



Young consumers' exposure to alcohol sponsorship in sport

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Abstract

Two studies were undertaken with the aim of determining the nature and prevalence of exposure to alcohol sponsorship communications associated with sport. Study 1 reports a content analysis of alcohol sponsors' leveraging across popular sporting events. Study 2 examines alcohol sponsors' activation in social media. A high proportion of alcohol sponsorship messages containing content appealing to young adult drinkers are revealed across multiple media. Events and policy implications are addressed.

Executive summary

This research explores the nature and prevalence of exposure to alcohol sponsorship leveraging (i.e. all sponsorship-linked marketing communications and activities collateral to the sponsorship investment) associated with sports. Examination of the prevalence and nature of exposure across the proliferation of media now available to sponsors is critical, with mounting evidence of a relationship between exposure to alcohol advertising and drinking

cognitions, expectancies and behaviours (Casswell & Zhang, 1998; Ellickson et al, 2005; Hanewinkel et al, 2007). This research is motivated by current regulatory attention and policy debate surrounding the impacts of alcohol sponsorship in sport, particularly upon young adult consumers aged 18-30 years (Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill, 2007; Australian Preventative Health Taskforce, 2009; House of Commons Health Select Committee Report on Alcohol, 2009). To date,



research has focused on alcohol advertising exposure impacts upon underage drinkers (e.g. Ellickson et al, 2005; Anderson et al, 2009; Jones & Magee, 2011), rather than the specific impacts of alcohol sponsorship of sport upon young drinkers, including vulnerable targets aged 18-30 years (Australian Preventative Health Taskforce, 2009). Moreover, extant research has not distinguished different programming contexts, such as sport, movies, comedy or drama. We argue that sponsorship differs from advertising in terms of its communication, placement and cognitive processing and therefore, as a burgeoning marketing communications tool, warrants research attention independent of advertising. Most importantly, sponsorship remains an attractive promotional vehicle when compared to the heavily regulated alcohol advertising in traditional broadcast media, potentially acting as a vehicle for circumvention of advertising regulation.

Two studies examine alcohol sponsorship exposure across (1) four televised sports in Australia and (2) social media activation by alcohol sponsors. The first study reports a content analysis of alcohol sponsors' embedded and sponsorship-linked advertising leveraging across four popular sporting events. The second study examines alcohol sponsors' activation in youth-salient social media by way of a frequency analysis, representing the first investigation of sports-related alcohol sponsorship activation through social media. A high proportion of alcohol sponsorship messages which contain content appealing to young drinkers and widespread leveraging by sponsoring alcohol brands were revealed, suggesting the existence and use of sponsorship as a means of regulatory circumvention. In addition, breaches of the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code ('ABAC') were observed, questioning the strength of enforcement of the code and the effectiveness of self-regulation in Australia. Exposure to sponsorship-linked advertising is therefore found to be prevalent in Australian sports, and extensively targeting young drinkers identified to be at risk of hazardous consumption (e.g. Preventative Health Taskforce, 2009). Findings are consistent with previous studies which quantify alcohol advertising

embedded in popular content. We extend these findings to a sports sponsorship context, including multiple sports and media, in recognition of the complexity of integrated marketing communications now available to sponsors. Our research implies a need for policy focused upon less regulated and more indirect marketing communications tactics including sponsorship and specific leveraging strategies by alcohol sponsors.

Introduction

Correctly measuring the health, economic and social effects of alcohol consumption is an important worldwide public policy issue. The link between excessive alcohol consumption and health and social issues such as violence, binge drinking and drunk driving is well established (Bye & Rossow, 2010; Room et al, 2005; Van Gils et al, 2010). While the link between alcohol advertising and consumption is debatable (e.g. Jernigan et al, 2005; Rosenberg & Siegel, 2001; Snyder et al, 2006), it has nevertheless resulted in advertising restrictions being implemented (Australian Broadcasting Authority, 2004; Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code Scheme, 2010).

Alcohol marketing is controversial due to its alleged association with increased consumption and its role in the initiation of binge drinking among youth and young adults (Chung et al, 2010). The aim of this research is to examine the nature and prevalence of exposure to alcohol sponsorship in sport. Examining sponsorship-linked exposure is important in light of evidence suggesting alcohol advertising exposure impacts attitudes and behaviour among young consumers (e.g. Fielder et al, 2009). Furthermore, exposure is being adopted as the primary evaluation index by advertisers. Given significant sponsorship-linked investment in sports by the alcohol sector, the largely unregulated nature of sponsorship-linked communications, and the fact that it operates differently to product advertising, the relative lack of research into sports sponsorship exposure is surprising.



Following a review of the research on sponsorship leveraging and exposure, we report results of a content analysis of four popular sporting events broadcast on television accessible to all viewers, and a second study examining alcohol sponsorship exposure through social media. A key outcome of this research is to provide much-needed evidence of alcohol sponsorship exposure in sports to guide policy development. The current research focuses upon the Australian context in terms of its regulation of the marketing of alcohol products and the use of sponsorship-linked communication tools for such products. This focus is premised upon the relative lack of empirical research on the nature and prevalence of sponsorship-linked alcohol exposure in Australian sports, the cultural affair with sports permeating the Australian population (O'Brien & Kypri, 2008) and the elevation of the issue of sponsorship-linked binge drinking to national policy level (Preventative Health Taskforce Report, 2009).

