

# Alcohol sponsorship of a summer of sport: a frequency analysis of alcohol marketing during major sports events on New Zealand television

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## ABSTRACT

**AIMS:** This research aims to assess the nature and extent of alcohol marketing through sport sponsorship over a summer of televised sport in New Zealand.

**METHODS:** Frequency analysis of New Zealand television broadcasts of five international sporting events during the summer of 2014–2015. Broadcasts were analysed to identify the percentage of time when alcohol brands were visible during game-play. The number of independent alcohol brand exposures was recorded.

**RESULTS:** Alcohol brands were observed during every televised event. Audiences were exposed to between 1.6 and 3.8 alcohol brand exposures per minute. Alcohol brands were visible between 42 and 777 times across the games examined. For three out of the five events alcohol brands were visible for almost half of the game.

**CONCLUSION:** Alcohol sponsorship was prevalent in international sport on New Zealand television. Given the popularity of broadcast sport, especially with children, there is an urgent need for regulation of alcohol sponsorship of sport. There are viable models of alcohol sponsorship replacement but their implementation requires the will of both sporting organisations and politicians. This research adds weight to arguments to implement recommendations to remove all alcohol sponsorship of sport.

Harmful use of alcohol contributes to an estimated 3.3 million deaths each year. This accounts for 5.9 percent of all deaths worldwide.<sup>1</sup> In New Zealand, alcohol contributes to 5.4 percent of all deaths of people under 80 years, an estimated 13,769 years of life lost.<sup>2</sup>

Alcohol-related harm is a wicked problem.<sup>3</sup> Exposure to alcohol advertising is positively related to consumption, particularly in children.<sup>4</sup> Further, exposure to alcohol advertising encourages current drinkers, particularly youth, to drink more.<sup>3–5</sup> Alcohol sponsorship has also been shown to increase alcohol consumption in sportspeople.<sup>6</sup> Restrictions on tradi-

tional forms of alcohol marketing are now commonplace. These include watershed times for marketing, restrictions on content and complete bans.<sup>3</sup>

Globally, alcohol marketers have adapted to the aforementioned advertising restrictions by adopting other less regulated forms of marketing, such as sponsorship, to persuade people to consume their products.<sup>3</sup> The alcohol industry continues to increase its sponsorship of many major sports and cultural events globally.<sup>7</sup> Alcohol sponsorship is effective in communicating the industry's messages to audiences, including young people who should not be exposed to alcohol advertising according to the

World Health Organization (WHO)<sup>1</sup> and the industry's own self-regulatory codes on advertising.<sup>8</sup> For example, in the UK the sponsorship of sport has enabled alcohol marketers to bypass regulations that tend to focus on traditional forms of advertising.<sup>9</sup>

Sport is emotionally captivating, which may make its sponsorship more persuasive than traditional television advertising.<sup>9</sup> One study found 71% of Thai youth watching the 2006 World Cup appreciated the broadcast sponsorship of the ThaiBev alcohol company and wanted to repay the sponsor by purchasing their product.<sup>10</sup> A longitudinal study of 552 12–13 year-old children showed 61% recalled alcohol sponsorship of televised sport, with a further 66% recalling the logos on sports clothing. This study also found that awareness increases the odds of children drinking alcohol by 35%.<sup>11</sup> Another study found children who owned alcohol-branded merchandise were both more likely to initiate drinking as well as binge drink.<sup>12</sup>

The effects of sponsorship are of particular concern when considering the amount of exposure to alcohol sponsorship communicated during sports broadcasts. Audiences of English football broadcasts were exposed to an average of 111 alcohol-related images per match.<sup>13</sup> Other frequency analyses have produced equally high rates of exposure.<sup>9,14–16</sup> They include analysis of football,<sup>9</sup> rugby,<sup>14,16</sup> cricket<sup>14,15</sup> and other sports.<sup>14</sup>

The WHO prioritises regulation of all sponsorship activities that promote alcohol to reduce alcohol-related harm. Specifically, the establishment of a regulatory system with a legislative basis for all alcohol-related sponsorship.<sup>1</sup> The WHO grades alcohol sponsorship restrictions as strong for effectiveness and very strong for breadth of evidence. This rating is based on the growing evidence of the persuasive nature of alcohol sponsorship, its ability to circumvent current industry regulations on advertising and recommendations for legislative regulation.<sup>3</sup>

In New Zealand, alcohol marketing is subject to industry self-regulation through the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA).<sup>8</sup> A number of New Zealand agencies, including the Law Commission,<sup>17</sup> the Medical Association<sup>18</sup> and the Ministerial Forum on Alcohol Advertising and Sponsorship

(MFAAS)<sup>19</sup> recommend removing alcohol-related sponsorship of cultural or sports events and activities. The timing of this research is particularly important as we still await the government response to the 2014 MFAAS recommendations noted above.

