

Celebrities, Satirical Rock Stars, and Calcified Mustaches:
A Review of the Cause and Effect of the Milk Media Phenomena

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Writing 50

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December 11, 2009

Abstract

Since 1993, America's consumption of milk has skyrocketed due to the influential "Got Milk?" campaign. After a 30-year decline in milk sales, the milk industry came back with a more health-focused, yet entertaining campaign that has become a part of American pop culture. Through visual images, the campaign has been able to specifically target both women and children. By giving women images of good physical fitness and health, the campaign furthers women's already unstable image of what health is through their use of celebrity examples while also informing women of the nutritional benefits of their product. The desires of children are also used to attract the younger audience to this product through combining forces with many other well-known brands often associated with children. These advertising strategies, combined, have created a powerful market for the product.

The National Dairy Board's "Got Milk?" television, print, and online advertising campaign has gained vast amounts of success and fame through targeting of women and children as milk's primary consumers. By targeting women's desires for physical health and beauty as well as children's basic desires of items that have been advertised to them as something they should want, the campaign has attained extreme success during its entire run. Through the use of visual images, the "Got Milk?" campaign has successfully perpetuated milk as an American staple food.

The History of Milk in America

The history of liquid milk goes back many civilizations, yet is first referenced to in ancient Greek mythology. The myth of the goddess Hera ingrained the importance of milk in the western world through the spilling of her breast milk after refusing to feed Heracles. The spilling of the milk resulted in the Milky Way, one of the northern hemispheres most important astrological landmarks. Along with its importance to ancient Greece, milk also shows its importance in biblical times in the use of the phrase "The Land of Milk and Honey," which described the fertile Israel - a land of immense importance to both religion and history ("Milk," 2009).

Although milk has a long history throughout man's reign on earth, the beginnings of the "Got Milk?" phenomena are in the new world. Americans' love for dairy began with milk byproducts mainly used for preserved or fermented dairy products such as cheese and butter. Common in farms and backyards, the "family cow" was an integral part of the American diet, yet

fluid milk was extremely uncommon. If produced, it was “clabbered milk,” the byproduct of butter production used for feed for hogs and cooking (DuPuis, 2002, p. 5). Cow’s milk as a popular liquid drink did not occur until the mid-nineteenth century and began as a breast milk supplement for infants and weaned children in cities.

Although milk production was occurring, the process was by no means sanitary, making milk a potentially deadly product given to some of the weakest Americans, children. One historian referred to milk as “white poison” because of its potentially harmful effects. The toxicity of milk was due to unregulated production and animal care in unsanitary conditions both inside and outside the cities where the majority of the milk was being consumed. Milk may have been sitting for long periods of time unrefrigerated, creating significant amounts of bacteria that caused anything from infections to infant diarrhea (p. 47).

In 1840, prominent milk reformer, Robert Hartley, claimed that three-fourths of New York City children were being raised on cow’s milk after a discussion of the unsanitary conditions in milk production and extreme infant mortality rate gripping the city. This created a large push for milk reform within the city not only because of the large spike in infant mortality in America but in central Europe as well (p. 48). Both nineteenth-century foundling hospitals and many studies showed statistically significant differences between mortality rates in cities where infants were artificially fed, and cities where breastfeeding was more prominent. Infant mortality continued through the 1880’s as attempts to develop a country milk system were set in motion through a new urban reform creating broader food safety and city sanitation (p. 82).

The true change in milk reform did not come until the early twentieth century with the invention of pasteurization. With pasteurization gaining popularity in the initial phases, Americans, especially American mothers, were able to give their infants and children milk

without fear of common milk borne illnesses such as typhoid fever, scarlet fever, septic sore throat, diphtheria, and diarrheal diseases (“History of Pasteurization,” 2007). With the advent of a clean product, women went from seeing milk as a toxic substance for their children to a safe replacement for breast milk. By the 1940s, milk had become a staple product in the American diet with the average person drinking over a pint of milk a day. Currently, milk is one of the most heavily regulated commodities in the US, showing the product’s transformation from a contaminated product feared by many mothers to one of the leading foods, processed or non-processed, that a mother would chose for her child (DuPuis, 2002, p. 5).

“Got Milk?” Campaign Overview

Although advertising campaigns for milk had arisen throughout history in America, a 30-year milk sales decline caused the industry to reconsider their tactics (“Background Info,” 2003). With per capita consumption on the continuous decline and changing American ways due to large marketing campaigns by soft drinks, the Milk Processor Education Program (MilkPEP) was established. The program was authorized by Congress in 1990 and was funded by the nation’s dairy processors to give them a competitive “marketing voice” as a whole. The marketing strategy was meant to educate the consumer about nutritional benefits of milk in order to reverse the decline in milk sales (“Got Milk?": From Memorable to Motivational,” 2007).