The use of more indirect promotional vehicles, including sponsorship, has recently been raised in policy debates. Issues cited include the enabling of companies to penetrate the young adult market, the obscuring of the connection between alcohol consumption and addiction and the circumvention of advertising bans in the broadcast media (Hastings et al, 2005; McCreanor et al, 2005). Similarly, tobacco advertising bans resulted in a transfer of marketing tactics from advertising to alternative media and communications, including sponsorship of sports event broadcasts (Cornwell, 1997). Sports sponsorship as a marketing tool has proven very popular, with expenditure on securing sponsorship rights by the alcohol industry increasing globally from approximately \$85 million in 1999 to \$2.5 billion in 2009 (IEG, 2011). In 2009, two of the world's largest alcohol producers, Anheuser-Busch InBev and SABMiller, spent approximately \$350 million and \$212 million respectively on television advertising during US sporting events alone (IEG, 2011). The weight of total alcohol advertising expenditure compared to overall advertising expenditure is significant, with the alcohol category representing (18%) of total advertising in

Australia (Statista, 2013). While there is a strong correlation between exposure levels and marketing budgets, the aims of our research were to gain insight into the specific tactics associated with sponsorship-linked communications and its prevalence in Australian sport. An analysis of the sector's marketing budget would not reveal the media mix of the budget, the content placement (i.e. sports vs. drama), whether the expenditure is sponsorship-linked, and potential exposure extent for young consumers (i.e. viewership). Importantly, marketing expenditure would not suggest the extent and nature of social media promotions, which often carry little or no cost. Moreover, an important commercial benefit of sports sponsorship is that it associates sponsors' products with healthy images, something that is particularly important for products that pose risks to health (Corti et al, 1995). Critically, sponsorship has the potential to reach audiences through more indirect and less regulated means than traditional advertising, an important issue that is addressed by our research. Despite its growth, expenditure and reach, there is limited research attention directed to the use of sports sponsorship as a marketing communications tool by the alcohol industry, and even less measurement of vulnerable consumers' exposure to sponsorship-linked activation through sports.

This research provides a valuable and timely insight into an issue which has been emerging in public policy discussions, namely the consideration of banning alcohol sponsorship of sport (e.g. Tran, 2009). In Australia, for example, the discussion began with the release of the Preventative Health Taskforce Report (2009) and the Alcohol Toll Reduction Bill (2007). Specifically, the phasing out of alcohol promotions which have high exposure among young people, including "sponsorship of sport and cultural events", has been recommended (Preventative Health Taskforce Report, 2009, p. 251). Internationally, several countries have banned alcohol sponsorship of sport. France has had a complete ban on alcohol advertising and sponsorship since 1991, and hosted the 1998 FIFA World Cup with this ban in place. Likewise,



Norway and Turkey have strong restrictions on alcohol advertising in sport, and South Africa is currently drafting a bill to ban all alcohol advertising and sponsorship in sport (O'Brien et al, 2012). Through a recently announced trial programme, the Australian National Preventative Health Agency has successfully negotiated the removal of alcohol sponsorship from many of Australia's major sporting bodies, but several of the country's biggest sports are still resisting this change (O'Brien et al, 2012).

Alcohol advertising in Australia is regulated by the Advertiser Code of Ethics and the alcohol advertising-specific Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC). The Advertiser Code of Ethics applies to all advertisers, while the guidelines set out in the ABAC are the basis for a voluntary system of self-regulation. The ABAC scheme does not cover all forms of promotion, and its effectiveness continues to be criticized for its limited scope, lack of enforcement means and absence of penalties for non-compliance (Jones et al, 2008). Research demonstrates that young people are regularly exposed to alcohol advertising (Fielder et al, 2009) and that the current regulatory system fails to effectively limit exposure and appeal of advertising content for young people. The problem of exposure is complicated by the web of integrated marketing communications strategies now adopted by brands, including traditional media and the linking of alcohol brands to sports and cultural activities through sponsorship and embedded and incidental advertising through product placement, branded merchandise and competitions.

Alcohol sponsor brands can therefore gain visibility via the sports contest as well as being able to air conventional commercial messages during the event. This is a major regulatory gap in terms of young targets being exposed to alcohol marketing. Alcohol advertising during sports is even more powerful when it is not 'just advertising' but sponsorship-linked advertising which is critical to effectively leverage sponsorship investments (Kelly et al, 2012).

Sponsorship and advertising distinguished

Attention from health research has been directed towards the impact of advertising exposure on alcohol consumption (e.g. Jones et al; 2010; Saffer, 2002; Wyllie et al, 1997). However, research on the issue of alcohol advertising exposure has not distinguished alcohol advertising from alcohol sponsorship. Sponsorship is defined as a cash and/or in kind fee paid to a property in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that property. It may include naming rights of teams and events, broadcast rights, exclusive supply rights, promotional opportunity and personal endorsement (Cornwell, 1995; Corti et al, 1995). Exposure to sponsorship messaging is also evident through sponsors' practice of adopting sponsorship-linked advertising to leverage sponsorships around the event (Kelly et al, 2012). As sponsorship is now considered a mainstream marketing communications tool, with evidence that it functions differently to advertising (Cornwell, 2008), it is important to consider sponsorship-related exposure.

Sponsorship, including leveraging through sponsorship-linked advertising, can be distinguished from traditional advertising in terms of its objectives, the degree of regulation applying to it and how it is processed by target consumers (Cornwell, 2008; Hermann et al, 2011). The relatively unregulated environment pertaining to sponsorship, in contrast to advertising, makes it a very attractive promotional vehicle for the otherwise heavily regulated alcohol industry. It is also important to distinguish sponsorship-linked leverage and/or activation from product advertising. Specifically, the term leverage is used to describe all sponsorship-linked marketing communications and activities collateral to the sponsorship investment, while the term activation applies where audiences may interact or in some way become involved with the sponsor, such as social media presence and event-related competitions (Weeks et al, 2008; Miloch & Lambrecht, 2006). Having established the importance of sponsorship versus product advertising as a focus for our research, in the



following section we provide the rationale for our focus upon exposure as a critical predictor of attitudes and consumption.

Exposure and sponsorship

Our examination of exposure is justified for two reasons. First, a commonly reported method for evaluating the effectiveness of sponsorships is to measure the quantity of exposure the sponsoring brand achieves through media coverage of the event (Cornwell, 2008). Exposure is created through the mention of the name or the appearance of the brand logo, and is assessed as quantities of exposure time or space (Cortez, 1992). While this measurement approach has been criticised as post hoc in nature and reflecting potential rather than actual exposure, it remains the most commonly adopted technique for measuring media exposure (Crompton, 2004). Preliminary interviews with sponsorship managers, conducted as part of the current research programme, confirmed the use of expected exposure measures in sponsorship leveraging decision-making. Hence, exposure is a relevant sponsorship objective for brand managers.

