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Brands and sociality: alcohol branding, drinking culture and Facebook

Nicholas Carah, University of Queensland

Sven Brodmerkel, Bond University

Lorena Hernandez, University of Queensland

Abstract

Critical accounts of Facebook as a channel for marketing communication have predominantly focused on the social network's ability to provide marketers with free user-generated content and with detailed consumer data that allows them to target advertising to specific audiences. Although this article includes such activities, it extends the discussion to concentrate on the under-researched topic of how Facebook creates value for marketers by exploiting sociality in general. Taking the practices of Australian alcohol brands as an instructive case, this paper critically examines how these brands strategically employ Facebook to manage their connections with consumers' identity-making practices and engage with the mediation of everyday life. We argue that Facebook works not just as a platform to harvest data, but also as a platform to manage the circulation of affect and creation of social connections around brands. This is particularly important in the case of alcohol brands since some social media engagement practices allow for circumventing

regulatory regimes by prompting connections between mediations of drinking culture and the brand that would not be possible in other media channels.

Keywords

branding, drinking culture, Facebook, alcohol brands, popular culture, social media

Introduction

Speaking at the Computer History Museum in July 2010, Mark Zuckerberg articulated Facebook's strategy to become a ubiquitous platform for social interaction and content circulation. His account reinforced the view that the ongoing business strategy of Facebook is organised around developing methods for valorising user-generated content and data. Facebook's market capitalisation is facilitated by its capacity to organise and harness its users' creation and circulation of information about themselves and their social world. The platform is dependent on the communicative capacities, social relations and material social spaces of its users. Users' communicative activities simultaneously produce data that Facebook gathers, sorts and uses to continuously organise networks and flows of content (see Andrejevic 2009, Dijck 2011, Martens 2011, Wessells 2011). Facebook is composed of this continuous interaction between the social networks that users create and the technical apparatus that stimulates, shapes and valorises those networks.

In this article we contribute to efforts to conceptualise how Facebook and branding are interconnected modes of cultural production. The relationship between brands and Facebook extends beyond the application of user data for customised advertising and user participation in creating and circulating brand messages. We develop our analysis with a study of the use of Facebook by alcohol brands in Australia. Alcohol brands provide a valuable and important case for two reasons. First, alcohol brands have been innovative in their use of Facebook as part of broader

participatory and culturally embedded branding activities. They provide an illustrative case for positioning Facebook within a larger conceptualisation of branding. Second, careful study of the participatory and culturally embedded marketing activities used by the alcohol industry is critically important for current policy debates about the regulation of alcohol marketing in Australia and elsewhere (including the United Kingdom and United States, see Chester et al. 2010; Hastings and Sheron 2013).

Alcohol brands and Facebook

Alcohol brands have been strategically innovative in their use of Facebook. The market-leading example is Diageo and Facebook's 'multi-million dollar strategic partnership' announced in September 2011 that aimed to 'drive unprecedented levels of interaction and joint business planning and experimentation between the two companies'. Diageo reported that the partnership had led to a

> 20% increase in sales as a result of Facebook activity. This 5:1 return has come off the back of Diageo's brands growing their collective fan base from 3.5 million to 12 million in the past 12 months.

In addition, Diageo announced that

> the two companies will work together to push the existing boundaries of social media through co-created experiments leveraging the full capability of the platform. Facebook will also provide metrics to help Diageo define ROI [return on investment] and performance across its priority brands.[i]

Alcohol companies' use of Facebook's participatory and surveillance capacities to create brand value has only recently become a matter of public concern and debate in Australia (and elsewhere, see for instance: Hastings and Sheron 2013, Nicholls 2012). In 2012, the Australian National Preventative Health Agency (ANPHA) released an issues paper and called for submissions on alcohol advertising regulation (ANPHA 2012). The issues paper argued that:

- Most research, policy and regulation focuses on 'traditional' or 'above the line' media, but the majority of alcohol marketing uses interactive, social and below-the-line forms of media and promotion (ANPHA 2012, section 4.44, 5.59).

- Below-the-line marketing 'may seek to "normalise" alcohol and drinking as part of everyday life' (section 4.45) and might be able to create brand value via 'discussions and conversation which do not explicitly reference drinking' (section 7.71).

- Industry use of social and mobile media enables brands to be integrated into cultural spaces and practices.

ANPHA's arguments pointed to the need for an examination of alcohol brands' use of Facebook that pays critical attention to how brand value is made on the social network. Most research in the public health literature has focused on alcohol advertising in traditional media (television and print), paying little attention to other forms of alcohol marketing such as sponsorships, experiential marketing and other below-the-line marketing (Jones and Jernigan 2010). Only a few studies have addressed the prevalence, nature and extent of alcohol marketing on social media. The majority of these studies have focused on how young people engage with alcohol and portray their 'drinking' identity on social media (Griffiths and Caswell 2010; Moreno et al. 2010; Ridout et al. 2011). Brown and Gregg (2012) argue that young women's everyday use of Facebook promotes 'risky' alcohol consumption: posts anticipating the night out, live mobile updates and images while they are out drinking, and bonding in the days after as they go through photo albums. Social media enhances the enjoyment of excessive consumption because it enables people to amplify the telling of good stories and the sharing of memories (Brown and Gregg 2012: 361).