In 1993, the California Milk Processor Board formed and hired San Francisco-based Goodby, Berlin & Silverstein to turn milk sales around. Consumer research entailed hiding a video camera in the back of a refrigerator and recording people’s reactions to ‘unexpectedly’ running out of milk, thereby creating the beginning of the “Got Milk?” deprivation ads. This targeting of innate human desires for food and drink took Americans by storm with the

campaign's first television advertisement entitled "Aaron Burr." Directed by Michael Bay, a man calls in to answer an obscure radio trivia question to win \$10,000 but can't answer because he has a mouth full of peanut butter and no milk. With that, the "Got Milk?" phenomenon was born. The ads were successful, increasing milk consumption by one percent in the first year and winning multiple awards at Cannes, along with many other advertising award programs. Because of its success, the "Got Milk?" campaign became what is now the "Got Milk?" brand and was licensed to the National Dairy Board, making television and billboard advertisements nationwide by 1995. Since then, Americans have been bombarded not only by large amounts of television ads for the brand, but print ads, billboards, radio commercials, toys and websites, all representing the impact that the brand has made on our current pop culture ("Got Milk?" Brand History," 2009).

Campaign Targets: Women

The success of the "Got Milk?" brand is not purely attributable to the commercials that make us laugh or make us thirsty. The bulk of this success has been from the marketing strategies used to target not only women, but children as well. By targeting women's health, body image, and children's desires, the "Got Milk?" campaign successfully captures many of the household's main grocery shopper's concerns. In *The Social Psychology of Food*, Armitage and Connor (2002, p. 53) discuss the Health Belief Model, which considers psychosocial variables in explaining health related actions through six determinants. This model explains the success of the stress the "Got Milk?" campaign places on milk being a healthy and beneficial choice for both mothers and their children.

Women's Health

In advertising focused towards women drinking milk for their health, still images have remained at the forefront of the strategy, and the image used is interestingly enough a male trait. Although mustaches are usually associated with the male sex, the “Got Milk?” campaign created a unisex perception of the common facial hair design. Within the milk mustache magazine and billboard advertisement portion of the “Got Milk?” campaign, the ways milk can make your body and bones stronger is made apparent in these images. The milk mustache ads have a very similar format including a famous person with their milk mustache (in this case we are examining those that feature females), a paragraph as to why they drink milk, a “drink well, live well” slogan, and the “Got Milk?” slogan. Looking at the six determinants of the Health Belief Model, one can see how this campaign targets women efficiently. The six determinants used are perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, perceived barriers, health motivations, and cues to action.

Two perceived susceptibilities of the campaign are bone density loss and reduced health as women age. This is displayed in the image through the choice of people used in the campaign, 40+-year-old celebrities that can or will be affected by these concerns, and the comments they make about needing nutrients for strong bodies and bone health within the ads. The perceived necessity is what the comments regarding strong bodies and bone density allude to: Osteoporosis, an age-related disease of the bone leading to reduced bone mineral density (“Osteoporosis,” 2009). Perceived benefits are discussed in every ad. Each celebrity discusses her reasoning for drinking milk such as “preventative health benefits that have everyone buzzing,” “staying healthy” and “making muscles stronger” (“Milk Mustache Celebrities,” 2009). The calcium in milk and its link with bone health are brought up time and time again

sending the message to women every time they see the advertisement. In some of the first celebrity milk mustache print ads in 1995, nutritional facts were included, beginning the long-lasting tie between milk's positive nutritional value and health (HarrisInteractive, 2007).

Perceived barriers are items such as ways for obtaining the calcium needed and the idea that a calcium deficiency isn't really realistic for women like themselves. These barriers of obtaining calcium are knocked down in many of the comments the celebrities in each ad make about how they drink a certain amount of a specific type of milk a day, giving women plenty of ideas of how much they could drink. The barrier that women like them don't need to worry about getting the extra calcium is also dismantled through the variation of women they place on the advertisements. Ages range from younger women such as Sara Ramirez in her early thirties to fashion designer Carolina Herrera in her seventies. Images also range in lifestyles of celebrities from housewives with their children to female athletes in full power stances displaying that no matter who you are or what you do, bone health and general wellbeing are something all women have in common.

