# Like, comment, share: Alcohol brand activity on Facebook

## Researcher

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## Summary

By the end of 2012 the top 20 alcohol brands (brands) in Australia had more than 2.5 million followers on their Facebook pages. During 2012 they posted more than 4500 items of content. Their followers interacted with that content by liking, sharing or commenting on it more than 2.3 million times. These figures suggest that Facebook is now a key player in the promotion of alcohol.

## Outcomes

This report found that on average over the year, the top 20 alcohol brands posted four items of content per week. The least active brand posted twice a week, the most active posted almost twice a day and the average brand posted every Friday of the year.

Brands continuously seek engagement from fans in the form of likes, comments, and shares. They are also investing significant resources in producing content for their pages and managing interactions with consumers.

Brands strategically arrange the timing and context of their posts to engage with users in real time. The most common day for brands to post is a Friday, and the most popular time of day to post is between 3pm and 5pm.

The alcohol industry has developed an extensive, real-time, culturally embedded mode of branding on Facebook. The sophisticated use of social media by brands identified in this research raises seven issues that are currently not addressed by existing regulation:

* Extensiveness – Brand activities on Facebook are extensive and continuous in terms of audience size, volume and frequency, interaction and timing.
* Collaboration with consumers - Brands focus on interacting with consumers, with consumer contributions being a regular and intrinsic part of brand messages on Facebook.
* Activations - Brands invest significant resources in ‘real-world’ promotional activities. They build themed social spaces in nightlife precincts, music festivals and sporting events and use these to generate content and engagement on their Facebook pages.
* Everyday life – Brands engage with consumers’ routine conversations about everyday life. The more embedded in everyday life alcohol consumption is, the more valuable alcohol brands are because they become increasingly impervious to regulation.
* Global pages - Brands are using Facebook to develop global approaches to branding, allowing them to use global strategies and to target millions of consumers.
* Surveillance and targeting - Brands and Facebook together accumulate an extensive amount of data about consumers, allowing them to target messaging in ways they were unable to previously.
* Transparency - Regulating alcohol brands depends to a large extent on brand activity being subject to public scrutiny. However, as branding activities go ‘below the line’ on Facebook, it is not possible for regulators, researchers, policy makers and the public to observe and scrutinise the brands’ activities.

## Recommendations

In light of the above, this research poses six questions for policy makers and regulators about this mode of alcohol marketing:

* How extensive and continuous should alcohol branding be?
* What kind of collaboration with consumers is appropriate?
* What kind of engagement with everyday life is appropriate?
* How should global branding activities be addressed?
* What kind of surveillance and targeting is appropriate?
* How transparent should alcohol brands be about their activities?

[view the report](/wp-content/uploads/Facebook-and-alcohol-advertising-report.pdf)