Recent research in the public health literature has begun investigating how brands use viral messaging, real-world tie-ins, interactive games, competitions and time-specific suggestions to drink as strategic stimuli for consumer engagement online (Mart et al. 2009; Nicholls 2012). Only a

few studies so far, however, have examined how alcohol brands embed themselves within this broader mediation of drinking culture online. For example, a study by Nicholls (2012) offers a content analysis of alcohol brand presence and activity on Facebook. However, his study does not consider in detail how brands create value by engaging with participants' everyday mediation of drinking culture on the platform.

While these and a few other studies have begun to map alcohol brand activity on social media (Gordon et al. 2010; Griffiths and Casswell 2010; Hastings et al. 2010; Jones and Jernigan 2010; Leyshon 2011; Mart et al. 2009; Nicholls 2012,), no significant attention has been paid to how this mode of branding creates value by relying on the participation of ordinary users. However, understanding how brand value is created and managed on social media is critical to devising effective advertising regulation. To examine how brand activity is interrelated with the broader mediation of drinking culture online, we need to turn to a conceptualisation of branding as a social process that relies on the productive sociality of everyday users.

Conceptualising branding on Facebook

For much of the twentieth century brand management involved defining a brand's symbolic meaning, transferring it to products and services, and conveying it to consumers via mass media (Holt 2002). Since the 1990s this understanding of brands has been challenged in marketing, critical, media and cultural studies (Holt 2002, Lury 2009). Lury (2009) argues that from the mid-twentieth century the way brands 'qualified' products shifted from controlling particular meanings to 'positioning' brands within cultural practices. Rather than impose particular meanings, brands moved toward managing consumer activity around cultural resources and social spaces provided by the brand (Holt 2002, Lury 2009). From this perspective, branding is best conceptualised as a social process that incorporates the participation of consumers and cultural intermediaries

(Arvidsson 2005, Foster 2008, Holt 2002, Lury 2009). Brands do not necessarily prescribe and control specific meanings, but anticipate and harness the productive communication and sociality of consumers. In the words of Lury (2009), they 'assemble culture' as an ongoing and open-ended process.

Lury's conceptualisation of branding as a process of assembling culture is useful in illustrating how branding and Facebook are interrelated. Following Lury, we suggest that Facebook brings together technical and cultural aspects of brand management. Facebook is instrumental in the expansion of a culturally embedded mode of branding that is interwoven with a series of calculative and predictive capacities made possible by the 'proliferation of "social" transactional data' (Lury 2009). When a person interacts with a brand on Facebook, that activity does 'double duty' (Andrejevic 2011). First, the social networks of Facebook are a device for circulating culturally embedded brand meanings. The brand travels via the identities and social connections of users. And second, the social networks that users create generate information that can be used to manage the flow of content through the network. The effectiveness of Facebook's surveillance and targeting is dependent, in the first instance, on the quality of information users register on the platform. Facebook's ability to generate value increases as users create denser social networks comprised of more and more links between their everyday lives, brands and popular culture (Dijck 2011:11). Social media makes the social relations between brands and consumers tangible and measurable in the form of interactional data. This interactional data includes the number of times a brand is interacted with (mentioned, tagged, liked, shared), the sentiment expressed in relation to a brand, and the network centrality of users interacting with a brand. Thus, the creation of brand value on Facebook is calculated independently of ideas expressed in individual media texts. What counts is the formation of social relations and dense networks around the brand.

Brands derive value from being embedded and reproduced in the social networks and identities of users. Facebook enables brands to capitalise on 'soft', culturally embedded branding activities (such as partnering with a cultural event). If, for example, a brand establishes a themed 'activation' at an event like a music festival, Facebook provides the technical capacity for that 'real world' interaction with consumers to be converted into media texts (status updates, tags, likes, images, comments), an online social network and interactional data. The 'soft', culturally embedded branding activity is interrelated with 'hard', calculative and predictive branding activities such as collecting data from social networks and using it to manage markets. Facebook provides a suite of technical, social and communicative capacities that enables brands to operate as 'devices for the reflexive organisation of a set of multi-dimensional relationships' between brands, culture and people (Lury 2009: 69). The brand is not only, or even primarily, a symbol representing a particular meaning; instead, it is an ongoing social process. It is coextensive with the social relations it stimulates and manages.

Facebook users produce the identities, cultural practices and social relations within which brands are embedded. Facebook assembles a social network of individuals with the capacity to affect and be affected (Clough 2008, Lury 2009). Users are affective labourers who use their communicative capacities to create and circulate social connections, ideas and feelings. They create value by relating identities, dispositions, tastes and social connections to brands and other cultural commodities (Martens 2011) in ways that attract attention from other users in the network. Facebook 'brokers' the circulation of attention through the network (Dijck 2011) and provides the calculative and technical capacity to monitor, analyse and modulate social connections around brands, identities and cultural practices

The implication of conceptualising branding as a social process for policy debates is that the regulation of alcohol marketing needs to address how new forms of media, cultural spaces and the social lives of consumers are intrinsic components of brands. The assembly and management of

alcohol brands extend far beyond particular meanings, and their volume and placement within mass media. For example, some of the alcohol brands investigated in this study used Facebook to prompt mediations of drinking culture that would not be possible due to the interactive, participatory and regulatory limits of other forms of media. In this article, we offer a formulation of brand activity on Facebook that is attuned to how the platform is embedded in everyday life. We argue that the debate needs to shift away from evaluating the specific representations alcohol brands create, and toward examining how branding involves an array of political, cultural and economic techniques. Beyond the specific case of alcohol brands, we offer a conceptualisation of brand value on Facebook that maps out how the culturally-embedded and calculative-analytic activities of brands and Facebook are interrelated (Lury 2009). This expands and links accounts of value creation on social networking sites (Andrejevic 2009, 2011) and consumer participation in the creation of brand value (Arvidsson 2011, Holt 2002).