Second, the need to continue investigation of exposure as it relates to sponsorship is supported theoretically by the mere exposure hypothesis, which has been long cited in the sponsorship and advertising literature as a possible mechanism responsible for consumer processing (Zajonc, 1980; Bennett, 1999). The mere-exposure hypothesis introduced by Zajonc (1980) suggests that repeated exposure to a stimulus will produce a positive affective response and has been found across a wide range of stimuli (Bornstein 1989; Cornwell et al, 2005). Exposure may therefore act as an appropriate mechanism for sponsorship communication stimuli, such as simple brand names or logos, which cannot carry the depth of information that more complex advertising communications can (Cornwell et al, 2005). Extant research (e.g. Shimp & Gresham, 1983) indicates that exposure to, and

processing of, marketing communications are the basis for higher-order effects including preference and purchase intention (Cornwell et al, 2005). As with mass media promotions, sponsorship is likely to be more effective in the early stages of this information processing hierarchy, whereas other elements of the marketing strategy and environmental factors are far more influential in the later behavioural stages.

Several sponsorship studies demonstrate the link between exposure and consumer behaviour. Exposure has been demonstrated to generate feelings of familiarity, and hence positive feelings towards the message or organisation (Donovan et al, 1993). In this way, sponsorship, especially through repetition over the duration of the sponsorship, may reinforce a perception of the social sanction of the alcohol-branded message. Furthermore, awareness facilitates other promotional activities by sensitising the individual to such activities (Otker, 1988). Bennett (1999) reported finding mere exposure effects in a field study of UK soccer supporters who had just viewed a soccer match where sponsor information was present. Olson and Thjømøe (2003) examined sponsorship-like conditions by comparing attitudinal influences of varying levels of brand information-processing by using two experimental groups that differed in the number of exposures they received to specific types of brand information (brand only versus brand combined with brand information). Findings supported the mere-exposure effect, in that participants appeared to form favourable evaluations simply as a result of exposure to brands. Becker-Olsen and Simmons (2002) found that participants exposed to sponsorships with low-fit generated less favourable affective and behavioural responses to the firm. McDaniel and Heald (2000) administered pre- and post-test attitudinal measures around exposing participants to variations of advertisements depicting sponsorship information. In this way, changes in the participants' attitudes could be attributed to viewing the sponsorship information in the advertisement. In an effort to better understand processing in relation to multiple-sponsor events, Ruth and Simonin (2003)



investigated attitudes towards a specific sponsor, attitudes towards co-sponsors and the event being sponsored.

The few existing studies on alcohol sponsorship impact have focused upon specific sports events (e.g. NASCAR) and specific vulnerable communities or segments, typically including adolescents and children (e.g. McDaniel & Heald, 2000; Wyllie et al, 1997). This has prompted recent calls for research on the nature and effects of broader and less regulated aspects of alcohol marketing on people's alcohol-related attitudes and behaviours, including pricing, point of sale promotions, new media, product placement and sponsorship (Cornwell, 2008; Gordon et al, 2010; Jones & Jernigan, 2010). While a small body of research has examined exposure to alcohol sponsorship and advertising (e.g. Jones et al, 2010; Sherriff et al, 2010), few studies have examined exposure to sponsorship-linked communications by alcohol brands during sporting events. Recent longitudinal data suggests an impact of alcohol industry sponsorship exposure upon drinking initiation and consumption levels (e.g. Ellickson et al, 2005; Snyder et al, 2006), but the weight of research has assessed the impacts of advertising, rather than sponsorship-related exposure. Extant research on the impacts of advertising exposure upon attitudes, expectancies and consumption potentially provide support for the assumption that sponsorship exposure will have a similar influence.

Experimental studies in which consumption behaviour was measured following exposure to alcohol advertising have demonstrated impacts upon consumption. For example, blood alcohol levels were shown to increase after viewing print advertisements for alcohol (McCarty & Ewing, 1983). Male college students shown advertising embedded in television programmes in relatively naturalistic settings were more likely to choose alcohol rather than soft drinks (Kohn & Smart, 1984) and were likely to drink more (Wilks et al, 1992). However, the effects differed according to the timing and the number of advertisements shown and one study using a less naturalistic

situation, showed no effect (Sobell et al, 1986). These mixed results are likely to be attributable to the focus upon immediate impact of exposure, when advertising is expected to have a gradual effect, requiring repeated exposures. For example, following repeated exposure to beer advertising, college students rated alcohol as more beneficial and less risky (Synder & Blood, 1992) and reported more positive assessments of the benefits of beer (Slater & Domenech, 1995). Cross-sectional survey data has consistently found evidence of a positive relationship between self-reported exposure and/or response to advertising and positive beliefs and reports of consumption (Finn & Strickland, 1982; Atkin & Block, 1983; Grube & Wallack, 1994; Wyllie et al, 1997) and there is a suggestion that this relationship is causal through the emergence of more sophisticated modelling techniques (Bentler & Dudgeon, 1996) and longitudinal data (Connolly et al, 1994; Casswell & Zhang, 1998).

In light of the apparent association between exposure and consumption, it is critical to analyse the actual level and content of alcohol advertising exposure. For example, Jones, Phillipson & Barrie (2010) adopted content analysis, frequency analysis and thematic analysis to study alcohol advertising exposure during two sports broadcasts in Australia and its impact upon child audiences. Their findings suggest that alcohol advertising during sports broadcasts is extensive and contains elements appealing to child audiences. Content analysis was also undertaken by Pinsky and Silva (1999) to determine the frequency and content of alcohol advertising on Brazilian television. While a positive link between alcohol advertising and adolescent viewership on cable television has been documented (Chung et al, 2010), there has not been adequate attention directed towards alcohol sponsorship exposure in the sporting context.

Given the theoretical, practical and empirical importance of measuring the nature and extent of alcohol sponsorship-linked exposure in sports, we report results of two studies which provide insight into this critical exposure mechanism in consumer attitude formation and behaviour.