This study aims to identify the nature and extent of alcohol sponsorship visible during a range of major televised sports events on New Zealand television over the summer of 2014/2015. It aims to examine differences in alcohol sponsorship across a range of sports and to include sports with both female and male sportspeople. Finally, it aims to provide New Zealand data to help inform the current policy debate.

## Methods

### Study design and sample

Five major sporting events broadcast on commercial television in New Zealand during the summer of 2014–2015 were purposely selected to identify any alcohol brand sponsorship observed during each broadcast. Selected sports are popular with men, women and children, Māori and Pacific audiences and watched by large audiences. These events were the Rugby League 9s test match (rugby league, women, played in Auckland), the Australian Open Final (tennis, men, played in Melbourne), Asian Cup Final (football, men, played in Sydney), Football Ferns International Friendly (football, women, played in Chicago) and the ICC (International Cricket Council) ODI (One Day International) Cricket World Cup Final (cricket, men, played in Melbourne). Each of the sports events selected in this study attracted large audiences of all ages. For example, the Rugby League 9s test match was watched by an audience of 109,600 in New Zealand<sup>20</sup> and the Australian Open Final attracted 42,000 New Zealanders<sup>20</sup> and 13 million Australians.<sup>21</sup> All events were analysed using the broadcasts produced by the major satellite sports broadcaster in New Zealand *SkyTV*. *SkyTV* broadcast was chosen, as they are the primary broadcaster of sport in New Zealand with over 830,000 subscribers, including residential and commercial customers.<sup>22</sup>

Ethics approval was not required, as the data source was available through *SkyTV* (NZ).

## Data collection

Games were recorded using the recording function of *SkyTV's MySky*. Data were analysed using *VLC* media player, which slows the frame rate, allowing brand exposure to be measured precisely. Broadcasts were recorded in their entirety but only game time was included in the analysis. Analysis of broadcasts commenced with the start of play (excluding warm-ups and pre-game interviews) and ended when the final whistle, successful match point or fall of the final wicket signalled the end of the game. All advertisements, pre- and post-match interviews and half-time shows were excluded. The rationale for this exclusion involved water-shed restrictions, preventing any alcohol advertising during commercial breaks as well as research questions focused on alcohol marketing through alcohol sponsorship.

## Data analysis

Each broadcast was analysed for alcohol brands screened during the game, including on advertising hoardings, players' uniforms, on-field sign writing, goal posts, corner flags and commercial graphics. An alcohol brand exposure was recorded when at least half of a legible brand name was clearly visible somewhere on the screen.<sup>11</sup> The duration of clear images was recorded to the nearest second. The location and marketing medium of the alcohol-sponsorship exposures were recorded. The brand of alcohol was also recorded.

Researchers recorded the length and number of times a brand was observed on screen in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The timestamp on the video file was used to calculate the length of time a brand was clearly visible. The time of exposure (duration) was divided by the total time of the game play to calculate the percentage of time where alcohol brands were observed during game-play. Each individual alcohol exposure was counted to calculate the frequency of exposure. Rates were calculated by dividing the absolute number of exposures by time (minutes).

## Results

Alcohol brands were observed during every televised event. A single alcohol sponsor's brand was observed at four events, the

Asian Cup (Kirin), Australian Open (Jacobs Creek), Cricket World Cup (Victoria Bitters (VB)) and Football International Friendly (Budweiser). Three different alcohol sponsors' brands were observed during the Rugby League 9s Test (Woodstock, Peter Yealands Wines, Bottle-O). The Asian Cup, Cricket World Cup and Football International Friendly were sponsored by beer brands, the Australian Open was sponsored by a wine brand and Rugby League Test was sponsored by a spirit brand, wine brand and an alcohol store. The range of brands and products demonstrate sport's appeal to alcohol marketers. It also shows the problem is not isolated within a particular sport or to particular brands or products.

Alcohol brands were observed between 42 and 777 times a game (Table 1). Alcohol brands were visible from 24.1 to 47.1% of the duration of a match, except for cricket at 9%. The low duration in cricket was due to the absence of an alcohol brand as a major sponsor of the tournament.

