

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Alcohol Marketing in Televised English Professional Football: A Frequency Analysis

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(Received 7 March 2013; first review notified 28 June 2013; in revised form 20 August 2013; accepted 20 August 2013)

Abstract — **Aims:** The aim of the study was to explore the frequency of alcohol marketing (both formal commercials and otherwise) in televised top-class English professional football matches. **Methods:** A purposive sample of six broadcasts (total = 1101 min) of televised top-class English club football matches were identified and recorded in full. A customized coding framework was used to identify and categorize all verbal and visual alcohol references in non-commercial broadcasting. The number and the duration of all formal alcohol commercials were also noted. **Results:** A mean of 111 visual references and 2 verbal references to alcohol per hour of broadcast were identified. Nearly all visual references were to beer products and were primarily simple logos or branding. The majority of verbal alcohol references were related to title-sponsorship of competitions. A total of 17 formal alcohol commercials were identified, accounting for <1% of total broadcast time. **Conclusion:** Visual alcohol references in televised top-class English football matches are common with an average of nearly two per minute. Verbal references are rare and formal alcohol commercials account for <1% of broadcast time. Restriction of all alcohol sports sponsorship, as seen for tobacco, may be justified.

BACKGROUND

Excessive alcohol consumption and the associated negative health effects are a major public health concern. Almost 4% of all deaths worldwide are attributable to alcohol (World Health Organisation, 2012). While per capita alcohol consumption in the UK has fallen recently with heavier drinkers consuming more and moderate drinkers reducing their intake (Meier, 2010), there continues to be a rise in alcohol-related hospital admissions (Health and Social Care Information Centre, 2012).

Marketing aims to satisfy buyer needs by presenting the right product, in the right place, at the right price, and at the right time (Cannon, 1992). Techniques such as advertising are an important aspect of marketing, but are only one element in the wider marketing environment. For example, while alcohol advertising expenditure in the UK is around £202.5 million per annum, the total spent on all alcohol marketing is over £800 million per annum (Institute of Alcohol Studies, 2010). Alcohol is marketed through an integrated mix of strategies including TV, radio and print advertising, point of sale promotions and sponsorship of a variety of sporting and cultural events (Hill and Casswell, 2004).

Tobacco marketing has been increasingly regulated in recent years. In the UK, tobacco advertising has been prohibited by law since 1989 (European Commission, 2012) and sponsorship of sporting events since 2003 (HM Government, 2002). In contrast, both alcohol advertising and non-advertising marketing in the UK are covered by self-regulatory codes of practice. The Portman Group, which is described as the alcohol producers' 'social responsibility organization', has a code of practice on non-advertising marketing (The Portman Group, 2012), while alcohol advertising is overseen by the Advertising Standards Authority—the self-regulatory organization of the advertising industry (Committee of Advertising Practice, 2010a,b). Both organizations emphasize that alcohol marketing should not be targeted at under-18-year-olds and that it should not encourage overconsumption or associate alcohol with social or sexual success, irresponsible behaviour or illegal drugs. Neither the Portman Group nor the Advertising Standards Authority has

legal powers of enforcement. A recent analysis of alcohol industry documents reported extensive use of subtle and sophisticated imagery to circumvent these restrictions and concluded that the current reliance on self-regulation of alcohol marketing in the UK is failing (Hastings *et al.*, 2010).

Association football, or soccer (referred to as 'football' throughout), is a globally popular spectator sport. It is estimated that 46% of the world population watched at least 1 min of coverage of the 2010 FIFA (Federation of International Football Associations) World Cup (FIFA.com, 2011) and almost 22 million viewers in the UK watched some of the final match of the competition (BBC News, 2010).