Study 1

Aims and background

The present research builds on prior research on alcohol exposure by focusing upon sponsorship-linked communications in the context of a variety of popular televised sporting events on free-to-air television. If sponsorship-related alcohol branded exposure is widespread in Australian sport, then we would expect alcohol sponsors' brand appearances and sponsorship-linked advertising during sports broadcasts to be greater in terms of frequency and prevalence than the commercial average during these broadcasts. While it would not be surprising to see some degree of concentration of beer commercials primarily targeting young males during sports broadcasts, prior research has not quantified alcohol sponsorship-linked exposure associated with sports content. Our research questions in the first study were as follows:

1. What is the frequency of exposure to sponsoring alcohol brands' (including beer, wine and spirits) activation during sports broadcasts?
2. What is the nature of this activation, including location, duration and content?

Methodology

In 2010 and 2011, broadcasts of four major Australian sporting events were recorded: the international one-day cricket final between Australia and England, the National Rugby League (NRL) Grand Final, the Grand Final of the Australian Football League (AFL) and the 2010 Australian Melbourne Cup horse race. These sports events were selected for several reasons. First, all four are very popular and claim high broadcast viewing numbers, particularly in the young consumer market (Oztam, 2011). Second, they are viewed by a variety of Australian sports fans. Moreover,

many sports sponsorships, including alcohol, target young male fans due to their prevalent sports viewing behaviour (Hall & O'Mahoney, 2006). While males comprise the majority of viewers across these sports (Oztam, 2011); the selected sample also represented the most popular sports among young female fans. Third, these events varied in terms of broadcast timing and length. Ensuring heterogeneity in the sample of events meant that alcohol sponsorship exposure could be assessed across several sports and patterns of exposure could be assessed across a broader time frame.

All of the sports sampled were sponsored to varying degrees by alcohol companies. Half of the events were sponsored by two categories of alcohol (beer and spirits) at a top tiered level (i.e. event title sponsor, paying the highest possible sponsorship fee) while the other half were sponsored by a single category (beer) at lower tiered sponsorship levels (i.e. lower investment to secure relatively minor sponsorship status through sponsorship of teams, pre-game events or players). All sponsors of the events were observed and analysed in the study.

Three judges independently evaluated all advertisements. Each judge had a background in marketing, and was extensively trained by the principle researcher prior to coding. Advertisements which were not a part of the study sample were coded independently by each judge following receipt of instructions relating to coding category details by the researcher. Any disagreements during this training phase were discussed and settled by mutual agreement among the judges. Each judge coded each event and its related advertising content following training. Programmes were examined for traditional advertising (commercials), sponsorship-linked advertising and sponsorship activation embedded in the event (i.e. stadium signs, announcer voiceovers, player uniforms, branded appearances). The content of sponsorship-linked alcohol advertisements was coded for features that have been found to be appealing to young adult audiences (i.e. aged 18-30 years), including use of young, attractive models, celebrities, humorous or



attractive mascots, portrayal of success among the actors, adoption of humour appeal in execution and embedding of relevant sub-cultural cues such as pop music (Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code, 2010; Waiters et al, 2001). Coding dimensions and themes were derived from a combination of prior content analysis and sponsorship exposure measurement approaches (Chung et al, 2010; Jones, Phillipson & Barrie, 2010) and themes outlined in the ABAC as targeting young consumers. Specifically, all advertisements shown during the recorded broadcasts were coded on the following dimensions: alcohol brand; event dates and times shown; frequency of alcohol sponsor brands' appearance; product category; total number of commercials (not limited to alcohol brands); number of sponsorship-linked alcohol commercials; alcohol product medium placement during the game (e.g. uniforms, venue signage, field); alcohol appeal type (Jones, Phillipson & Barrie, 2010); success (i.e. sporting and social) portrayed in alcohol commercials (ABAC; Jones, Phillipson & Barrie, 2010); setting (e.g. outdoors, sporting, work, bar, home) of alcohol commercial (ABAC; Chung et al, 2011); use of music (classical, pop, rock or other); and celebrity endorsement (presence or absence; Chung et al. 2011). Coded footage began with the commercials preceding commencement of the broadcast, incorporated all commercials during the broadcast, and finished with the commercial break following the end of the games/events, resulting in a total sample of 12 hours and 56 minutes of footage.

Results and discussion

Inter-coder reliability

The overall agreement or consistency among three coders of the four sporting events, averaged across sports, was a Krippendorff's Alpha of .79, ranging from .68 (AFL) to .89 (Cricket). According to Banerjee, Capozzoli, McSweeney and Sinha (1999), Kappa above .75 indicates excellent agreement. As such, excellent agreement was achieved for all sports except AFL (.68) which, according to conventions outlined in

Landis and Koch (1977), could be classified as within the range of substantial agreement (.61 to .80).

Alcohol sponsorship exposure

Table 1 establishes that direct alcohol sponsorship exposure, in terms of frequency of stadium signs, announcer voiceovers, player uniforms and branded appearances, was approximately double the number of exposures associated with traditional alcohol advertising. Direct sponsorship exposure, while of course not carrying the same full message as an advertisement, is more frequent, can reactivate the message and imagery from an advertisement, presents and reinforces an association between the alcohol and the sport (Cornwell, 2008) and is harder to avoid (e.g. viewers are likely to take their breaks during the ads rather than during game time). Thus the direct exposure to sponsorship found in these results is important in the policy debate due to its unique processing, reach and frequency capabilities.

To allow comparison across the events, relative duration of alcohol advertising and alcohol appearances during the event were calculated as a proportion of the duration of the event and of all commercials. Sponsorship-linked alcohol advertising as a proportion of all advertising time ranged from 10.53% to 21.08% across the events, representing greater than the average commercial airtime pertaining to any other product category and also relative to total broadcast time, ranging from 5% to 15%. Most of the commercials were shown multiple times, resulting in only four unique alcohol commercials during the cricket final and one unique alcohol commercial for each of NRL, AFL and Melbourne Cup broadcasts. It can therefore be concluded that leveraging in the form of sponsorship-linked advertising by alcohol sponsors is prevalent and strongly embedded in terms of frequency in popular sports content.

