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The Frequency of Company-Sponsored Alcohol Brand-Related Sites on Facebook™ – 2012

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In an effort to gain a broader reach to consumers, many companies have begun advertising on popular social networking websites like Facebook™. In 2011, Alexa™, a web information company, reported that Facebook™ was the second most popular website visited on a global level.¹ Moreover, Facebook™ also offers advertisers the ability to target specific groups based on demographic information provided by personal account holders.² As the benefits of advertising on Facebook™ have become increasingly more lucrative, marketing experts have predicted that social media spending will increase from \$2 billion in 2008 to \$3.5 billion in 2013.³ In this study, we attempted to quantify for the first time the frequency of company-sponsored alcohol brand-related sites on Facebook™.

We conducted a systematic Internet search for company-sponsored Facebook™ sites for 898 alcohol brands across 16 different alcoholic beverage types. This brand database was previously created for studies of brand-specific alcohol pricing and consumption among underage youth.^{4, 5} We conducted two searches for each of the 898 brands. First, we searched by the brand name only such as “Abita.” Second, we searched by the brand name with a descriptor such as “Abita Beer.” We recorded the first 150 entries using each search

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strategy, including only company-sponsored Facebook™ sites that promoted the brand directly, such as a Facebook™ group devoted to that brand, a site advertising or promoting the brand, a group formed around that brand, or an event featuring that brand.

Through our search we identified 1,017 company-sponsored, alcohol brand-related sites on Facebook™ of which the greatest number of company sites were for beer brands (230), followed by wine (211), and vodka (204) (Table 1). Brands with the most company sites were Smirnoff (52), Johnnie Walker (48), Absolut (36), and New Belgium (27) (Table 2). Our comprehensive database of results can be accessed at www.youthalcoholbrands.com/facebook.

Alcohol companies readily admit that brand-specific Facebook™ sites are critical in promoting sales of those brands.^{6, 7} New Belgium estimated that its Facebook™ fans are responsible for \$50.7 million in annual sales, or half of its overall sales.⁶ Diageo reported that Facebook™ ads and promotions for Smirnoff™ and Baileys™ increased sales of these brands by 20%.⁷ In an article in Advertising Age, Diageo chief marketing officer Andy Fennell emphasized the importance of Facebook to Diageo's marketing: "Facebook is now just a central part of all of our campaigns. ... We've got 20 million fans on Facebook, so we've done the scale thing, and funnily enough, when you get to 20 million, the next 5 million are dead easy, because it just snowballs."⁸

In 2011, Facebook™ struck a multi-million dollar deal with Diageo to "share skills and pool resources to figure out new ways to harness the chatter among Facebook™'s 750m users."⁷ Diageo apparently sent 950 of its marketers to "Facebook™ boot camps" to "build their social media capabilities" and expected to obtain "significant returns on investment."⁹ Our research documents the success of this strategy, as Diageo brands are among the top in total number of company-related, brand-specific alcohol sites. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is presently investigating alcohol marketing using digital media and has requested detailed information from alcohol companies on their use of social media sites such as Facebook™.¹⁰

We believe results from our study help to inform the FTC's investigation and can serve as a foundation for further research, such as investigating whether the most prevalent brands on Facebook™ are also the brands most preferred by underage drinkers.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

Acknowledgments

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Table 1

Total Number of Facebook™ Company Sites by Alcoholic Beverage Type

Alcohol Type	Alcohol Subtype	Total Number of Company Sites
BEER	Beer Total	230
ALCOPOPS	FAB^a Total	21
SPIRITS	AED^b	4
	Bourbon	44
	Brandy	4
	Cognac	22
	Gin	15
	Rum	38
	Scotch	80
	Tequila	47
	Vodka	204
	Whiskey	27
	Liqueurs	69
	Grain alcohol	0
	Total	554
WINE	Wine	211
	Fortified wine^c	1
	Total	212
OVERALL TOTAL		1,017

^a Flavored alcohol beverage^b Alcoholic energy drinks^c Low-end fortified wine

Table 2

Twenty Alcohol Brands with the Most Company Facebook™ Sites

Company	Brand	Number of Company Facebook™ Sites
Diageo	Smirnoff	52
Diageo	Johnnie Walker	48
Pernod Ricard	Absolut	36
New Belgium Brewing Company	New Belgium	27
Beam Inc.	Jim Beam	23
Russian Standard	Russian Standard	20
Grupo Modelo	Corona	15
Diageo	Guinness	15
Brown-Forman	Finlandia	15
Diageo	Baileys	14
Anheuser-Busch	Stella Artois	13
Bacardi Limited	Bacardi	13
Diageo	Jose Cuervo	12
Proximo Spirits	Three Olives	12
Anheuser-Busch	Bud Light	10
Jas Hennessy & Co.	Hennessy	10
Rémy Cointreau	Remy Martin	10
Campari Group	Skyy	10
Diageo	Bushmills	10
LVMH	Belvedere	9