The symbiotic relationship between alcohol and football is demonstrated by increasingly sophisticated marketing techniques. In Australia, 15% of all alcohol commercials and 20% of beer commercials on television linked alcohol to sports (Pettigrew *et al.*, 2012). The English Premier League, currently the most wealthy football league in the world, was sponsored by *Carling Lager* [a beer brand] for the first 8 years of its existence. In the 2011–2012 season, 15 of the 20 teams in this league had alcohol brands as official sponsors. In 2010, Manchester United Football Club, the then richest sporting club in the world (Badenhausen, 2012), signed a 3-year sponsorship deal with *Singha Beer* [a beer brand], which aimed not only to 'engage the club's fans around the world', but also to 'write a new chapter in the *Singha* story for the whole world to read, turning a local brand into the global brand' (Manutd.com, 2010). Internationally, *Carlsberg's* [a beer brand] sponsorship of the UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) European Football Championship in 2004 was estimated to grow its global brand by ~6% (Babor *et al.*, 2010).

Although it is difficult to clearly demonstrate the impact of marketing on total population consumption of alcohol, systematic review evidence confirms that alcohol marketing increases the likelihood that young people will start to use alcohol and will drink more if they already use it (Anderson *et al.*, 2009). In the UK, 96% of 13-year-olds are aware of alcohol marketing in some form (Balance, 2012) and recent data suggest that children are exposed to more alcohol advertising on TV than adults

(Winpenny *et al.*, 2012). It has been estimated that up to 5.2 million 4- to 15-year-olds in the UK were exposed to TV alcohol advertising during the 2008 UEFA European Football Championship (Alcohol Concern, 2010). Increased brand knowledge, positive attitude towards alcohol and intention to drink were found in young people exposed to televised coverage of this competition (de Bruijn, 2008).

Previous research has explored the frequency and content of alcohol commercials on television in Australia (Pettigrew *et al.*, 2012) and Brazil (Pinsky and Silva, 1999), as well as during televised sport in the USA (Zwarun and Farrar, 2005) and Australia (Jones *et al.*, 2010). The only published studies we are aware of that explored all alcohol marketing, rather than just alcohol commercials, within televised sports were conducted on broadcasts of professional US sports, but not including association football, in 1990–1992 and 2000–2002 (Madden and Grube, 1994; Zwarun, 2006). The earlier study found an average of 1.2 min per hour of broadcast devoted to alcohol commercials and 3.2 min per hour that included alcohol marketing; 10 years later, these figures had increased to 1.7 and 6.0, respectively (Zwarun, 2006). However, for their analysis of non-commercial alcohol marketing, both Madden and Grube (1994) and Zwarun (2006) broke all broadcasts into 60-s intervals and determined the number of intervals in which alcohol marketing was present. This approach fails to capture rapidly repeated exposure to multiple different alcohol references—assuming that, for example, 10 instances of a alcohol logo within a 60-s interval is the same as one single instance. It also leads to the potential for inconsistencies. For example, a 3-s camera shot including a particular alcohol logo spanning from one 60-s interval to another would be counted as two references, while the same shot midway through a 60-s interval would only be counted once.

To extend the emerging evidence base on alcohol marketing in televised sport to the UK and overcome some of the limitations of previous research, we conducted a frequency analysis of all alcohol marketing across a range of televised English professional football matches.

METHODS

We explored the frequency and nature of alcohol marketing during a sample of televised football broadcasts featuring top-class English club teams broadcast on commercial television channels in the UK.

Selection of broadcasts

We defined top-class English club teams as those competing in the Premier League and Championship (the first and second divisions of the English Football League respectively) during the 2011–2012 season.

Top-class English club teams compete in the widest range of domestic and international competitions during January and February. During these months, in addition to league matches, clubs also compete in the Football League Cup, known in 2011–2012 as the *Carling Cup* (a knockout competition open to all 92 teams in the Football League); the Football Association Challenge Cup, known in 2011–2012 as the *Budweiser* (a beer brand) *FA Cup* (a knockout competition open to a wide range of professional and amateur teams); the

UEFA Champions League (the first-tier Europe-wide club competition) and the UEFA Europa League (the second-tier Europe-wide club competition).