Consolidated viewership data (Ozdam, 2011) by age segments is shown in Table 2. Vulnerable youth and young drinker cohorts represented substantial portions of total audiences, with viewership ranging from 12% to 30% for young drinkers aged 18-34 years and from



TABLE 1 Prevalence of alcohol sponsors' exposure during broadcasts, including commercial breaks televised in 2010/2011

SPORT	TIME (MINUTES)	COMMERCIAL % OF TOTAL FOOTAGE TIME	NUMBER OF COMMERCIALS	TOTAL NO. OF SPONSORSHIP-LINKED ALCOHOL APPEARANCES EXCLUDING SPONSORSHIP-LINKED ALCOHOL COMMERCIALS	TOTAL NO. OF SPONSORSHIP-LINKED ALCOHOL COMMERCIALS	SPONSORSHIP-LINKED ALCOHOL COMMERCIALS % OF TOTAL FOOTAGE TIME	SPONSORSHIP-LINKED ALCOHOL COMMERCIALS AS PROPORTION OF ALL COMMERCIAL TIME (%)
CRICKET	345	20% (69.5)	166	23	12	5	21.08
MELBOURNE CUP	183	14% (25.3)	48	5	3	11	16.67
AFL	106	21% (22.2)	114	8	4	13	10.53
NRL	330	15% (49.2)	64	7	4	15	17.19

TABLE 2 Viewership profile across events

SPORT	VIEWERSHIP PROFILE PROPORTION OF TOTAL % (N)			HIGHEST POPULARITY RANK ACHIEVED (1-20)*		
	ADOLESCENTS (13-17)	YOUTH (17-24)	YOUNG ADULTS (25-34)	ADOLESCENTS (13-17)	YOUTH (18-24)	YOUNG ADULTS (25-34)
AFL	15% (141,000)	13% (196,000)	17% (365,000)	1	1	1
NRL	9% (88,000)	9% (131,000)	16% (340,000)	<20	12	9
MC	8% (78,000)	12% (185,000)	14 (311,000)	<20	5	12
CRICKET	4% (38,000)	4% (68,000)	8% (192,000)	<20	<20	18



TABLE 3 Thematic content of alcohol commercials during sports broadcasts

SPORT	APPEAL TYPE	CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT	SUCCESS	MUSIC	ENVIRONMENT
CRICKET	HUMOUR (2)* SPORTS (2)	YES (2)	SPORTS (1) SOCIAL (3)	CLASSICAL (2) POP (1) OTHER (1)	OUTDOORS/ SPORTING EVENTS (2) HOME/OUTDOORS (1) BAR (1)
MELBOURNE CUP	SPORTS (2)	NONE	SPORTS (1)	CLASSICAL (1)	SPORTING EVENTS (2)
AFL	HUMOUR (1)	NONE	NONE	CLASSICAL (1)	BAR (1)
NRL	HUMOUR AND SPORTS (1)	NONE	SOCIAL (1)	NONE OTHER	BAR OUTDOORS/ SPORTING EVENT (1)

*number of sponsorship-linked advertisements

4% to 15% for 13-17 years. The events were among the most popular broadcasts in the young drinker cohorts, particularly in the 25-30 year old segment, in which all four events were rated in the annual top 20 programmes (Oztam, 2011).

Content of alcohol advertising

Consistent with the ABAC, special attention was paid to features that are known to appeal to a youth audience (see Table 3). The content of sponsorship-linked advertising during broadcasts was found to adopt themes known to appeal to the youth and young adult populations including humour, portrayal of success and popular music. Most alcohol commercials during the four sporting events adopted humour, sports themes or a combination of both to appeal to their audiences and most were sponsorship-linked. Successful characters were also often depicted in the commercials and this was in both sporting and non-sports contexts. For example, five commercials conveyed a convincing narrative of success in terms of dating the opposite sex and targeting young male drinkers. Commercials regularly featured attractive models, often in sporting or bar environments. While these appeal strategies are common to many brands, the ABAC scheme governing alcohol industry advertising in Australia holds that

executions depicting young characters and portrayals of sexual or sporting success that could be attributed to alcohol consumption is in breach of the code. Thus our findings represent important evidence of breaches of this code by alcohol sponsors, indicating that sponsorship linked activation through advertising and enforcement of the ABAC scheme should also be targeted by policy.

The current research advances knowledge of exposure by focusing upon sponsorship activation and leveraging by alcohol brands during sports broadcasts. Overall, alcohol sponsors' branded appearances and related sponsorship-linked advertising were found to be prevalent across the four sports broadcasts, as summarised in Table 1. Moreover, exposure was found to be associated with a high proportion of underage, adolescent and young adult viewers, considered to be vulnerable targets by policy makers (Preventative Health Taskforce, 2009). Having found a high degree of exposure to sponsoring alcohol brands in televised sports events, we sought to investigate the carry-over of alcohol sponsorship-linked leveraging to other popular media. As the current policy agenda is aimed at protecting at-risk young drinkers, we undertook an exploratory study of alcohol sponsors' leveraging linked to sporting events across social media.



Study 2

Aims and background

While it is true that websites for most alcohol brands ask your age before letting you in, there is no way to verify whether underage targets are falsifying their age. However, social media pages for the alcohol brands allow open access, without any attempt to prevent underage users from being exposed to alcohol marketing on those websites. Facebook and YouTube are very popular with young people, including underage targets. As far as the authors are aware, this study represents the first investigation of sports-affiliated alcohol sponsorship activation through social media.

An exploratory study was undertaken with the aim of determining the extent to which sponsoring alcohol brands and sponsored sports activate sponsorship links through social media. As mentioned, the leveraging or 'activating' of sponsorship through marketing communications increases its effect (Roy & Cornwell, 2004), yet alcohol sponsorship research attention directed towards social media is largely absent. In order to gather initial insight into this activation strategy, this study aimed to: 1) extend the current exposure examination to youth-targeted social media and; 2) provide empirical evidence of the existence and nature of an activation practice that effectively circumvents highly regulated conventional media platforms, previously identified by Cornwell as "the sponsorship loophole" (1997).