Methodology

This article primarily presents an analysis of Facebook pages officially run by alcohol brands in Australia. To set this brand activity in relation to cultural practices and spaces we also draw on interviews with 35 informants who consume alcohol and use Facebook, and participant observation at a music festival featuring brand activations. We present the material in two sections. The first section contains an overview of alcohol brand activity on Facebook in 2011 and 2013. The purpose of this overview is to demonstrate the extensive nature of this mode of branding, and the level of interaction with Facebook users. The second section involves the further analysis of three selected alcohol brands: Smirnoff, Jagermeister and Victoria Bitter. We selected these brands because they were early adopters who were using Facebook in a culturally embedded way in Australia. In the case of Jagermeister and Smirnoff, they were also deliberately integrating

Facebook with 'real world' branding activities. We complement our examination of Jagermeister's and Smirnoff's Facebook activity with participant observation of their 'activations' at a music festival in 2012.

The study began with systematic observation of the Australian Facebook pages of 14 alcohol brands in 2011. These brands were selected using three methods: (1) observations of brand activity at cultural events, (2) searching Facebook for pages of major brands, and (3) searching for links to Facebook activity from alcohol advertisements and other promotional material. In 2011, we took an inductive approach because only early adopter brands were using Facebook pages in a deliberate way. By 2013, brand Facebook pages had become a broadly used promotional device. For this reason, we systematically searched 271 alcohol brands in Australia from the McCusker Centre's Guide to the Alcohol Industry (2012). We found 51 that had a fan base of more than 5000 Australian Facebook users who had 'liked' the page. While we present our analysis of Smirnoff, Jagermeister and Victoria Bitter within the context of this overview of alcohol brand activity on Facebook in Australia, we do not claim that these three brands are representative of the whole industry, but rather that the critical analysis of their specific practices offer insight into how brand value is made on Facebook.

We situate our analysis of brand activity on Facebook in relation to interviews with 35 young people who drink alcohol and use Facebook. The purpose of this interview material is not to offer a generalisable account of young drinkers' practices. Instead, we use the interviews selectively to articulate how brands' activities on Facebook are interrelated with cultural practices and identities. Interview participants were snowball sampled from the peer networks of research interns. The interview participants were made up of 20 females and 15 males; 31 were aged under 25, and four were aged between 25 and 30. The interview participants were asked to share their perceptions of

their drinking culture, alcohol brands and advertising, and the representations of drinking culture and alcohol brands on social media.

Overview of alcohol brand activity on Australian Facebook pages

Alcohol brand activity on Facebook in Australia is extensive and growing. Table 1 details the top 20 brands (in terms of fan base) in February 2013. To become a 'fan' of a brand on Facebook, a user needs to go to that brand's page and 'like' the page. Once they have done that, any content the brand posts can appear in their news feed. Any time that fan interacts with the brand by posting content, commenting, liking or tagging the brand that interaction may be displayed in the news feeds of their friends. Brand activity was coded using basic metrics of interactivity: number of posts by the brand, number of fans the brand has, and the average number of likes, comments and shares from fans per post. In January 2013, the top 20 alcohol brands in Australia had a combined fan base of 2.47 million. There is a combination of beer, spirit and cider brands represented.

Table 1: Alcohol brands' Australian Facebook pages[ii]

Ranking	Brand	Joined Facebook	Total Fans (2011)	Total Fans (2013)	People talking about this brand in the past week (January 2013)	Largest age group talking about this brand
1	Smirnoff	Unknown	118 606	180 000[iii]	194 058	18-24
2	Rekorderlig	2011 January	-	223 687	15 660	18-24
3	Wild Turkey	2011 August	-	221 120	7840	18-24
4	Pure Blonde	2008 April	56 695	215 369	5665	18-24
5	Bundaberg Rum	2008 June	35 948	187 197	2042	18-24
6	Jim Beam	2011 March	-	166 001	11 163	18-24
7	Baileys	2009 November	-	141 863	7558	35-44
8	Jack Daniel's	2010 June	60 000[iv]	138 557	4584	25-34
9	Jacobs Creek	2010 January	-	134 993	2792	35-44
10	Johnny Walker	2008	-	114 625	3886	25-34

		November				
11	Tooheys Extra Dry	2008 March	48 160	111 128	806	18-24
12	American Honey	2011 March	-	93 867	1168	18-24
13	Jagermeister	2010 January	22 408	79 022	1206	18-24
14	Bundy R. Bear	2008 November	51 413	78 906	275	25-34
15	Carlton Dry	2010 October	-	76 698	3723	18-24
16	Victoria Bitter	2009 July	26 255	65 885	11 511	25-34
17	XXXX Gold	2010 November	-	63 708	317	25-34
18	Absolut Vodka	2009 August	-	63 362	1362	18-24
19	Jameson Irish Whiskey	2009 October	-	59 056	92	25-34
20	Midori	2009 October	-	55 579	7160	18-24

Table 2 presents three brands examined in 2011 that were not in the 2013 top 20.