All live football matches, featuring top-class English club teams, broadcast by the major satellite sports broadcaster in the UK, *Sky Sports*, or on commercial terrestrial channels in January and February 2012 were considered for inclusion in the study. A purposive sample of six matches was selected for inclusion (Table 1). Sampling was intended to capture the full range of competitions taking place, as well as broadcasts at different times of day and on different days of the week. Thus, we included one match from each of the six competitions mentioned above: two matches broadcast on Saturdays, two on Sundays and two midweek; and matches beginning from across the range of midday to mid-evening.

Broadcasts of the included matches were recorded in their entirety, encompassing: the 90 min of match-play plus any added or extra-time, any interview and discussion sections immediately before or after the match and during the half-time break and all commercial breaks.

Coding framework

A coding framework was developed based on previous research and discussions with relevant experts (Neuendorf, 2002; Zwarun, 2006; Jones *et al.*, 2010). This framework captured details of all visual and verbal alcohol references, excluding those in formal alcohol commercials, in the broadcasts. The term ‘alcohol reference’ was used to describe all verbal or visual instances that were alcohol-related, including: on-screen branding, commentator mentions of alcohol brands or alcohol-related concepts and visual references within marketing for non-alcohol products. For visual references, each instance of an identifiable alcohol logo in the stadium (including on players’, officials’ or spectators’ clothing) or on the screen, or other branding, coming into shot was counted as one reference, irrespective of how long that single shot lasted. Thus, for example, a static advertising billboard alongside the field of play may have been counted multiple times each time it came into shot.

A draft coding framework was piloted on one broadcast, not included in the current sample, by the first researcher (A.G.) and a second coder. The results were discussed and used to finalize the framework.

All visual and verbal alcohol references were coded in terms of alcohol type (classified into one of five categories based on current UK alcohol duty rules: spirits, spirit-based ready-to-drink products, liqueurs and strong wine (with alcohol by volume (ABV) of >22%); fortified wine (with ABV of 15–22%); sparkling and table wine (with ABV of ≤15%); beer and lager (of any strength) and perry (pear-cider) and cider (of any strength)). The location of all visual alcohol references (coded as: alongside the field of play, seating area, on the field of play, stadium interior and other) and the timing of all verbal alcohol references (coded as: pre-match, first half, half-time, second half or post-match) were also recorded.

The frequency and the duration of formal alcohol commercials (in seconds) were also recorded.

Data collection and analysis

Recordings of all the six broadcasts were systematically coded by the first researcher (A.G.), using the pause and rewind

Table 1. Characteristics of television broadcasts of six top-class English football matches

	Broadcast number					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Competition	Barclays Premier League	nPower Championship	UEFA Champions League Heineken	UEFA Europa League	Budweiser FA Cup	Carling League Cup
Competition alcohol sponsor	–	–	–	–	Budweiser	Carling
Home team	Manchester United FC	Blackpool FC	Associazione Calcio Milan	Amsterdamsche FC Ajax	Sunderland AFC	Cardiff City FC
Home team alcohol sponsor(s)	Singha Beer, Casillero del Diablo, Smirnoff	–	–	Amstel, Jupiler	Strongbow	–
Away team	Liverpool FC	Portsmouth FC	Arsenal FC	Manchester United FC	Middlesbrough FC	Liverpool FC
Away team alcohol sponsor(s)	Carlsberg	Greene King IPA	Carlsberg	Singha Beer, Casillero del Diablo, Smirnoff	Carlsberg	Carlsberg
Location	Old Trafford, Manchester	Bloomfield Road, Blackpool	Stadio San Siro, Milan	Amsterdam ArenA	Stadium of Light, Sunderland	Wembley Stadium, London
In-stadium attendance	74,844	12,545	68,257	48,866	33,275	89,044
UK broadcast channel	Sky Sports 1	Sky Sports 2	ITV1	Channel 5	ITV1	Sky Sports 1
Date (all 2012)	11 February (Saturday)	11 February (Saturday)	15 February (Wednesday)	16 February (Thursday)	29 January (Sunday)	26 February (Sunday)
Kick-off time	1200	1700	1900	1715	1300	1500
Broadcast length (minutes)	198	155	153	174	183	238
UK TV audience total	1,965,000	294,000	4,994,000	2,913,000	3,569,000	1,362,000
UK TV audience <18 years (% of total)	240,000 (12.2)	19,000 (6.5)	450,000 (9.0)	272,000 (9.3)	238,000 (7.7)	169,000 (12.4)