Methodology

A frequency analysis was undertaken of 19 Facebook and 17 YouTube sites of beer and spirits alcohol sponsors of popular sports over a period of three months from March to June in 2011. While the majority of the sample focused upon sponsors of Australian sports, including those sampled in Study 1, some top-tiered international alcohol sponsors of sports were also examined, given their extensive promotional budgets and popularity as global brands. This therefore

builds on our first study by investigating realistic exposure in relation to global sports and brands in addition to local Australian sponsorships. This approach is ecologically valid with the uniquely global reach of social media and its popularity with young adult targets (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2009). On Facebook, counts of posts, likes, links and the content of comments were recorded. For YouTube, counts of subscriptions, videos, views and comments were undertaken. In addition, the sites of several sporting events that were sponsored by alcohol brands were analysed. Although the sample of social media websites was not exhaustive, it was diverse in terms of size, sports and brands and therefore a useful sample for the exploratory purposes of the study.

Results and discussion

Facebook

Results from the second study are summarised in Tables 4 and 5. On Facebook, the Budweiser (US) and Heineken (European) brands were most active in terms of posts and likes than the mean for all alcohol brands sampled. Guinness had the most links to external sites followed by Carlton Draught. These popular brands all have sponsorships with popular sports, including FIFA World Cup, rugby union, tennis, the English Premier League, the NFL and the AFL. Moreover, their sponsorships in most cases are of long duration and first tier (i.e. official event, league or team sponsorship), thus suggesting enhancement, through social media, of an already strong link between the brand and sport in consumers' minds. In many cases, the sponsorship relationship did not have to be recalled or ever known previously, because many alcohol brands directly mention the sponsored sport and their association with it on the publicly interactive 'wall' of their Facebook pages. Several conversation threads were observed which centred around the brand and its connection to sport (e.g. "Can't wait for the first Heineken this weekend while watching the soccer").



The link to sponsored sports was further evident through hyperlinks to the sports or events sponsored (i.e. on average 6.4 links) displayed in prominent locations. The number of direct links between alcohol sponsorship and sport are summarised in Table 4. While only one of the foreign brands, Heineken (UEFA Champion's League), had a sporting hyperlink, three of the Australian beer brands had on average three links to their sponsored sports (e.g. XXXX linked to QLD Maroons, Brisbane Broncos and Gold Coast Titans). In general, alcohol spirit companies had a greater number of links than beer brands, with most from Captain Morgan Rum, followed by Smirnoff and Jack Daniels. Jim Beam Australia had links to Surfing and V8 car racing, which are both sponsored by alcohol brands, including VB (Victoria Bitter) and XXXX Gold respectively. Photos, events and polls were commonly used tactics to engage audiences and stimulate conversation around the sponsored sport or brand, thus forging an association between them in a socially acceptable (i.e. non-hard sell) context. Thirty per cent of total posted photographic content on sponsoring alcohol branded sites related to sponsored sporting events, and depicted young people drinking at these events. Hence this research demonstrates that the nexus among sponsorship by alcohol brands, sponsored sports and young target markets which engage with social media appears to be prevalent and suggests a high amount of exposure to alcohol brands among youth.

YouTube

Table 5 summarises results of the frequency analysis of alcohol branded YouTube sites. All beer brands which sponsored sports had YouTube pages. Guinness had the greatest number of posted videos, with more than five times that of the next closest brand (XXXX), while Fosters and Heineken had the most subscriptions and the greatest number of comments. All sponsoring beer brands except Carlton Draught had their commercials available on YouTube, with twenty per cent of total commercials embedding sponsored sports' content. Fosters, Carlton Draught and XXXX

provide event footage from their sponsored sport or team and Tooheys Extra Dry and Hahn provide interviews or 'behind the scenes' footage directly linked to their sponsored sports. Of the three brand categories sampled (i.e. beer, spirits, wine), beer brands created the greatest number of links (i.e. across total content and comments) with sponsored sports events and also made the greatest number of links to sport compared to links to other cultural or recreational events.

No responsible enjoyment tag or health message was observed for any beer or wine brand. A responsible enjoyment tag was noted for Jim Beam Australia and Jack Daniels, however these were the only two brands of all those studied to carry a health-related message. The lack of health messages displayed on branded social media sites highlights the potential for regulatory anomaly which exists in relation to alcohol sponsorship and social media, with advertising placed in traditional media requiring health warnings in many countries (Agostinelli & Grube, 2002).

Though it had the smallest number of videos and comments, Captain Morgan Rum had the greatest number of subscriptions. Conversely, Jack Daniels, the sponsor of Kelly Racing team in the V8 Supercars, had the greatest number of posted videos. Bundaberg Rum, an official sponsor of the NRL, had substantially more views than any other brand. While the alcohol industry is legally entitled to adopt social media marketing strategies to raise consumer awareness of alcohol brands and their sponsorships of community events including sports, and noting that some social media users will be adult targets, these results still have critical policy implications because young consumers aged between 13-25 years are the heaviest users of social media (Roy Morgan, 2011).