Health motivation is displayed in the images of the women presented. All the women from the ads look as though they are in great health looking strong, with good complexions, skin and hair. Each looks as though she is going to take on the world with confidence, pushing women to desire the health and comfort the celebrities have in the images. The cues to action displayed in the milk mustache ads are once again in the images of the celebrities. People aspire to be like the celebrities they admire and recognize and therefore are compelled to action by the idea that "if they can do something, so can I" (Escalas & Bettman, 2008). Another cue to action for health is the external influence of milk's association with recognizable brands also promoting wellness such as General Mills Cereals. By placing the nutritional facts with multiple types of

milk on every cereal box, cereals such as Fiber One and Total, the “Got Milk?” campaign is furthered even beyond the milk mustache portion as drinking milk is emphasized even outside advertisements.

Women’s Body Image

Through every form of media, women are consistently bombarded by images of what society and pop culture believes the “perfect” woman should look like. By taking a not so “en Vogue” approach, the “Got Milk?” milk mustache advertising campaign created an image somewhat closer to what actual women look like, yet is still a far cry from the average working mother. In the images of celebrities presented, any somewhat larger women or athletically built women are displayed in less clothing while skinnier women are more hidden in less revealing outfits. This tactic of lumping all celebrities used in a more generic weight and fitness category closer to that of the average American woman creates a sense for the viewer that looking like a celebrity is within their grasp. By going through the determinants of the Health Belief Model, the connection the celebrities in the ads are trying to make with the viewer becomes more apparent (“Milk Mustache Celebrities,” 2009).

The perceived susceptibility presented in many of these advertisements is that of weight gain. This is presented in the text portion of the ad as many celebrities state that the reason they drink milk is to stay slim and fit, the opposition of weight gain. As a woman sees the text, a celebrity of her age range is presented with the comment creating the idea that she too must watch her weight; therefore, the viewer is probably in the same situation. The perceived severity of the situation is becoming obese and therefore undesirable - the opposite of the ideal that the advertisement presents. The perceived benefits of the image are displayed to the viewer by the

milk drinking celebrity. Becoming leaner and therefore more fit and desirable like the celebrity is shown as positive consequences of drinking milk. Factors such as working out along with drinking milk to gain the fitness benefit and the actuality that they may never be able to look like the celebrity in the advertisement are two of the more prominent perceived barriers. The health motivation is the proof in the image of the celebrity. Celebrities depict fitness and body ideals and many women look to those images for inspiration.

Along with the fit celebrity, the milk mustache campaign took a small detour in a few of their advertisements featuring the “skinny glass” with the token celebrity and their mustache. This bowed glass of milk, representing a picturesque woman’s large bust, thin waist, and curvy derrière, gave women a second visual image along with the celebrity of how drinking milk as part of their diet could help them slim down reiterating the ad’s main message (“Got Milk? From Memorable to Motivational,” 2007). There are many cues to action within the ad. The desire to be like the beautiful, thin celebrities pictured that are telling the consumer to drink milk and the repetitiveness and variety of milk mustache ads with a myriad of celebrities seen in many women’s magazines are two of the most important. Women seeing their favorite celebrities supporting a product, let alone a product that is seen in the media consistently, is a cue to action in itself. Along with these, reminders of “drink well, live well” and “Got Milk?” as displayed within the ads are also constant catchy reminders of the product and why the consumer should purchase it.

Campaign Targets: Children

Not only are mothers targeted by the “Got Milk?” brand, but children are a large part of the objective audience as well. “Got Milk?”’s success in targeting children is largely due to the

way the campaign targets children's desires for items they consider as rewards. By using Herrnstein's matching law, the idea of reinforcing certain learned behaviors with rewards, the "Got Milk?" brand has been able to bombard children with the idea of drinking milk from every aspect of their lives (Connor & Armitage, 2002). Described as "the tendency of animals to allocate their choices in direct proportion to the rewards they provide," the "Got Milk?" brand has worked wonders in linking the brand with food brands, toy companies and figures children associate with in order for the link to be made in their minds tying the consumption of milk to well known things in their life they enjoy while building strong bones ("Richard Herrnstein," 2009).

By the third year of the "Got Milk?" advertising campaign, the brand partnered with General Mills "Trix" cereal creating their first television ad entirely directed towards children ("Got Milk?" Brand History," 2009). The advertisement shows an older man desperately trying to purchase a box of Trix even though the saleswoman refuses him with the token Trix tag line: "Trix are for kids!" ("Cereal Slogans," 2005). Once he returns home with the cereal, he unzips himself and reveals that he is the Trix bunny who is finally able to eat Trix after years of attempts - only to find he is out of milk. This commercial ties the reward, Trix cereal, a sugary and not necessarily healthy children's cereal, to the choice of choosing milk. After the successful partnering with General Mills, the "Got Milk?" campaign joined other producers of foods directed towards children's consumption such as Nabisco through the Oreo cookie and Nestle through Nestle's Quick chocolate milk powder.

