

Alcohol Advertising During Televised Australian Football Finals

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Abstract

Alcohol marketing during sport, and alcohol industry sponsorship of sporting events, is highly lucrative; however, concerns have been raised over the impact on child and adolescent viewers of repeated exposure to alcohol marketing messages. The aim of this research project was to investigate the amount and type of alcohol marketing during two major sporting events in 2012 – the semi-finals and grand final of the AFL and NRL. The broadcasts of these six games were audited for alcohol advertisements and other advertising communications. Almost one-fifth of the screen time included alcohol marketing. Policy and practice implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: alcohol, sports, sponsorship, integrated marketing

Track: Marketing and Society

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1.0 Background

The misuse of alcohol is a key public health concern in Australia; consequently, the marketing of alcohol is also of particular interest (Maher *et al.*, 2006). Alcohol advertising in Australia spans a growing number of mediums – such as television, print media, the internet (Facebook and company websites), event sponsorship, competitions, player sponsorship, sports sponsorship and point-of-sale promotions. In both of the recent reviews on the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of interventions to reduce alcohol-related harms, banning alcohol advertising was one of the key strategies identified (Anderson *et al.*, 2009; Babor *et al.*, 2010).

It is acknowledged that alcohol advertising during sport, and the sponsorship of sporting events by the alcohol industry, is lucrative business. The sports sponsorship market in Australia is estimated to be worth \$600 million per year (Cincotta, 2008), with an estimated \$50 million of this sponsorship from alcohol companies, making them one of the largest spending industries (Lee, 2008). An important commercial benefit of sports sponsorship is that it associates alcohol with the healthy, positive image of sport. An association with such healthy activities obscures the potential health risks that alcohol may pose, while also promoting consumption (Maher *et al.*, 2006).

Alcohol marketing has expanded in the last 10 years and is moving away from traditional marketing channels such as print and television. Sports sponsorship by alcohol companies it is no longer limited to professional sports leagues or competitions but has embedded itself at the grassroots level. Within junior sport, alcohol sponsors ‘assist’ with branded jerseys, club equipment and free or discounted alcohol (Mallam, 2006; Turner, 2009; Sawyer *et al.*, 2012; Kelly *et al.*, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c). Alcohol companies have sponsorship agreements with sports stadiums and individual players to further solidify this relationship.

To further cement the relationship between alcohol marketing and sport in Australia, many of our major national sporting organisations have strong and ongoing sponsorships deals with various alcohol companies (Cricket Australia, Australian Football League (AFL), National Rugby League (NRL)). The AFL has Carlton Draught as a major corporate partner of the competition and the NRL had two major alcohol sponsors in 2012, Victoria Bitter and Bundaberg Rum. However, information as to the dollar figure that each company pays to be a major sponsor is not publicly available for either code, although it is estimated to be in the millions. Interestingly, both Carlton Draught and Victoria Bitter belong to the parent company of Carlton and United Breweries (CUB). It is also important to note that many individual teams also receive sponsorship from alcohol brands, such as the Sydney City Roosters (Victoria Bitter) and Brisbane Lions (Carlton Draught).

An outcome of such pervasive advertising and sponsorship by the alcohol industry is the exposure of young people to a vast amount of alcohol marketing. Underage television viewers (13-17) have been found to be equally likely to be exposed to televised alcohol advertisements as young adults (18-24) (Fielder *et al.*, 2009), largely because of their placement during sporting telecasts. The broadcast of alcohol advertisements on commercial television in Australia is restricted to between 8:30pm and 5:00am; during M (mature classification), MA

(mature audience classification) or AV (adult violence classification) programs. The one exemption to this 'rule' is to allow alcohol advertising during the live broadcast of sporting events on weekends and public holidays (Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice (CTICP), 2010) which means that from a very young age children will be exposed to large amounts of alcohol marketing via sport. An analysis of alcohol advertising expenditure in Australia found that almost half (46%) of alcohol advertisements were shown on weekends and public holidays, with 44% shown during live sports broadcasts – reflecting the impact of the CTICP exemption (Fielder *et al.*, 2009).

2.0 Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to investigate the amount and type of alcohol marketing during two major sporting events in 2012. The six games that were chosen for analysis were the two semi-finals matches and the 2012 Grand Final for both the NRL and AFL. These were chosen due to the high volume of viewers, with the AFL and NRL Grand Finals attracting 3.196 million and 2.424 million viewers respectively. The AFL Grand Final had the highest television audience for a sporting event of the year, and the NRL Grand Final the fourth highest; both attracted higher viewership than the Olympic Games.

