

The Worst Monday of the Year

An analysis of Carl's Jr. x Alix Earle's "Hangover Burger" campaign

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Campaign Overview

The Super Bowl is one of the year's biggest nights in marketing and advertising. With such large audiences interacting with advertisements during each commercial break, many brands try to remain in the spotlight with ads that use humour, emotion, or a famous influencer. Super Bowl LIX was no different, as numerous influencer campaigns aired with unique storylines to entice audiences to watch (Marie Lee, 2025). For those who may not have had ad space during the game itself, they turned to social media to share their Super Bowl-esque campaigns.

Enter the [Carl's Jr x Alix Earle](#) campaign.

Posted on social media on February 5, the ad aimed to promote the free “Hangover Burger,” available on February 10, after the Super Bowl. Playing homage to Carl's Jr.'s previous “Burger Girl” commercials from the 2000s, the Hangover Burger ad features Earle completely glammed and in a bikini (Jiang, 2020; Earle, 2025).

“Looking her best,” Earle reminisces on how most people are a *hot mess* after the big game as she walks through a neighbourhood filled with individuals who seem to be experiencing the aftermath of the Super Bowl, the worst hangover of their lives. Earle then suggests that the *free* Carl's Jr. Hangover Burger is the cure to the post-party bug (Earle, 2025). After describing the ingredients within the burger, Earle consistently shares the key messaging of the campaign: the *free* Hangover Burger, which is the best post-Super Bowl cure, is available on February 10 by downloading the Carl's Jr. app and signing up for *my rewards* (Carl's Jr., 2025).

While no hashtags were used throughout this campaign, the consistent theme and key messages about the free burger available through the Carl's Jr. app remained prevalent. Utilizing Alix Earle, the “social media

powerhouse,” allowed Carl's Jr. to tap into a broader audience and place its brand back into the spotlight, for better or worse (Carl's Jr., 2025).

Choosing the Right Influencer

Alix Earle is not the first influencer one would think of when thinking of burgers. However, given the nature of Carl's Jr.'s campaign and its themes of “post-party,” “hangover cures,” and “unapologetic authenticity,” it played right into Earle's brand (Carl's Jr., 2025). Since her rise to fame on TikTok through her *'get ready with me'* and vlog-style videos, Earle has consistently shared moments from her life online, even those she deems a *'hot mess'* (Moore, 2023). Alongside her realness, Earle has also established herself as a “proud party girl,” making her the perfect candidate for this campaign (Tannenbaum, 2025). According to Carl's Jr., her followers know she loves a “late-night burger run” and looks for a cure for a night out, making the hangover burger an ideal partnership (2025).

Based on her millions of followers across her platforms—almost four million *on Instagram* and over seven million on *TikTok*—Earle has established herself as a mega-influencer with extensive reach among various audiences, including college students and Gen Z (Earle, 2025; Moore, 2023). While Earle has a dominant audience among young girls who enjoy beauty, lifestyle, and the party scene, she also has an established audience among young guys due to her appearance and ties to the football scene, which aligns directly with Carl's Jr.'s target.

Alongside her audience connection and broad reach, Earle is tied to the NFL due to her relationship with Miami Dolphins wide receiver Braxton Berrios, which increases her relevance and fit for this campaign (Tannenbaum, 2025). Combining her pre-established audience, wide recognition and ties to the NFL, having Earle participate in this Super Bowl ad made sense due to her “product-influencer fit” for Carl's Jr. to accomplish their campaign goals (Bosher, 2020).

Campaign Goals & Objectives

Utilizing a bikini-clad Alix Earle and a free burger day may seem like a top-of-the-funnel tactic for Carl's Jr. to gain brand awareness, but that was a secondary objective within this campaign. Regardless, Carl's Jr.'s choice to use Earle proves promising as her collaboration has already led to thousands of impressions and engagement (Carduso, 2025). For example, on TikTok, Earle has received 7 million views, 295 thousand likes and over a thousand comments on the ad since its initial posting. Furthermore, alongside the initial ad, Earle has posted additional content for the campaign, including photos of herself posing with the burger, which has also generated awareness and consumer engagement (Earle, 2025).

The main objective of this campaign relates to bottom-of-the-funnel conversion between consumers and the Carl's Jr. app. While Earle promotes the “taste” of the hangover burger, she also consistently references how to get the free burger by downloading the Carl's Jr. app and signing up for *my rewards* (Earle, 2025). App downloads and a reward system may not seem like a significant goal for such a widespread campaign and use of resources, but their promotion has a long-lasting effect. Consumer downloads and sign-ups enable Carl's Jr. to provide consistent internal marketing, which can lead to increased consumer loyalty, retention, and potential buyers (Carduso, 2025). That said, the main goal of this campaign was to generate leads and conversions between viewers and app sign-ups.