Table 2: Brands examined in 2011 not in the 2013 top 20

Ranking	Brand	Joined Facebook	Total Fans (2011)	Total Fans (2013)	People talking about this brand in the past week (January 2013)	Largest age group talking about this brand
23	Carlton Draught	2008 July	20 140	38 206	1786	25-34
32	Little Creatures	2008 October	8011	22 982	292	25-34
43	James Boag	2008 July	9319	11 266	572	25-34

The number of alcohol brands with an active presence on Facebook in Australia and a fan base of more than 5000 (by 2013) has grown steadily from 13 in 2008 to 51 by the end of 2012. The 11 brands we examined in 2011 had a combined fan base of 485,378. In 2013 those same 11 brands now have a combined fan base of 1,118,518. In the analysis to follow, we focus specifically on Smirnoff, Jagermeister and Victoria Bitter. In Table 3 we present a small sample of brand activity in January and February of 2011 and 2013 for each brand.

Table 3: Brands' Facebook activity and interaction 2011 and 2013 (January and February)

Measure of page activity	Smirnoff		Jagermeister		Victoria Bitter	
Year	2011	2013	2011	2013	2011	2013
Fans	118 606	180 000	22 408	79 022	26 255	65 885
Posts	51	20	48	16	28	19
Likes	3027	18084	269	5730	1420	30 108
Average likes per post	59.35	822	5.6	358	50.71	1584
Comments	1246	405	48	339	854	2834
Average comments per post	24.43	18.4	3.3	21.18	31.57	149.15
Shares	-	2094	-	416	-	9184
Average shares per post	-	98.18	-	26	-	483
Total interactions (likes, comments and shares)	4273	20583	317	6485	1504	42 126
Average total interactions per post	83.78	1029.15	6.6	405.31	53.71	2217.15

In the case of each of the three brands, we see large increases in fan base: 52% for Smirnoff, 252% for Jagermeister and 151% for Victoria Bitter. Each brand decreased the frequency of posts to its page but had a marked increase in the amount of interaction with each post.

We then coded brands' activities inductively to develop a schema of practices. Typical brand activities on Facebook included:

- Advertisement: promoting brand advertisements and websites.

- Celebratory: making a statement celebrating drinking culture or the brand.

- Competition: promoting a competition run by the brand.

- Culture and everyday life: posting content about everyday life or cultural pastimes, such as clubbing, music, festivals, sport and weekend activities, to prompt conversation. In a few cases this included expressing sentiments about natural disasters or national holidays.

- Drinking Culture: asking a question about drinking culture to prompt interaction with users.

- Activation: posting content and photos from branded festivals or events.

- Consumption suggestion: posting suggestions on different ways to consume the product.

Table 4 presents the frequency of each of these practices for each brand in the two month period examined.

Table 4: Brands' Facebook practices 2011 and 2013 (January and February)

	Smirnoff		Jagermeister		Victoria Bitter	
Practice	2011	2013	2011	2013	2011	2013
Advertisement	3	3	-	2	4	-
Celebratory	-	-	1	-	4	-
Competition	21	5	35	1	7	4
Drinking culture	5			1	4	
Culture and everyday life	17	2	7	4	9	15
Activation	5	2	5	4	-	-
Consumption suggestion	-	8		3	-	-
Total	51	20	48	15	28	19

These practices correspond in part with those identified by Nicholls (2012), such as the 'real world tie ins', 'encouragement to drink' and 'time-specific questions'. In this article, we are specifically interested in practices that stimulate interaction with consumers by prompting them to like, comment, share, tag or check in. This is most evident where brands ask questions about drinking culture, run competitions and build activations at cultural events, and post content about everyday life and cultural pastimes. We are not concerned with quantifying these practices or suggesting that these three brands' specific practices are representative of broader industry activity. Our ongoing analysis suggests that industry-wide there is an array of practices that continually evolve as brands

respond to the changing capabilities of Facebook, the regulatory and policy environment, and consumer practices. We argue that these practices help us to articulate some of the fundamental features of alcohol brand activity on Facebook. We aim to conceptualise the value proposition Facebook offers brands in general, and on which all these specific practices are constructed.

Within a conceptualisation of alcohol brands as the product of social relations organised around alcohol consumption and everyday life, the analysis to follow considers two aspects of alcohol branding and value creation on Facebook.

First, alcohol brands use Facebook to enhance and extend connections between the brand and cultural identities by participating in conversation about cultural practices such as sport, music, popular culture and pastimes, and by extending narratives from advertisements and other promotional activities (Wessells 2011: 73). This is evident in the drinking culture, drinking and everyday life, and competition practices noted above in Table 4. Value is accumulated from the creative ability of the Facebook user to employ his or her identity and communicative capacities to articulate the brand within cultural identities. At times, these contributions raise issues and express sentiments that the brands in principle endorse, but cannot express openly themselves without violating regulatory codes.