3.0 Methodology

Alcohol marketing during the six matches was coded using a framework developed by Thomas *et al.* (2012) for gambling marketing, adapted to assess alcohol marketing. This framework grouped marketing strategies into the five categories of:

1. Fixed advertising: Advertising on static banners within the stadium.
2. Dynamic advertising: Advertising on revolving or electronic banners within the stadium.
3. Commercial break advertising: Advertisements that appeared during commercial breaks.
4. Integrated advertising: Live announcements, popups and pull-through banners; and broadcast sponsorship announcements.
5. Team sponsorship: Logos on players' uniforms, logos within locker rooms, and team banners.

Games were coded for marketing incidences and duration during the game coverage, as well as alcohol advertisements (alcohol ads as a percentage of total advertisements), and total alcohol marketing exposure time. Alcohol advertisements were also coded against the Alcohol Beverages Advertising Code (ABAC). The ABAC clauses are particularly relevant to this study as there is substantial evidence that these advertisements appeal to young people, and that many circumvent the guidelines and are inconsistent with the spirit and aims of the code. This is likely due in part to the fact that the code is voluntary, funded and administered by the alcohol industry, and has no directive power or penalties for breaching the code (AMA, 2012).

As identified by Thomas *et al.* (2012) and Sherriff *et al.* (2010), alcohol marketing is usually visible in short, sharp bursts of activity and therefore we coded any alcohol marketing that lasted for at least one second. In each incident, the alcohol brand/logo/message had to be

clearly recognisable to the viewer for it to be coded.

Three Research Assistants were trained on the use of the coding guide, which was piloted using broadcasts recorded in the regular season of both the AFL and NRL. Each Research Assistant worked independently and coded two games each, with an investigator re-coding approximately 10% of the total recorded time to check for reliability. There was 98% inter-coder reliability between the research assistants and the investigator. For the six televised broadcasts of the NRL and AFL finals matches, two Research Assistants further coded all alcohol advertisements shown during the pre-game show, during the match and in the post-match analysis. The ABAC guide was used as a coding framework for the recorded alcohol advertisements and researchers were trained to administer the coding pro-forma. Further to this, alcohol advertisements were also coded for the presence of features or themes that have been found to be appealing to young people in previous studies – such as humour, relaxation and bonding. The coders watched each advertisement several times before beginning to code to ensure no important information was missed. Any discrepancies between the two Research Assistants were reported to a third researcher to adjudicate.

The recordings commenced with the pre-game show and concluded after the post-game analysis or winners presentation in the Grand Finals. Channel 7's contract with the AFL has given them the right to broadcast four AFL matches per week, all preliminary finals, the Brownlow Medal ceremony and the Grand Final. This is the only television platform on free to air television that can broadcast this level of coverage of the AFL and they have exclusive rights for the next four years (SWM, 2013b). Much like Channel 7's partnership with the AFL, Channel 9 has exclusive rights to broadcast free to air NRL matches including 3 games per week (2 on Friday night and 1 on Sunday afternoon), Thursday night games on three weeks of the year, NRL test matches, City Country and State of Origin, all of the preliminary finals and Grand Final as well as 'The NRL Footy Show' (NRL.com, 2012)

4.0 Findings

4.1 Alcohol advertising during non-sporting broadcasts

During the non-sporting broadcasts, there were four incidents of alcohol marketing, totalling 28 seconds. These four incidents occurred during the news coverage on Channel Ten when both the NRL and AFL Grand Final highlights were being shown. There were no incidents of stand-alone alcohol marketing throughout the entire broadcast for the six recorded times.

4.2 Alcohol advertisements during sporting broadcasts

Alcohol advertisements (i.e., those shown in commercial breaks, and thus covered by ABAC) constituted 5.4% (15min 23sec) of total advertising time compared to 6.9% (19min 31sec) for junk food and 5.8% (16min 27sec) for gambling. We also note that only two 'public service' alcohol advertisements, totalling 60 seconds, were shown across the six games. [NOTE: some of the commercials were cut short to be able to cross back to the live match that was being played which is why some of the commercials did not fit with the normal 30 second or 60 second commercial slot.]