Campaign Analysis & Ethics

As mentioned, the Alix Earle x Carl's Jr. campaign has been successful in terms of engagement and impressions on social media, which has, in turn, led to more awareness for the brand and its “free” burger day. However, due to how recent the advertisement is, the success of the conversion rate between the ad and app downloads and my rewards sign-ups cannot be determined.

Although using a mega influencer was a wise decision on Carl's Jr.'s part, the campaign's distribution should have been different. Instead of running an official Super Bowl ad during the game, Carl's Jr. chose

to share this ad specifically on social media and streaming platforms to generate free press and word-of-mouth sharing (Dooley, 2025).

While this makes sense, given that Alix Earle is a mega social media influencer, it was a missed opportunity to get more awareness about the “unofficial Carl’s Jr. National Hangover Day.” Carl’s Jr. should have utilized the 120 million viewers watching the Super Bowl through a traditional commercial, especially with the “controversy” of the campaign (Marie Lee, 2025). Combining these mixed opinions with Carl’s Jr.’s supposed “unapologetic, bold style,” why not go big or go home with an ad that would get mass viewership for a product being released the following day (Carl’s Jr., 2025)?

While technically, no ethical standards were infringed upon, the Earle x Carl’s Jr. campaign reflects notions of objectifying women, which, given the political discourse in the United States, does not sit well with most audiences. Historically, Carl’s Jr. built its brand on utilizing the outdated concept that “sex sells” through advertisements featuring underdressed influencers, such as Paris Hilton, taking suggestive bites of oversized burgers (Jiang, 2020; Tannenbaum, 2025). However, the brand strayed away from these ads and changed its culture in 2017 following the rise of the #MeToo movement. The step away from these advertisements allowed Carl’s Jr. to focus more on their products but ultimately left it without a distinguishable identity (Tannenbaum, 2025; Dooley, 2025).

Based on these notions and the current media landscape, the campaign should have taken a different approach regarding its storyline and imagery. Partnering with Alix Earle remains an excellent decision for Carl’s Jr., given the burgers' connected connotations, but the choice of clothing and suggestive content was unnecessary. Instead, the ad could have incorporated the same elements of the aftermath of a night out while showcasing Earle at Carl’s Jr., getting the hangover burger in some respect. This slight change would still gather the attention of Earle’s followers while still attracting the “young, hungry guys” Carl’s Jr. aimed to entice (Tannenbaum, 2025).

While this critique is not on Earle or her self-expression, bringing back this ad style was a poor brand and campaign decision. Yet, Carl's Jr.'s claim that the brand is "having fun doing things other brands are too timid to do" does not account for their ad playing into the outdated female objectification. Plus, with the United States facing a rise in misogyny and "masculine energy" due to recent political changes combined with the strip back of reproductive rights, the timing and execution of the campaign were a step in the wrong direction for Carl's Jr (Tannenbaum, 2025).

In connection, Super Bowl LIX saw a significant rise in influencer campaigns that focused on female empowerment and amplifying women's voices. For example, *Nike* aired its first Super Bowl commercial in 27 years, featuring various female athletes, including Caitlin Clark and Jordan Chiles (Curtright, 2025). Despite different goals and industries, comparing these influencer campaigns highlights how the Hangover Burger ad is controversial and should have taken a different approach to promoting its product and collaboration with Alix Earle.

Outside of these "unethical" views, the campaign also needs improved partnership disclosures to increase transparency, as per the FTC guidelines. Although the campaign displays various terms and conditions for the free burger throughout the initial video advertisement, there was no disclosure that the video was an ad or sponsored. Earle does disclose the stipulations for the free burger day multiple times throughout the video, but there is no indication of how she is tied to the brand. Although the production of the video demonstrates that this partnership is clearly an ad, there is no disclosure of the relationship between the two within the content or caption. Furthermore, looking at Instagram specifically, the additional content Earle shared did not include any sponsorship identification (Federal Trade Commission, 2019). For these reasons, this campaign needs to enhance its compliance with the FTC guidelines and increase its focus on meeting ethical standards.

Conclusion

Based on social media impressions and engagement, the Hangover Burger campaign is a hit among its target demographics due to its combination of influencer partnerships and brand repositioning. However, due to its lack of compliance with FTC guidelines and disregard for the negative connotations associated with its storyline, the campaign needs vast improvement for complete success.

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