UEFA, Union of European Football Associations; FA, football association; FC, football club, AFC, association football club; –, none.

facility as required. Two broadcasts (broadcasts 1 and 3) were randomly selected for duplicate coding by a second coder to explore inter-rater reliability.

Data were collated into tabular form in order to summarize key variables and the average number of visual and verbal alcohol references per hour of broadcast was calculated.

RESULTS

The six broadcasts lasted a total of 1101 min (18 h and 21 min). Double coding of two broadcasts revealed discrepancies over the presence of only two visual alcohol references (out of 521 included in the broadcasts), indicating a high degree of inter-rater reliability.

Visual alcohol references

A total of 2042 visual alcohol references were observed representing an overall average of 111.3 per hour of broadcast. The frequency of visual alcohol references ranged from 3 to 1004 per broadcast, with a mean of 340 and median of 257 per broadcast. The number of visual alcohol references per hour also varied substantially between broadcasts with a range from 1 to 253.1, a mean of 105.2 and a median of 89.7 (Table 2).

The most common location for visual alcohol references was advertising billboards alongside the field of play (43.6% of all visual alcohol references), followed by references on the field of play (27.1% of all visual alcohol references) consisting largely of signage displayed pre- and post-match. The majority

of visual alcohol references coded as 'other' (26.1% of all visual alcohol references) were on-screen visual images shown during action replays, substitutions and when scores were displayed. Almost all visual alcohol references were to beer (98.6% of all visual alcohol references) and tended to be simple depictions of logos or other branding.

Verbal alcohol references

A total of 32 verbal alcohol references were made during the included broadcasts. With four exceptions, all of the verbal references were made during broadcasts 5 and 6 and were the result of sponsorship of the particular cup competitions (e.g. the *Carling Cup*; the *Budweiser FA Cup*). The four exceptions were the use of the word 'hangover' in discussion between commentators. Here, one commentator, an ex-professional footballer, suggested that the winning team were likely to have hangovers in the morning, suggesting that alcohol overconsumption was likely to be associated with winning the match.

Formal alcohol commercials

A total of 17 formal alcohol commercials were included in the broadcasts. These consisted of eight different commercials for five different products: four beers and one sparkling wine. Commercials varied in length from 6 to 40 s. Overall, formal alcohol commercials accounted for 0.6% of broadcast time.

Table 2. Number of visual alcohol references, by location and alcohol type, in television broadcasts of six top-class English football matches

	Broadcast number						Total (% of all visual alcohol references)	Mean visual alcohol references/hour of broadcast
	1	2	3	4	5	6		
Location								
Alongside the field of play	22	180	472	0	94	125	893 (43.7)	48.7
Seating	0	0	0	0	0	49	49 (2.4)	2.7
On the field of play	17	0	0	0	7	530	554 (27.1)	30.2
Stadium interior	2	0	2	0	5	6	15 (0.7)	0.8
Other	5	4	1	3	224	294	531 (26.0)	28.9
Alcohol type								
Beer	37	180	474	2	329	996	2018 (98.6)	110.0
Perry & cider	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sparkling and table wine (ABV ≤15%)	3	2	0	0	0	6	11 (0.5)	0.6
Fortified wine (ABV 15–22%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spirits, RTD, strong wine (ABV >22%)	6	2	1	1	1	2	13 (0.6)	0.7
Total (% of all visual alcohol references)	46 (2.3)	184 (9.0)	475 (23.3)	3 (0.1)	330 (16.2)	1004 (49.2)	2042 (100)	111.3
Mean visual alcohol references/hour of broadcast	13.9	71.2	186.3	1.0	108.2	253.1	111.3	–