Second, we examine how Facebook enables alcohol brands to be incorporated into the mediation of everyday life. Facebook enables material brand practices to be extended online and connected to an apparatus of surveillance. This is evident in the activations and competition practices in Table 4. For instance, brands establish installations at music festivals and then use Facebook as a platform to extend and mediate these interactions with drinkers by posting photos, videos and other content. This creates online connections between the brand, cultural spaces and users. These texts circulate like micro-advertisements within peer networks on Facebook. We aim to conceptualise how the Facebook and 'real world' activities of the brands are connected.

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Creating value by managing connections between brands and identity practices

Alcohol brands use Facebook to harness the sociality generated as people construct their identities by exchanging, judging and evaluating cultural meaning, lifestyles and practices. Consumers incorporate the brand within their identities and social networks, and generate a 'social graph' of data that enables Facebook and brands to manage these networks (Andrejevic 2011, Arvidsson 2011, Lury 2009). In this section, we examine how Victoria Bitter (VB), Jagermeister and Smirnoff each engage with the identity and cultural practices of their 'fans'.

Performing identity

People use Facebook to construct their identities and a story about their lives. Brands use Facebook to intersect with these identity-making practices. Australian beer brands have long deployed stereotypical national and gendered identities in their advertising that celebrate masculine mateship, sporting prowess and idealised suburban leisure activities (Hogan 1999, Kirby 2003, Rowe and Gilmour 2009). VB's television advertising has a long history of depicting masculine suburban identities; on Facebook, its fans perform these identities in relation to the brand. For instance, on January 25, the eve of the national Australia Day holiday, the day in the year most overtly characterised by stereotypical nationalism, VB posted to its Facebook page: 'Besides VB, what's the next essential for a great Australia day BBQ?' (3.56pm). A selection of replies to come throughout the evening included:

'Meat and bongs' (3.57pm)

'Great mates and girls in bikinis' (3.57pm)

'Sluts' (3.58pm)

'VB n woman, get it 2getha peeps hahaha' (3.59pm)

'i cant believe no one has said pussy yet' (4.07pm)

'Hot chicks in bikinis' (4.34pm)

'One of those aprons with a pair of tits on them. :)' (5.09pm)

'Cocaine & strippers?' (5.23pm)

'Getting the mullet trimmed & having a personal buxom babe serve me vb all day! Get ur boobs out boys!' (10.11pm)

The responses uniformly aggressively promoted hegemonic masculine identities. Several encourage drug use and are misogynistic. VB's online fans employ their own identities to extend mediations of the brand within their peer networks. The fans reflect, adapt and amplify narratives from VB's television advertising. Their interaction with VB on Facebook is incorporated into their own identity on the platform and is displayed in the news feeds of their peers. VB is a cultural resource that fans use to construct their own identity, and in doing so, they help to make VB coextensive with their cultural world. Importantly, this performance of identity is being simultaneously 'customised' within peer networks. As the brand is dispersed into multiple peer networks, it is adapted to the identities of those peer groups. For example, the references to the kitschy Australian apron with 'rubber tits' on it and the mullet hairstyle associated with suburban 'bogans' might be incorporated as part of sincere and ironic constructions of masculine identity. Similarly, the use of the term 'sluts' might be deliberately and proudly misogynistic or it could be intended or received as poking fun at the brand. While in one peer network the brand is employed as part of a sincere 'ideal' masculine identity, it is being simultaneously performed in another part of the network as part of an ironic masculine identity. Arguably, these multiple incorporations of the brand into identities have always taken place in the private lives of consumers (as they watch television advertisements, or socialise

in pubs or at barbeques); however, Facebook enables them to be significantly extended and mediated, and for the brand to watch and respond to them.

Judging exactly what consumers mean becomes less important if value is being created not in a particular disposition, but in the incorporation of the brand into the multiple performances of identity on Facebook (Dean 2010). VB's online fans employ their own identities to extend mediations of the brand within their peer networks. When employing their identity, they say things the brand can imply but never say. Noteworthy in this exchange, and most other interactions between VB and fans on Facebook, is that VB did not intervene to 'manage' the conversation by deleting posts, cautioning or challenging posters, or distancing the brand from the views expressed. The only time VB explicitly intervened in a conversation was to thank a poster for their 'enthusiasm', but ask them not to swear excessively.

Although VB was largely silent, on some occasions, other fans would challenge the views of posters. For instance, in one case, VB asked: 'Could this be every man's dream job? VB's brewmasters get to taste each batch of VB six times before it goes out to you' (15 February 2011). When a number of women commented that it could also be a 'woman's dream job' they received replies such as:

'Bunch of bitches VB rocks. Go get a dic* in your mouth you weak stomach knob heads' (6.58pm)

'It is a mans job women should b chained 2 da kitchen! lmfao' (4.13am) ('lmfao' in this post stands for 'laughing my fucking arse off').

The intervention of women in the discussion created a forum for further displays of aggressive masculinity and misogyny under the moniker of the brand. The fans who respond construct their own masculine identity by acting as defenders of the brand's ideals on the brand's behalf. They act as if they have the imprimatur of the brand, and the brand doesn't intervene to say otherwise. The

repeated use of appeals that prompted commentary of this kind by VB suggested that at the very least they didn't perceive it to be detrimental to their efforts to create brand value.