Sites of sponsored sports including the NRL, AFL, V8 Supercars, the Australian Open (tennis), Surfing Australia and the ARU contained prominent links to sponsoring alcohol brands' social media and websites. In most cases, sponsoring alcohol brands' logos were displayed along with those of other sponsoring brands and hyperlinked to their brand websites or Facebook sites. This cross-leveraging of sporting and



TABLE 4 Content analyses of Facebook pages

	FACEBOOK PAGE (SPORT SPONSORED)	NO. OF POSTS	NO. OF LIKES	HIGHEST NO. OF LIKES FOR A POST	NO. OF COMMENTS	NO. OF COMMENTS RELATING TO SPONSORED SPORTS	NO. OF LINKED PAGES TO SPONSORED SPORTS	NO. OF PHOTOS	NO. OF PHOTOS PORTRAYING SPONSORED SPORTS	NO. OF POLLS
BEER	BUDWEISER (FOOTBALL - FIFA WORLD CUP)	3,652	1,142,011	5,666	11,280	747	4	3,565	1250	2
	HEINEKEN (LONDON 2012 OLYMPICS; FOOTBALL - UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE; RUGBY UNION - RUGBY WORLD CUP)	4,903	1,927,670	5,333	16,283	2,811	7	2,203	835	1
	FOSTERS AUSTRALIA (AFL, NRL, CRICKET)	57	4,501	5	8	2	1	2	1	0
	CARLTON DRAUGHT (AFL; AUSTRALIAN RUGBY UNION - NSW WARATAHS)	240	25,089	208	2,233	123	8	59	23	4
	"XXXX" (NRL - STATE OF ORIGIN, BRISBANE BRONCOS; MOTORSPORT - V8 SUPERCARS; CRICKET)	140	6,393	69	665	83	7	90	48	2
	TOOHEYS EXTRA DRY (SURFING)	367	64,732	307	1,295	69	2	96	25	2
	BLUETONGUE (NRL - NEWCASTLE KNIGHTS)	22	7,726	14	191	28	2	8	2	0
	CASCADE	125	2,783	72	335	21	2	243	35	0
	VICTORIA BITTER (NRL - NSW BLUES, VB KANGAROOS)	331	32,708	208	2,805	139	7	61	15	2
	JAMES BOAGS (MOTORSPORT - FORMULA 1 AUSTRALIAN GRAND PRIX; HORSE RACING - MELBOURNE CUP)	110	9,565	47	401	30	N.A.	387	2	1
	GUINNESS	322	5,690	60	207	26	24	248	53	1
	HAHN (GOLF - EMIRATES AUSTRALIAN OPEN, PGA CHAMPIONSHIP)	213	9,208	47	898	33	N.A.	57	2	1
	JACOB'S CREEK (TENNIS - AUSTRALIAN OPEN)	180	10,026	74	483	28	8	119	35	5
	CAPTAIN MORGAN RUM	1,120	414,926	3,835	12,192	783	25	1,348	647	2
	JACK DANIELS (MOTORSPORT - KELLY RACING : AUSTRALIAN V8 SUPERCAR SERIES)	6,547	2,099,091	4,927	24,046	4,037	21	1,359	453	2
	JIM BEAM AUSTRALIA (MOTORSPORT - DICK JOHNSON RACING : V8 SUPERCARS SERIES)	38	952	6	73	8	15	8	2	
BUNDABERG RUM (NRL; MOTORSPORT - BUNDABERG RACING TEAM: AUTO ONE V8 UTE SERIES)	47	88,646	1,072	1,792	187	7	96	32	2	
SMIRNOFF	533	134,825	1,384	4,523	319	24	3	1		
BACARDI (NATIONAL BASKETBALL ASSOCIATION)	39	997,550	1,320	3,364	702	16	3,280	367	3	
MEAN		999.26	367,583.79	1,297.58	4,372.32	535.58	10.59	696.42	201.47	2.14



Alcohol sponsorship

TABLE 5 Content analyses of YouTube pages

	YOUTUBE PAGE	NO. OF VIDEOS	NO. OF CHANNEL SUBSCRIPTIONS	HIGHEST NO. OF VIEWS	NO. OF COMMENTS	NO. HEALTH MESSAGES	NO. ASSOCIATIONS* WITH SPONSORED SPORT	NO. ASSOCIATIONS WITH CULTURAL/ RECREATIONAL EVENTS
BEER	BUDWEISER	800	747	919,121	121	0	132	93
	HEINEKEN	53	1,138	122,148	13	0	232	116
	FOSTERS AUSTRALIA	71	6,206	697,911	260	0	93	28
	CARLTON DRAUGHT	8	0	145	1	0	4	3
	XXXX	155	654	193,266	2	0	45	1
	TOOHEYS EXTRA DRY	2	94	144,766	23	0	2	1
	VB	20	2	2,247	0	0	14	3
	JAMES BOAGS	13	176	1,558,474	27	0	1	0
	GUINNESS	36	304	8,920	8	0	6	2
	HAHN	7	51	38,093	0	0	0	1
	JACOB'S CREEK	54	3	206	0	0	2	3
	CAPITAN MORGAN RUM	3	2,452	.	26	0	0	14
	JACK DANIELS	30	26	303	0	3	4	0
	JIM BEAM AUSTRALIA	16	27	148,358	0	5	7	0
	BUNDABERG RUM	9	424	587,634	8	0	6	2
	SMIRNOFF	16	37	40,993	2	0	0	12
BACARDI	18	484	34,626	0	0	3	2	
MEAN		77.12	754.41	281075.69	28.88	0.47	32.41	16.53

alcohol brands was a strategy observed across all of the sponsored sports sampled and their alcohol sponsors. While it is not surprising that sports sites would be well accessed by fans, and that these sites normally contain details of sponsors, it is worthwhile noting that potential alcohol-branded exposure is

elevated by access to these popular sports' websites. Moreover, young fans only intending to engage with the sponsored sport or team through social media may incidentally be exposed to alcohol branded partners, as they are while watching the event or game in a stadium or on television.



Discussion

Our research suggests a need for public policy makers to closely monitor the blurring line between sports and sponsorship marketing, particularly in relation to alcohol and potentially other harmful and otherwise unregulated products. Together, the two studies demonstrate widespread exposure to sponsoring alcohol brands' leveraging during sports event television broadcasts and activation in social media. We uncovered both passive and active aspects of leveraging by alcohol sponsors across these media. Thus, exposure encompasses an integrated cocktail of opportunities during the event, along with interactive and potentially continuous engagement with the brand through social media.