DISCUSSION

Summary of findings

This is the first study that we are aware of to document the frequency of alcohol marketing in televised professional football matches. We found that visual references to alcohol were common in the included matches (overall 111.3 visual references per hour of broadcast). Nearly all of these references were to beer products and they were primarily found on advertising billboards alongside the field of play, on the field of play before or after matches or on-screen around replays, substitutions and score updates. Visual alcohol references tended to be simple logos or other branding. Verbal alcohol references were much less common (total of 1.7 per hour of broadcast) and the majority of these were related to sponsorship of specific competitions. A total of 17 formal alcohol commercials were included in the broadcasts accounting for <1% of total broadcast time.

Strengths and limitations

Although previous studies have explored alcohol marketing in other televised sports in other countries (Madden and Grube, 1994; Zwarun and Farrar, 2005; Zwarun, 2006; Jones *et al.*, 2010), this is the first study we are aware of to study alcohol marketing in UK televised sport and in broadcasts of, arguably, the world's most popular spectator sport: association football. Our focus on alcohol marketing in totality, rather than commercials only, also provides a substantial expansion on much previous work. Double coding of one-third of the matches confirmed that our coding framework resulted in a discrepancy of just two visual references across the 521 included, suggesting good inter-rater reliability.

We included a range of football matches in our sample from across the range of competitions that top-class English clubs take part in. These matches were popular, with a combined UK television audience of >15 million. Many teams featured in the sample have international followings and the worldwide viewing figures for these matches are likely to be much higher.

However, we only included six broadcasts. For logistical reasons, matches were purposively, rather than randomly,

selected. Our results are not, therefore, necessarily generalizable to all televised English football matches. Our finding of substantial between-match variation in the total number of alcohol references included in broadcasts highlights that further work is required to determine accurate estimates of expected exposure during an 'average' match. Further work could make use of stratified random sampling techniques to ensure a representative sample of matches from across different competition, time and day strata.

We did not make any attempt to determine the effect of the marketing identified on alcohol-related intentions or behaviour. It cannot be assumed that all references to alcohol during football broadcasts are equally 'effective'. While formal alcohol commercials made up <1% of the broadcasts included, these may be more compelling and memorable than momentary glimpses of logos on-screen. In contrast, the frequently repeated nature of such momentary glimpses, particularly in some broadcasts, may combine to have a greater effect than single instances of formal commercials. The relative effects of different types of alcohol marketing, and how this may vary across population groups, remain unclear.

Unlike previous research (Madden and Grube, 1994; Zwarun, 2006), we counted all individual visual and verbal alcohol references in the included broadcasts. Although this limits our ability to make direct comparisons between ours and previous work, we believe that our inclusive approach gives a better indication of the totality of all alcohol marketing in televised sport than merely counting the number of 60-s slots in which any alcohol marketing occurred.

Interpretation and implications of findings

The absolute levels of alcohol marketing we identified were substantially greater than the only previous work we are aware of which explored the full range of alcohol marketing within televised sport (Madden and Grube, 1994; Zwarun, 2006). Most recently, Zwarun (2006) identified 6.0 min per hour of broadcasting in which non-advertising alcohol marketing references were presented in televised sport in the USA in 2000–2002. In comparison, we found an average of 111.3 visual references plus 1.7 verbal references per hour. These differences may reflect differences in methods. The approach

of counting the number of 60-s intervals featuring any alcohol marketing used by both Madden and Gruber (1994) and Zwarun (2006) may substantially under-estimate the volume of alcohol marketing present. Alternatively, alcohol marketing may be much more common in UK televised football in 2012 than in other professional sports televised in the USA in 2000–02.