Audiences were exposed to between 1.6 and 3.8 alcohol brand exposures per minute. Sports that are played over a long duration tend to have a high frequency of exposure. The playing time of a cricket match is much longer than the other sports selected for this study. Viewers watching the entire Cricket World Cup Final were exposed to alcohol brands 519 times (exclusively due to the sponsorship of Australia Cricket by VB), although this amounted to 1.6 exposures per minute (the lowest rate for all sports). Only the Australian Open, where alcohol brands were observed 777 times, exposed viewers to an alcohol brand more frequently. In contrast to the cricket, the frequency of exposure was compounded by a high rate of exposure, 3.8 exposures per minute.

The duration of exposure in sports played by female athletes was just as high as (and higher in some cases than) the sports played by male athletes. The women's football international friendly had the longest duration at 47.1% and the women's rugby league test 24.1%. The two sports had an average of 3.3 exposures per minute of broadcast. These results demonstrate sports played by female athletes are susceptible to alcohol sponsorship.

**Table 1:** Nature and extent of visible alcohol sponsorship at televised sports events.

|                                |                    |  |  |                         |                                  |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|--|--|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Event                          | Asian Cup Final    | Australian Open Final                  | Rugby League 9s Test                             | Cricket World Cup Final | Football International Friendly  |
| Sport                          | Football           | Tennis                                 | Rugby League                                     | Cricket                 | Football                         |
| Location                       | Sydney (AUS)       | Melbourne (AUS)                        | Auckland (NZ)                                    | Melbourne (AUS)         | Chicago (USA)                    |
| Gender of sports-people        | M                  | M                                      | F  | M                       | F                                |
| Brands                         | Kirin              | Jacobs Creek                           | Woodstock<br>Bottle-O<br>Peter Yealands          | Victoria Bitter         | Budweiser                        |
| Type of alcohol                | Beer               | Wine                                   | RTD (bourbon)<br>Alcohol outlet<br>Wine          | Beer                    | Beer                             |
| Number of times brand observed | 433                | 777                                    | 42   | 519                     | 340                              |
| Duration of exposure           | 42.6%              | 46.6%                                  | 24.1%  | 9.7%                    | 47.1%                            |
| Rate of exposure (per minute)  | 3.4                | 3.8                                    | 2.3  | 1.6                     | 3.8                              |
| Marketing medium               | Sideline hoardings | Sideline hoardings<br>On-court Signage | Field signage<br>Sideline hoardings<br>Fan signs | Players' uniform        | Sideline hoardings<br>Scoreboard |

Most brands were observed on advertising hoardings on the sideline. Alcohol brands featured on cricket players' uniforms and spectators' replica jerseys. At the Rugby League 9s Test, an alcohol brand was printed on the playing field. Spectators were given signs with a blank centre boarded by an alcohol brand's marketing which they could write on.

## Discussion

Audiences are exposed to a range of brands and products. In three of the five sports analysed, alcohol sponsorship was visible for almost half the broadcast. This finding is consistent with other research on televised sport.<sup>9,13,14</sup> The extent of alcohol sponsorship demonstrates audiences were exposed to a high frequency and duration of alcohol marketing during sports broadcast.

The nature of alcohol sponsorship contributes to its persuasiveness as a marketing medium for alcohol manufacturers. In this study, one sport featured

brands on player's uniforms, implying that these athletes use and endorse this brand. Sports merchandise including player's uniforms, complete with sponsor's branding are popular with fans (particularly children), reminding consumers of the brand and reinforcing associations. The association of alcohol with sporting heroes deals a double blow to health promoters as role models to children are used to promote an unhealthy and harmful product.<sup>23</sup> An association that is not permitted in more traditional forms of advertising subject to the industry's self-regulatory codes.<sup>8</sup>

The size and diversity of sport viewership exacerbates the problem of alcohol sponsorship. Each of the sports events selected in this study attracted large audiences of all ages (100,000s).<sup>20</sup> International broadcasts extend sponsorship reach to global markets. For example Budweiser, an American beer brand, sponsored New Zealand versus the US football. This provided the brand promotion to New Zealand, United States and other global consumers. Similarly the

Australian Open tennis was sponsored by an Australian wine brand with the event broadcast to 40 countries.<sup>21</sup> New media such as livestreaming increases access to broadcast sport and provides another media for brand marketing. There were more than 24.3 million views across all Australian Open video platforms by the end of the 2015 tournament.<sup>21</sup> The size and popularity (particularly among children) of sport viewership demonstrates the urgent need for international collaboration to regulate unhealthy sponsorship of sport.