Beer brands exhibit the most prevalent exposure across both media, and exposure to spirits was also high in social media. Moreover, content of sponsors' activation was considered appealing to young adults. For example, leveraging during television commercials featured attractive models, social success narratives and/or humour. Facebook posts were commonly initiated by sponsoring alcohol brands, prompting discussion about the weekend (e.g. "What are you doing this weekend?"). Inevitably, such discussion threads resulted in engagement around the alcohol brand and sport.

Trends observed in Study 1 are consistent with prior content analyses suggesting deliberate targeting of young drinkers by strategic use of attractive narrative and execution within alcohol industry advertising (e.g. Jones & Jernigan, 2010). Overall, alcohol sponsors' branded appearances and related sponsorship-linked advertising were found to be prevalent across the four sports broadcasts. This finding is disconcerting for policy makers given the known negative social, health and community impacts of alcohol branded exposure upon young drinkers. The proliferation of subtle and embedded marketing communications such as sponsorship, product placement and SMS has undoubtedly been aided by technology and an absence of regulation or regulatory enforcement around

placement and content. Our analysis also highlights potential for breaches of the ABAC in terms of ad content appealing to youth. Notably, our findings suggest a strong link between alcohol sponsorship of sports and thematic content of advertising embedded during broadcasts. Our findings therefore imply a need for regulators to address content of alcohol industry advertising and specifically sponsorship-linked advertising placed to coincide with sporting event broadcasts. Our research supports the existence of a regulatory gap applying to sponsorship as a promotional tool and indicates heavy use of it by alcohol sponsors. Moreover, there appears to be evidence of some defiance of advertising appeal regulations in terms of content of sponsorship-linked advertising.

The aim of Study 2 was to explore the use of social media as a communications platform by alcohol sponsors of sports events. Results demonstrate widespread use of social media by beer and spirits sponsoring brands. Specific tactics include wall posts designed to engage young target audiences and male consumers and to elicit interaction with the brands through discussion about the brand and associations, including sports and events connected to the brands through sponsorship. Most alcohol sponsors' sites exhibited links to sponsored events and vice versa. Moreover, these sites are popular with young target audiences, with a large extent of sponsoring alcohol-branded exposure and engagement being evidenced through views, posts and comments.

Managerial implications

This research has important practical contributions in the policy and sponsorship management domains. In a departure from prior content analyses examining alcohol advertising exposure, the current research focuses on sponsorship leveraging and activation across multiple sporting events and media. We argue that it is important to consider sponsorship, including leveraging through sponsorship-linked



advertising, independently of traditional advertising as a promotional tool because it is processed differently to advertising, relates to different marketing objectives and is largely unregulated. This research provides much needed evidence of sponsorship linked exposure to alcohol brands during sporting events. The policy debate in response to recommendations to limit or ban alcohol sponsorship of sporting and cultural events needs to consider objective measurement of exposure in vulnerable audiences.

Our findings imply that policy makers need to turn attention to alcohol sponsorship leveraging through non-regulated social media, known to be attractive to young targets. It is particularly worrisome from a public health perspective that the unique two-way communication facilitated by social media and young targets' willingness to engage in conversations with the brand suggests that exposure is stronger and potentially more meaningful than in broadcast media. Although it can be argued that the exposure in social media, in contrast to broadcast media, is voluntary, it is the heightened potential for, and frequency of, exposure that is associated with the unique technology of digital media. Hyper-linking, consumer-to-consumer communications and targeted advertising such as that deployed through Google's AdSense make social media a particularly attractive option for heavily regulated alcohol brands.

Our research has been exploratory in nature, but it has revealed much needed evidence of the extent of alcohol sponsorship in sports and what appears to be the mainstream practice of migrating advertising dollars from heavily regulated media to less regulated media and marketing communications including sponsorship. The importance of the issue of alcohol sponsorship in sport, and the need for further empirical evidence of its impacts through exposure, is underlined by our research. Moreover, this research emphasises the potentially broader trend of emotionally charged harmful products, including alcohol, tobacco, gambling and fast food effectively reaching extensive markets through the sponsorship loophole. While the prohibition of tobacco sponsorship and advertising has some obvious parallels to the question of regulation

concerning alcohol, it can be distinguished on the basis of a dramatically evolved sports landscape since the introduction of anti-tobacco policy. Sport is now a globalised, commoditised product that has become reliant upon significant sponsorship investment to grow and survive. The impact of banning might therefore be different to that of tobacco in the early 1980s and the uncertain world economy might make finding replacement deep-pocketed sponsors more difficult. One policy alternative to seeking sponsorship replacement might be to allocate a proportion of the excise duty currently gathered by governments from alcohol sales towards funding sport and cultural events. In 2012, the Australian Federal government commenced a \$25 million sponsorship buyout trial programme among community sports and cultural events, which might also be expanded through alcohol excise revenue.

Limitations and future research

Several caveats to our research should be highlighted. First, our exposure measure in Study 1 was confined to a frequency count of brand appearances and leveraged advertising during the events, matched with television ratings which were associated with those events. This measure therefore represents potential exposure, rather than actual exposure and fails to capture more implicit exposure which targets may unconsciously process. Alternative exposure measures, including both explicit and implicit awareness measures, would be a worthwhile direction for future research given the lack of empirical work on exposure and memory effects. Second, our studies were limited to four Australian sports and two media types, thus limiting external validity. Future research on alcohol-branded exposure associated with sports events should consider qualitative and quantitative measurement in international samples, across multiple sports and events, in addition to other media commonly used for sponsorship activation, including outdoor, internet and gaming. Additional important impacts of alcohol sponsorship, extending to affective, cognitive and



behavioural outcomes that might result from exposure among consumers and participants in sponsored sports, are yet to be determined and would be a worthwhile direction for future research.

Conclusion

The current research contributes to the debate centering on increasing regulation of alcohol marketing but focusing upon more indirect and less regulated marketing tools, such as sponsorship and its impacts. This represents a departure from extant research which examines alcohol advertising that is not linked to sports sponsorship and limits exposure analysis to television content at the expense of unregulated social media. Findings suggest a need for public policy to address the growing use of sponsorship as an embedded and largely unregulated marketing communication in sport.

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