Judging and evaluating

In recent years, VB has also attempted to expand its brand positioning in the face of declining sales. It attempted to acquire younger male drinkers by ironically portraying traditional representations of masculinity, nationalism and sport. VB used Facebook to 'help' young male drinkers intervene in the online identity construction of their peers. The brand set up a 'profile intervention' application where young males could 'report' their friends for having embarrassing un-masculine online identities. The application posted an interactive and noticeably branded video to the respective friend. In the video a 'psychointerventionist' told the 'mate' that he had become a 'profile poser'. Through the profile intervention, VB attempted to make itself a part of young males' identity play on Facebook, where they frequently 'police' or 'critique' their peers' online identity constructions. Even though ironic, the profile intervention reinforced VB's 'manly' image by asking young males to let the brand 'police' unmanly behaviour such as constructing an online self that was too 'posed'.

VB's profile intervention attempted to engage with cultural rituals young men have about self-presentation on Facebook. As an example of these cultural practices, two young male interview participants described to us ways in which the drinking culture of their football clubs is mediated on Facebook. One 20-year-old male student described a Facebook page his peer group use to organise social events involving drinking each week. As part of that page they run a 'Goose of the Week' contest, a ritual that celebrates excessive drinking as a kind of 'in joke' amongst members of the club. He explained that a recent winner 'rocked up to a party in a suit and left wearing nothing but a tea towel'. Another participant, a 21-year-old male apprentice described a 'Best on Ground' system, in which the drunkest person on the weekend is awarded a fictitious medal. At the year's end, points are tallied and an annual winner declared. The process of awarding the medal each

week is a Facebook ritual in which members of the club post stories about the weekend's drunken antics and 'debate' how the week's points should be awarded. The 'Goose of the Week' and 'Best on Ground' pages each illustrate aspects of male identity construction online around alcohol consumption that VB ironically engages with through its profile intervention. 'Best on Ground' and 'Goose of the Week' are each rituals through which young men use Facebook to conspicuously evaluate and judge the self-presentation of peers. The excessive consumption of alcohol is central to desirable presentations of the self. While VB cannot promote the excessive consumption of alcohol, it can interact with young men on Facebook to ironically 'police' and 'expose' male identity construction that does not conform to cultural norms of masculinity, which often include excessive alcohol consumption. Where 'Goose of the Week' and 'Best on Ground' pages explicitly promote excessive consumption, VB's profile intervention implicitly discourages identities that don't conform to these norms.

Brands accrue value by acting as a platform upon which fans create and circulate their own cultural tastes and identities. Jagermeister asked fans to employ their cultural knowledge by running a competition that required fans to locate rare videos of their favourite musicians on YouTube and post them to Jagermeister's Facebook page. As the competition spread through Facebook peer networks, the brand increased its fan base by 5000 in 48 hours.[v] Fans undertook the 'evaluative work' of posting videos of rare or impromptu gigs or performances. As they employed their taste and sensibility about popular music to select and circulate content, the fans built social networks around Jagermeister's page. The fans' activity was a form of 'co-creation' in the sense that in mediating their own identity, taste and dispositions online they also developed the brand's identity. Jagermeister used the competition to articulate itself with its fans' tastes in music. As Jagermeister announced the winners, it displayed mutual adoration of the popular musicians that its fans had selected. Smirnoff ran similar activities as part of their music festival partnerships. For example, they ran a ticket hunt that involved 'hiding' tickets to the music festivals at bars and other locations

around capital cities and then posting clues to Facebook for Smirnoff fans to find the tickets. The ticket hunt encouraged fans to interact with the brand on Facebook and use their cultural knowledge to find the tickets.

As brands innovate ways to engage with consumers on Facebook, they in turn make Facebook a more valuable platform because they increase its capacity to act as a device for managing brands. Fans undertake a specific form of brand-building labour by embedding the brand within their identities, cultural practices and tastes. In some cases, fans explicitly articulate connections that brand can only imply because of regulatory restrictions. Fans also authenticate brands' claims about cultural tastes. While the brand can make a claim, it only becomes meaningful and valuably when fans recognise and incorporate it within their own identity and network.

Creating value by embedding the brand into the mediation of everyday life

Facebook works as an apparatus that enables brands to manage and monitor their interventions in material social spaces. Facebook is increasingly mobile and embedded in the mediation of everyday life. Using smart phones, users can continually interact with the Facebook platform, posting content and entering data about themselves, their peer network and their material cultural practices. Similar to observations in the literature (Moreno et al. 2010; Ridout, Campbell and Ellis 2011), participants in interviews described to us practices of mediating drinking culture on Facebook. Many described how photos and status updates on Facebook portrayed, promoted and archived 'good times', partying and drinking. For example, a 24-year-old female university student explained:

> Participant: When a friend of mine came up from Sydney and we went out, there is lots of photos from that night. Quite shameful ones. But we were quite happy to plaster it all over Facebook.
>
> Interviewer: Is there a reason why you guys just put them up there?

Participant: Um, 'cause we had a good time together.

Interviewer: And you wanted people to know?

Participant: Yes.

Brands engage with users' mediation of everyday life by creating material branded spaces (Moor 2003, Thompson and Arsel 2004). Within the marketing industry, these material cultural spaces are called brand 'activations'. They 'activate' the brand within the 'real world'.