New Zealand sport administrators justify seeking sponsorship income as necessary to fund operating expenses.<sup>24</sup> They imply reducing sponsorship income may result in reduced opportunities for participation in sport at all levels with the greatest impact on children playing club sport.<sup>24</sup> However only a few sports receive the majority of the income from alcohol sponsorship.<sup>25</sup> This suggests regulations to limit alcohol sponsorship would be unlikely to impact on most sports organisations in New Zealand. Even in sports with large amounts of alcohol sponsorship suitable replacements could be found from other sectors as after the removal of tobacco sponsorship.<sup>18</sup> In fact, the year after Australia banned tobacco sponsorship, sponsorship revenue increased by 45%.<sup>26</sup>

There are examples of sports organisations forgoing the sponsorship of alcohol companies. Sixteen national sporting organisations partners in Australia signed up to a deal to relinquish ties with alcohol companies in sponsorship replacement programmes.<sup>27</sup> Other organisations, such as Netball New Zealand<sup>28</sup> voluntarily refuse alcohol sponsorship. The French government passed the landmark legislation *Loi Evin* in 1991 that removed all alcohol sponsorship of sport and cultural events and activities.<sup>17</sup> These examples provide evidence that there is political will within some sporting organisations and governments to create healthy environments for athletes and spectators.

The strengths of this analysis include the inclusion of sports played by women. An over-emphasis on male sport had left a gap in the literature, which this current research has addressed. This study focused on a range of sports, over an entire summer, that was broadcast in multiple countries.

The conservative approach to data analysis means the results produced are likely to be an under-estimate of the true level of exposure. It could be argued that brands (particularly reoccurring ones) are identifiable when less than 50% of the brand logo or name appears on screen.

This study has several limitations. The five sports were purposively selected and represent summer sports, which are broadcast on paid television. The extent of alcohol sponsorship in a wider range of sports including winter sports is unknown. Nor have we identified how much sponsorship is visible in sports broadcasts on free-to-air channels. This media will likely have wider reach. This is an avenue for further research.

This research adds weight to arguments to implement the recommendations to remove all alcohol sponsorship of sport.<sup>1,3,17-19,27</sup> This is particularly valuable in the context of the New Zealand Ministerial Forum of Alcohol Advertising and Sponsorship recommendation for the complete removal of alcohol sponsorship of sport, which is still awaiting a governmental response, as noted earlier. Tobacco sponsorship replacement provides an effective framework for alcohol sponsorship replacement. This has already begun in Australia with the government replacing funding from alcohol companies with the revenue generated from the 'alcopops tax.'<sup>29</sup> Similarly, *Healthway* in Western Australia has an alcohol replacement programme for sports willing to end alcohol sponsorship and promote healthy messages.<sup>30</sup>

Failing a complete ban of alcohol sponsorship, there needs to be regulation with a legislative basis. Alcohol companies have utilised sponsorship to circumvent their own regulatory codes on advertising.<sup>3</sup> There is a wide breadth of evidence that has concluded alcohol industry self-regulation is ineffective in limiting children's exposure to alcohol marketing.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, any suggestion of industry self-regulation of sponsorship should be dismissed in favour of regulations with a legislative basis. While this would not prevent the broadcast of international events with alcohol sponsorship, it would significantly reduce the exposure from domestic sports with high viewership such as rugby, cricket and football. Moreover, the Cricket World Cup

provides a template of how international tournaments can be run without major sponsorship from alcohol companies.

In conclusion, alcohol sponsorship was prevalent in international sport on New Zealand television. The large audiences were exposed to between 1.6 and 3.8 alcohol brand exposures per minute. For three out of the five events, alcohol brands were visible for almost half of the game, most frequently on side-line hoardings. Alcohol marketing, including sponsorship, is associated with

increases in alcohol-related harm and encourages children to initiate drinking.<sup>3-5</sup> Given the popularity of broadcast sport, especially with children, there is an urgent need for regulation that addresses alcohol marketing through sport. There are viable models of alcohol sponsorship replacement but their implementation requires the will of both sporting organisations and politicians. This research adds weight to arguments to implement recommendations to remove all alcohol sponsorship of sport.

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Nil.

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