As well as having their appetites targeted, children are reminded of the "Got Milk?" brand by many everyday items. By 1995, the "Got Milk?" brand came out with the special edition "Got Milk?" Barbie made by the toy company Mattel. This item epitomized Herrnstein's

law by placing Barbie in cow print overalls carrying a carton of milk and including a “Got Milk?” swirly straw for the child receiving the toy. Not only is the “Got Milk?” brand represented by the most popular children’s doll of the time, it including a straw to encourage the child to drink the product. Because they are taking part in the “Got Milk?” brand by wanting the doll, the child is rewarded with the doll by merely having an interest in milk, not necessarily drinking it. Making an association between toys they want and the “Got Milk?” brand has created immense success for the campaign. From 1995 until 2009 over 75 products, including many children’s toys, have been licensed and carry the “Got Milk?” slogan (“Got Milk?” Brand History,” 2009). Another successful partner, Nintendo’s Super Mario video game, was also featured in a television commercial aimed at children. After losing at the video game because they can’t get Mario to jump high enough, the playing children walk away from the TV, thus leaving the coast clear for Mario to see the gallon of milk in the refrigerator. He pops out, grabs the gallon, and as he drinks it, he begins to grow bigger and bigger until he finishes the gallon. He jumps back into the game and wins the level because of his increased size. Afterwards a generic voice is heard asking, “Want to grow? The calcium in milk helps bones grow” (“Mario Milk Commercial,” 2006). This commercial made the behavior reward concept extremely clear to children while drawing them in with one of the most popular video game characters in history. The point here was clear: drink milk and grow.

Popular figures known to children are also used in marketing strategies aimed at younger generations. Ranging from lovable childhood television characters to celebrities and sports stars, large numbers of children are drawn in to the “Got Milk?” brand by someone they look up to. Sesame Street’s Cookie Monster was featured on a nationwide billboard campaign with a glass of milk and some cookies. By using characters that are recognized by children as young as those

who may not even speak, the advertisers get children interested at an extremely early age. In terms of attracting elementary, middle school, and high school aged children, the “Got Milk?” brand sponsored the Gravity Tour in 1998, bringing the world’s top professional extreme sport athletes to festivals and high schools throughout California. Sports stars as well as celebrities are also used in milk mustache ads aimed towards kids and teens at bodybymilk.com. Here, kids can play games related to milk, make their own milk mustache ad with their picture, and learn about the benefits of milk such as building stronger bones, giving them energy to stay in the game and giving them a brighter smile (“*Body By Milk: Why Drink Milk?*,” 2009). The use of sports stars and celebrities that kids look up to shows them first hand that their heroes support them in drinking milk. This significant link at such a young age is an integral part of the “Got Milk?” advertising campaign towards children. Children’s mimicking those they look up to is the way they learn. Many times children tend to do the opposite of what their parents tell them out of rebellion, yet having celebrities and heroes they look up to reinforce what they are told is good for them; drinking milk drives the message of the campaign home. The most recent “Got Milk?” campaign directed at children and teens picks on the latest trend in obsessing over celebrity. Although he is no Miley Cyrus, White Gold, a mockery of a rock star, tells his tale of how he came out of a life with split ends, brittle bones, and a horrible complexion to a life of success and glory as the greatest rock star of all time by drinking milk (“White Gold,” 2009).

Along with the television commercials, the “Got Milk?” campaign has created an online campaign to promote the rocker that includes a full-length rock opera. Free for kids to watch, it tells the tale of White Gold attempting to get back to his homeland Milkquarious and his beautiful girl, Miss Strawberry Summers. He meets many milk driven characters along the way referencing milk with every step of the journey as he fights to get back the milk that keeps the

people of Milkquarious so strong and beautiful (“Battle For Milkquarious,” 2009). By using the latest trends, the “Got Milk?” campaign goes above and beyond where any other advertising campaign goes. Being able to move from still image and short visual stimulus such as commercials to full-length pieces of cinematography not only shows the success of the campaign but how it continues to flourish and grow.

Through the targeting of women and children specifically, the “Got Milk?” brand has been able to successfully perpetuate itself through nearly two decades while still holding strong. By linking their product with health, fitness, and desirable goods, the brand has created an empire within not only advertising for food, but also for advertising in general. The use of catchy visual images with health messages interwoven within them, the eyes of American women and children have watched and will keep watching where they will take the campaign next.

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