Facebook and the proliferation of smart phones greatly enhances the value of brand activations. Without social media, a brand activation is largely confined to its immediate social space and relations. Fans with smart phones mediate the activation on Facebook. They convert real world social relations into media texts that circulate in wider social networks online, extending the reach and surveillance capacities of the brand. Fans use their smartphones to translate the affective relations brand activations create into content, networks and data on Facebook.

In the past decade, music festivals have been extensively developed as branded social spaces (Moor 2003). Festival organisers and brands establish partnerships and sponsorship deals that give the brand presence at the festival and on its media platforms. For example, alcohol brands build themed activations that generally comprise a mixture of bars, art installations, DJs and live music, photographers and comfortable places to sit, dance and hang out with friends. At the Australian Splendour in the Grass music festival Jagermeister have built a 'hunting lodge' and Smirnoff have created a multi-level cocktail bar. These brand activations are incorporated into the festival's 'carnival' or 'fantasy' atmosphere. A male university student in his early twenties who had attended Splendour in the Grass four times since 2008 described how the brand activations are woven into the cultural experience of the festival. He told us that Jagermeister's 'old school hunting lodge' fit

the 'aesthetics of the winter festival'. The activations become part of the festival-goers' enjoyment and memories of the festival.

Audiences are encouraged by promoters working for the brands to register their experience in the activation on Facebook via check-ins, status updates and photos. Brands also employ photographers to take images in the activations and circulate them on Facebook. In 2011, Smirnoff posted over 8000 photos to its Australian Facebook page of fans at Smirnoff branded events and bars. At Splendour in the Grass in 2012, Jagermeister posted 320 photos to Facebook from its hunting lodge activation. These photos are distributed via the brand pages into the news feeds and peer networks of their Facebook fans, and into the news feeds of any fan that tags, likes or comments on the photos. Although the brands can largely only prompt or infer mediations of drinking culture within socially acceptable limits, we can assume that within the larger peer networks of Facebook, the brands' mediation of alcohol consumption at music festivals is integrated with more excessive mediations of consumption and partying at festivals. danah boyd (2008) demonstrated how Facebook news feeds amplified the sharing of personal information through the network; however, it is also an innovation that has intensified the circulation of branded information within peer networks.

Through Facebook, peers affect each other by mediating, amplifying and intensifying cultural practices, identities and meanings as part of their everyday life. Within Facebook, the images that brands and individuals circulate are not just advertisements that contain meaning; they are also a device that holds in place a network of social connections between people, brands, cultural experiences and social spaces. The brand circulates through social networks as users click, like, tag and comment on images from the brand activations. Facebook enables brands to extend and capitalise on engagements in material cultural spaces. Facebook generates a network of associations that makes the brand more visible, connects it to cultural identities and experiences,

and generates data. The connections between activations at cultural events and Facebook illustrate how brand management involves an ongoing process of assembling culture (Lury 2009). In this case, the creation of brand value on Facebook depends on the brand collaborating with other cultural producers to manage social spaces such as music festivals.

Brand value and regulation

Branding works on Facebook by appropriating sociality in general. Brands are more than just representations. They are a network of shared associations and affects, constantly under construction through the social practices of Facebook users. A 19-year-old female university student explained to us that alcohol consumption is incorporated in images on Facebook because it is part of the 'territory' of 'social happenings':

> You see a lot of people's photos of people drinking and it kind of just comes with the territory if you're putting photos up of you socialising… it's not like we are posing with it. But it's definitely there.

What is important to brands is to become part of the mediated and brokered sociality that social media create (Dijck 2011) and to successfully encourage the circulation of brand-relevant cultural meanings. Successful branding relies on the generalised productive activity of Facebook users (Dean 2010). The more users interact with the process of branding, the more co-extensive brands become with their fans' cultural practices and identities, and the more difficult it becomes to regulate brands as a distinctive mode of cultural production. Facebook acts as a platform where users can be drafted into the creative, evaluative and affective labour of embedding alcohol consumption and brands deeply in cultural life. On Facebook, users and brands become 'linked together in one promotional package' (Hearn 2008: 209). Brands and nightlife venues capitalise on the self-promotional practices of social media users, both their desire to mediate themselves online

and as they view images of their peers. For example, they exploit the desire shared by many young people to be photographed by 'hip' photographers. As Hearn illustrates, alcohol brands and nightlife venues capitalise on these desires and cultural practices when they hire photographers to act as 'paparazzi and take pictures of the partiers' (Hearn 2008: 209). The images are uploaded to social media sites where they are liked, tagged and commented on. On Facebook, users and brands then become 'linked together in one promotional package' (Hearn 2008: 209).

Branding is a continuous process that draws on the technical capacities of media and communication technology and the affective capacities and social relations of consumers and cultural intermediaries (Lury 2009). This poses problems for current approaches to regulating alcohol brands. Regulatory approaches assume that brands work in a representational way and therefore focus primarily on the 'content' of brand messages. But, if a brand is part of a complex and constantly unfolding assembly of cultural production, it becomes difficult to demarcate what the brand is, and therefore, what should be regulated. The production of the brand is impossible to see in its entirety, and what we can see is difficult to disentangle from the cultural relations it is embedded within.

