series of X^2 statistical tests were conducted. The first series of tests regarding beverage consumption patterns by gender refers to H_{01} and are provided in Table 4. As shown in Table 4, statistically significant differences were observed for Alcohol, Bottled Still Water, Soft Drinks, and Sparkling Water. Specifically, Table 4 can be interpreted to indicate that men are more likely than expected (and women less likely) to drink alcohol, soft drinks, and sparkling water. On the other hand, women are more likely than expected (and men less likely) to drink bottled still water. Because significant differences between the genders were observed for at least some of the beverage categories, we must reject H_{01} .

Table 4: X^2 Analysis of Gender and Beverage Types

<i>Drinks Type</i>		<i>yes (Obs)</i>	<i>Yes (Exp)</i>	<i>No (Obs)</i>	<i>No (Exp)</i>	X^2	<i>'p'</i>	<i>Finding</i>
Freshly Prepared Tea	Mal	447	462.4 9	593	577.51	1.858	0.173	
	Fem	460	444.7 1	540	555.29			
Tap Water	Mal	125	125.0 0	915	915.20	0.000	1.000	
	Fem	120	120.0 0	880	880.00			
Alcohol	Mal	135	99.51	905	940.49	28.86	<0.00	M>Exp

						9	1	
	Fem	60	95.69	940	904.31			F<Exp
Dairy & Soy	Mal	62	67.49	978	972.50	0.840	0.359	
	Fem	70	64.90	930	935.09			
Bottled Still Water	Mal	42	56.89	998	983.11	8.872	<0.00 3	F>Exp
	Fem	70	54.71	930	945.29			M>Exp
Soft Drinks	Mal	62	52.20	978	987.79	4.277	<0.04 0	M>Exp
	Fem	40	50.20	960	949.80			F<Exp
Sparkling Water	Mal	42	31.40	998	1008.6 0	6.964	<0.00 9	M>Exp
	Fem	20	30.20	980	969.80			F<Exp
Ready-to-Drink Juice	Mal	31	31.20	1009	1008.8 0	0.000	1.000	
	Fem	30	30.00	970	970.00			
Ready-to-Drink Lemonade	Mal	21	25.90	1019	1014.1 0	2.100	0.147	
	Fem	30	24.90	970	975.10			
Ready-to-Drink Tea	Mal	21	20.80	1019	1019.2 0	0.000	1.000	
	Fem	20	20.00	980	980.00			

To test H_{02} , Table 5 provides the results of a X^2 test of gender by usage occasions. As noted in Table 5, there are significant differences between the proportion of males and females selecting nine of the fourteen usage occasions. Specifically, men are more likely than expected (and women less likely) to consume beverages during the following usage occasions: mental refreshment, work or school breaks, energy on the run, socializing, physical recovery, and fun meals. On the other hand, women are more likely than expected (and men less likely) to consume beverages during the daily unwind, for routine habits, and during nurturing meals. Because significant differences between the genders were observed for most of the usage occasions, we must reject H_{02} .