Figure 1: Proportion of alcohol advertising by type/nature NRL

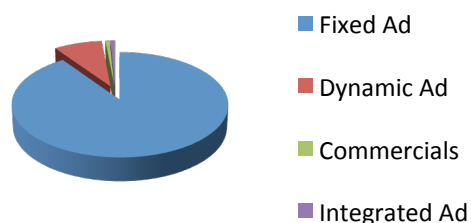
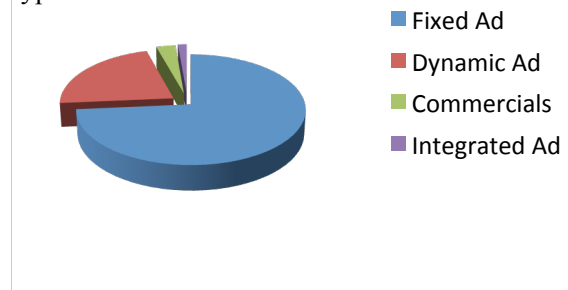


Figure 2: Proportion of alcohol advertising by type/nature AFL



4.3 Alcohol advertising during sporting broadcasts

Considering all forms of alcohol marketing, across the three NRL broadcasts, there was an average of 530 incidents and 30 minutes 40 seconds of marketing per match. This ranged from 364 incidents totalling 23 minutes and 29 seconds (Melbourne Storm vs. Manly Sea Eagles) to 647 incidents totalling 37mins and 15 seconds (in the NRL Grand Final).

Across the three AFL broadcasts, there was an average of 244 incidents totalling 20 minutes of marketing per match. This ranged from 67 incidents totalling 8 minutes and 44 seconds (in the Grand Final) to 570 incidents totalling 39 minutes and 42 seconds (Sydney Swans vs. Collingwood Magpies).

5.0 Discussion and conclusions

Alcohol marketing was found to be ubiquitous across both the NRL and AFL finals series. Over 18% of the entire broadcast of the NRL Grand Final match featured some form of alcohol marketing. Within the Sydney Swans Collingwood Magpies match, 17.7% of the total broadcast time was devoted to various forms of alcohol marketing. Often this consisted of numerous alcohol advertisements/promotions within the same broadcasting screen shot. This high level of alcohol marketing is in stark contrast to non-sporting broadcasts that were recorded concurrently. There were four incidents of alcohol marketing recorded across the comparison non-sporting broadcasts, all of which occurred during the news broadcast where highlights of either the NRL or AFL Grand Finals were shown.

The alcohol advertisements (commercials) that were recorded during the sporting broadcasts were also of concern. Each of the four commercials shown during the finals series included content that appeared to contradict the spirit (if not the letter) of the ABAC Code. It is important to keep in mind that the purpose of this Code is to “ensure that alcohol advertising presents a responsible approach to drinking, and does not appeal to children or adolescents.” From a policy perspective, it is important to note that these alcohol ‘advertisements’ made up only 5% of the alcohol marketing observed during these sporting broadcasts. This is important as there is substantial evidence that exposure to advertising that is integrated into program content – particularly program content which is emotionally engaging – is more influential in forming attitudes and brand connections than stand-alone

commercials.

There is a large body of evidence which shows that being exposed to alcohol marketing has serious implications for children and adolescents and can help shape their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours towards drinking (Henrikson *et al.*, 2008; Jones and Magee, 2011; Gordon *et al.*, 2011). Further highlighting the need for action on alcohol marketing is a recent systematic review of longitudinal studies by Anderson *et al.* (2009) which concluded that “alcohol advertising and promotion increases the likelihood that adolescents will start to use alcohol and to drink more if they are already using alcohol”. International evidence also highlights that banning alcohol advertising is one of the most effective strategies in reducing alcohol related harms based on several comprehensive reviews (Anderson, Chisholm and Fuhr, 2009).

Findings from this report combined with other evidence from Australia and overseas indicate that we need to challenge the argument that we need ‘more research’ and ‘more evidence’. There is a solid evidence base which shows that alcohol marketing is ubiquitous in Australian sport and that exposure to alcohol marketing results in earlier drinking initiation and higher rates of consumption among young people. What is needed is evidence based policy change that will help protect children from excessive exposure to persuasive messages about alcohol, and particularly that link drinking with sport and with ‘being Australian’.

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