Imagine a young music fan going to a music festival with a smart phone. She drinks, socialises with friends, and enjoys live music performances. Throughout the experiences, she will create images, videos and updates with her smart phone. Much of that content will be distributed to Facebook and interacted with by her peers. What her peers see and interact with is an extensive 'stream' of content that not only represents the festival experience, but also turns the sociality of the festival into a series of connections within Facebook. Some of the content related to the music festival that circulates on Facebook will be generated by the festival organisers, bands and sponsoring brands; however, much of it will be generated by the festival attendees and their peers. The brands' images become one part of the 'stream' or 'narrative' of the event. Images make sense in relation to each

other. The image that Smirnoff or Jagermeister uploads of the young music fan enjoying a drink in the branded bar becomes part of a larger narrative about partying at the festival. Brands then aim to get 'caught up' in social spaces and practices that their target markets mediate. As fans interact with the brand, they incorporate it into their own Facebook identity and peer network. These activities are largely invisible to researchers, policy-makers or anyone else not 'friends' with those people on Facebook. Users do not just produce content, they also perform the labour of creating and circulating a network of associations and affects the brand would not be able to enact or represent under either the alcohol industry's or Facebook's self-regulatory codes. Current regulatory codes focus on the content, placement and likely reception of brand messages; however, this ignores how brands operate as an ongoing social process that incorporates the participation of consumers and cultural intermediaries.

Conclusion

If branding is a process of assembling culture that relies on both the affective capacities of participants and the technology to stimulate, channel and respond to that participation, then the creation of brand value involves not only the standardisation and control of specific meanings, but also the management of sociality in general. This mode of brand management and value creation raises three important implications for policy debates about the regulation of alcohol brands.

First, brands that rely on the participation of consumers and cultural intermediaries do not 'coopt' representations and meanings *from* the social world; they become coextensive *with* social relations (Arvidsson 2011, Lury 2009). This underscores the importance on focusing not on what brands say, but on the kinds of participation and social spaces they create and manage.

Second, the participation and social relations that brands stimulate and manage are embedded within a calculative and predictive apparatus for surveillance (Andrejevic 2011, Lury 2009). The

brand speaks to consumers and is implicated in consumers' social relations, but significantly, it also watches and responds to consumers. The technical capacities of surveillance are imperative to a mode of branding that proceeds by stimulating and managing the participation and social networks of consumers and cultural intermediaries. Surveillance is not a separate activity used to evaluate brands, but is instead a set of technical practices intrinsic to the real-time and routine operation of brands.

Third, policy organised around regulating the representations of brands rests on those representations being publicly accessible. Brands are held to account for their representations because the public can view and judge them. Social media platforms enable the formation and management of multiple fragmented niche markets. While debate is emerging about the capacity of alcohol brands to 'coopt' public cultural spaces (such as music and sporting events), little attention has been paid to the technical capacity of social media to contain particular mediations of the brand within niche social networks. Brands are technically able to mass customise and privatise their messages. Take, for instance, when a person visits a real world brand activation – like a themed bar at a music festival – and then 'checks in' on Facebook via their smart phone. The 'check in' turns the real world interaction with the brand into a media text on the social network. The person's 'check in' incorporates the brand into their mediation of their enjoyment of the festival in their peer network. The brand can also use the check in as a prompt to interact with that peer network. They might invite the person's friends to join them in the branded space. The check in might also prompt comments and images from the branded activation that then circulate in peer networks.

This whole series of interactions create brand value, but they would only be visible to the individuals involved, Facebook and the brand. In the case of the brands examined here, what we could observe on their Facebook pages are small emergences of a wider mediation of drinking culture the brand is embedded within. This assembly of branding is distinctive not only for the way

it uses public social space, but also for the way brand interactions and messages 'disappear' into niche social networks where they cannot be observed and accounted for as part of a public process of debate and scrutiny. Attempts by regulators to judge the meaning of texts are increasingly futile when one singular text is being appropriated in a variety of ways within a social media network, and when most of those appropriations are not visible to regulators. Social media poses the important question of the extent to which brands *should* be publicly observable and accountable.

This article has illustrated how the intersection between branding and social media expands and enhances the capacity of brands to operate as a process of assembling culture (Lury 2009). We demonstrated how extensive alcohol brand activity is on Facebook, and we outlined some implications that this mode of branding raises for how we conceptualise the creation of brand value, and the regulation of alcohol brands. Both conceptualisations of value and regulation need to go beyond the specific representations that brands make, and instead, consider how they stimulate and manage participation; deliberately engage with material social spaces; watch and respond to social networks; and become coextensive with multiple fragmented networks of social relations.

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[i] See: http://www.diageo.com/en-row/newsmedia/pages/resource.aspx?resourceid=1072

[ii] Three brands from the initial 2011 study – XXXX, Hahn and Bacardi – no longer have the same page; the pages are defunct or have been migrated.

[iii] In late 2012, Smirnoff merged all of its national pages into one global page that serves national markets local content based on location details on users' Facebook profiles. Before the merge, the Smirnoff Australia page had approximately 180,000 fans. The new global page has over 10 million fans.

[iv] In 2011, Jack Daniel's ran two Facebook pages targeting two different market segments. Our ethnographic project followed the rock music oriented page, which had a fan base of approximately 3000. The other Jack Daniel's page – focused initially on motorsport – became its main brand page and had a fan base of approximately 60,000.

[v] See: http://www.pagesdigital.com/jagrmeister-launches-splendour-grass-competition/