Table 5: X^2 Analysis of Gender and Usage Occasions

<i>Usage Occasion</i>		<i>yes (Obs)</i>	<i>Yes (Exp)</i>	<i>No (Obs)</i>	<i>No (Exp)</i>	X^2	' <i>p</i> '	<i>Finding</i>
Daily Unwind	Mal	458	518.98	582	521.02	29.177	<0.001	F>Exp M<Exp
	Fem	560	499.02	440	500.98			
Meal/Snack Time	Mal	525	520.00	515	520.00	0.196	0.658	
	Fem	495	500.00	505	500.00			
Routine Habits	Mal	463	518.98	577	521.02	24.588	<0.001	F>Exp M<Exp
	Fem	555	499.02	445	500.98			
Comforting Meals	Mal	501	520.00	539	520.00	2.832	0.092	
	Fem	519	500.00	481	500.00			
Nourishing Breakfast	Mal	498	519.49	542	520.51	3.623	0.057	
	Fem	521	499.51	479	500.49			
Relaxing Screen Time	Mal	511	520.00	529	520.00	0.636	0.425	
	Fem	509	500.00	491	500.00			
Nurturing Meals	Mal	478	518.98	562	521.02	13.177	<0.001	F>Exp M<Exp
	Fem	540	499.02	460	500.98			
Mental Refreshment	Mal	740	524.08	300	515.92	365.827	<0.001	M>Exp F<Exp
	Fem	288	503.92	712	496.08			
Energizing Breakfast	Mal	513	520.00	527	520.00	0.384	0.535	
	Fem	507	500.00	493	500.00			
Work/School Break	Mal	603	521.53	437	518.47	52.079	<0.001	M>Exp F<Exp
	Fem	420	501.47	580	498.53			
Energy on the Run	Mal	688	523.06	352	516.94	213.467	<0.001	M>Exp F<Exp
	Fem	338	502.94	662	497.06			
Socializing	Mal	616	522.04	424	517.96	69.272	<0.001	M>Exp F<Exp
	Fem	408	501.96	592	498.04			
Physical Recovery	Mal	635	522.04	405	517.96	100.120	<0.001	M>Exp F<Exp
	Fem	389	501.96	611	498.04			
Fun Meals	Mal	553	520.51	487	519.49	8.283	0.004	M>Exp F<Exp
	Fem	468	500.49	532	499.51			

Finally, as noted in Table 6, referring to H_{03} , there are significant differences between males and females regarding their underlying motivations for consuming beverages. Specifically, it appears that women are more likely than expected (and men less likely) to select specific types of beverages to feel like they belong, to unwind, to get into a good mood, and to take care of

themselves. On the other hand, men are more likely than expected (and women less likely) to select a specific type of beverage to stay healthy, to avoid boredom, and to have fun with others. Because significant differences between the genders were observed for almost all the consumption motives examined, we must also reject H_{03} .

Table 6: X^2 Analysis of Gender and Motivations for Consuming Beverages

<i>Reason</i>		<i>yes (obs)</i>	<i>Yes (Exp)</i>	<i>No (obs)</i>	<i>No (Exp)</i>	X^2	<i>'p'</i>	<i>Finding</i>
To Feel Like I Belong	Mal	216	237.57	824	802.43	5.177	0.023	F>Exp
	Fem	250	228.43	750	771.57			M<Exp
To Unwind	Mal	194	224.82	846	815.18	10.999	<0.001	F>Exp
	Fem	247	216.18	753	783.82			M<Exp
To Relax	Mal	172	180.98	868	859.02	1.101	0.294	
	Fem	183	174.02	817	825.98			
To Stay Healthy	Mal	201	175.37	839	864.63	9.189	0.002	M>Exp
	Fem	143	168.63	857	831.37			F<Exp
To Be in Good Mood	Mal	139	167.73	901	827.27	11.966	<0.001	F>Exp
	Fem	190	161.27	810	838.73			M<Exp
To Take Care of Myself	Mal	113	132.04	927	907.96	6.415	0.011	F>Exp
	Fem	146	126.96	854	873.04			M<Exp
To Avoid Boredom	Mal	106	78.51	934	961.49	21.240	<0.001	M>Exp
	Fem	48	75.49	952	924.51			F<Exp
To Have Fun with Others	Mal	49	31.37	991	1002.27	7.132	0.007	M>Exp
	Fem	25	36.27	975	963.73			F<Exp