In contrast, we found a lower volume of formal alcohol commercials in televised sport than has tended to be reported previously. Compared with 0.6% of broadcasts being devoted to alcohol commercials in this study, 2.2% of cricket and 0.5% of tennis broadcasts were taken up by alcohol commercials in Australia (Jones *et al.*, 2010), and 1.1% of basketball and American football broadcasts in the USA (Zwarun and Farrar, 2005). These differences may reflect differences in the sports studied, location of broadcasts and changes in the nature of sports sponsorship over time. Additionally, the high presence of alcohol marketing within football broadcasts may mean that alcohol companies do not feel that additional commercials are necessary.

We identified considerable variation in the number of visual and verbal references to alcohol between matches. These appear to show some relationship to competition sponsorship by alcohol companies. Verbal references appeared to be predominantly linked to title-sponsorship of particular competitions by alcohol companies. Although almost all clubs in included matches had some sort of partnership with an alcohol company (Table 1), this did not appear as important as competition title-sponsorship by alcohol companies in determining the level of in-match alcohol marketing.

We identified a number of levels at which alcohol references were included in televised broadcasts of football matches. Many high-profile football matches are filmed by one company who distribute pictures to local broadcasters to add their own commentary. Around 70% of visual alcohol references were alongside or on the field of play and are therefore under the control of individual clubs rather than broadcasters. However, around a quarter of visual alcohol references were on-screen and so added by either picture distributors or local broadcasters. All verbal alcohol references made by commentators and formal alcohol commercials are under the control of local broadcasters. These various 'levels' of marketing suggest that control of alcohol marketing in televised sport would require a multi-pronged approach targeting clubs and their stadia, central picture distributors and local broadcasts.

The UK continues to rely on industry self-regulation of alcohol marketing. This emphasizes that alcohol marketing should not be aimed at children, promote overconsumption or associate alcohol consumption with social success, violence or antisocial behaviour (Committee of Advertising Practice, 2010a,b; The Portman Group, 2012). Much of the marketing we identified was simplistic visual representations of logos and other branding that would not be considered to infringe the regulations but which is likely to have a cumulative effect on young people.

A number of national organizations in the UK, including the British Medical Association (Hastings and Angus, 2009) and the House of Commons Health Select Committee (House of Commons Health Committee, 2012) have criticized the current UK government's reliance on self-regulation of alcohol marketing. Alternatives include a blanket ban on

alcohol sponsorship of sports, similar to that already in place for tobacco in many countries including the UK; restrictions on any televised marketing of alcohol before a particular watershed time, such as 9 pm; and the innovative approach taken by the Australian Federal Government, which has negotiated a 2-year sponsorship deal with 12 major sports clubs, which will replace alcohol sponsorship with responsible drinking marketing (Canning, 2012). Any policy developments should take into account the international nature of much televised sport. A ban on alcohol sports sponsorship in one country would not necessarily prevent broadcast in that country of sporting events taking place in other countries where such a ban was not in place.

CONCLUSION

Visual alcohol references in the selection of televised top-class English football matches included were common with an average of nearly two per minute. Verbal references were rare and formal alcohol commercials accounted for <1% of broadcast time. In the UK, alcohol marketing is subject to industry self-regulation with a focus on not appealing directly to children, encouraging overconsumption or associating alcohol with social or sexual success, irresponsible behaviour or illegal drugs. This fails to reflect the nature of alcohol marketing in contemporary televised sport where most marketing is constant repetition of simple logos. Current regulations make no attempt to restrict this constant bombardment or to make the case that association of alcohol with professional sport and sporting success is likely to reflect one aspect of social success. This represents a further failure of the current self-regulatory approach (Hastings *et al.*, 2010). Restriction of all alcohol sports sponsorship, as seen for tobacco, may be justified.

Acknowledgements — Many thanks to Kim Graham for acting as second coder.

Funding — J.A. receives salary support from Fuse – the Centre for Translational Research in Public Health which is funded by the British Heart Foundation, Cancer Research UK, Economic and Social Research Council, Medical Research Council, and the National Institute for Health Research.

Conflict of interest statement. None declared.

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