DISCUSSION

According to Pinar et al. (2021), market data are increasingly suggesting that the long-established gender biases that have characterized the beverage industry appear to be breaking down. For example, there has been a changing perception of gender-drink preferences and stereotypes for alcoholic beverages such as beer, spirits, and wine (Pinar et al., 2021). For rosé wine ‘retailers, bartenders, and restaurateurs started noticing how many young men were ordering the pink drink, as were young women; this consumer category even earned its own nickname: brosé’ (Pinar et al. 2021, p.74). This has led many modern beverage marketers to abandon gender-based marketing and embrace a ‘non-binary’ view of the consumer market, sometimes with

disastrous results. For example, in the U.S. market, Anheuser-Busch InBev faced a costly boycott of their Bud Light beer brand in summer 2023 in response to their marketing partnership with a transgender activist, alienating their core male demographic (Wheless 2023). The resulting backlash led to a long-term loss in market share and the Bud Light brand was forced to relinquish its market share lead in the category. Despite the well-intentioned efforts of progressive marketers, gender-typed markets and products still exist in Western nations, and our evidence reinforces the relationship between gender and consumer behavior in the Central Asian market as well.

In the case of alcoholic beverages, our findings are consistent with earlier consumption surveys from the Kazakhstan market that show different consumption patterns by gender. For example, according to Waters and Tom (2007), while many women drink alcohol socially and some drink regularly, on average they drink less alcohol than their male counterparts. Consistent with this, more than twice as many men in our sample reported consuming alcohol in the previous week as did women. Waters and Tom (2007) also report that motives and usage occasions vary by gender and, over one decade later, we observed a similar phenomenon. Therefore, contrary to the emerging belief that gender is gradually becoming less relevant as a segmentation variable, our results indicate that there are indeed differences between men and women on several dimensions of the consumer journey, from usage occasions to consumer motives and, ultimately, to actual consumption patterns.

Nevertheless, our findings did support the idea that not all beverages are clearly gender typed. Consistent with Pinar et al. (2021), the results showed that milk/soy drinks are perceived as gender neutral. The same is true for freshly prepared tea. In fact, irrespective of gender, our findings confirm Kazakhstan as one of the world's great tea drinking nations, with the volume of tea consumed by our sample dwarfing the consumption of all other beverages. Our findings are also consistent with market data **that rank this Central Asian nation as the world's third largest tea consuming nation, with yearly consumption in excess of 1.5 kilograms per capita, and among the top ten tea importing nations in the world** (Badarch 2022; Vorotnikov 2021). In contrast to their counterparts in other parts of the world, where coffee is consumed at a far higher rate, drinking tea is central to the Kazakh culture. Kazakhs have a strong tradition of hospitality,

and meeting together to enjoy freshly brewed tea brew is an integral part of their culture and social customs (Javeline 1999). Therefore, it is not surprising that freshly prepared tea was by far the most popular beverage among our respondents.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary implication of the study is that beverage marketers operating within the Central Asian nation of Kazakhstan must incorporate gender as a segmentation variable by considering gender-based motives, usage occasions, and consumption patterns. In fact, since there were even greater differences between the genders with regard to motives and usage occasions than even in the actual beverages consumed, there are valuable opportunities with respect to advertising and promotion. Indeed, advertising has the ability to not only capitalize on these differences but impact them as well. ‘The evidence shows that advertising tends to offer and exacerbate traditional and stereotyped images of men and women and gender roles’ (Castronuovo et al. 2021, p. 2). Thus, advertising can be used to enhance and consolidate gender perceptions and expectations that perpetuate culturally rooted social norms and that resonate with consumers. For example, rather than attempting to ‘row upstream’ by repositioning a beverage away from its core gender segment, as in the ill-fated attempt by Bud Light, they should understand and embrace existing gender expectations for their brands.

Advertisers could also choose to emphasize the motives and usage occasions of their targeted demographic segments. For example, an advertiser could position a beverage as a positive and mood enhancing (motive) staple of the nurturing family meal (usage occasion) when targeting female consumers. Alternately, a marketer could emphasize the health benefits (motive) of the beverage to facilitate recovery from physical exertion (usage occasion). Marketers must remember that the process of market segmentation and product differentiation have been fundamental to marketing since the 1950s (Smith 1956). The evidence in the current study supports the continued use of gender-based market segmentation and product positioning strategies in the beverage market of Kazakhstan, and there is no need to abandon the method just yet.

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