

Food and Non-Alcoholic Beverage Sponsorship of Sporting Events: The Link to the Obesity Issue

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Abstract

This study's primary purpose was to examine the opinions of consumers towards the appropriateness of food and non-alcoholic beverage sponsorships of sporting events in relation to other products. Research of this nature is particularly timely in light of the current obesity issue because many food and beverage products contribute to the obesity problem. Phase one involved a written survey ($N = 253$) whereas phase two involved two focus groups ($N = 12$). Attitudes toward food and non-alcoholic beverage sponsorships of sporting events were more favorable than alcohol sponsorships, followed by tobacco sponsorships. However, there were differences according to demographics. Overall, sporting goods companies and sport drink and water companies were considered the most appropriate sponsors. Tobacco was the least appropriate sponsor followed by liquor and fast food. The majority of participants were not in favor of government laws to prevent less healthy food and beverage companies from sponsoring sporting events.

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Conflicting debate has historically surrounded tobacco and alcohol sponsorship of sporting events. Many people, including health advocates, are opposed to tobacco sponsorship in the sport context because it appears hypocritical to use a product that is detrimental to one's health to promote an activity that exemplifies a healthy and fit lifestyle (Crompton, 1993; Danylchuk, 2000; Wenner, 1993). Similarly, many people are opposed to alcohol sponsorship due to the same hypocrisy, even though there is documentation of the

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benefits of moderate consumption of alcohol (Chadwick & Goode, 1998; Zakhari, 1997), thereby making it more socially acceptable (L'Huillier & Hiron, 1997; McAllister, 1995). For both tobacco and alcohol opponents, there is an added concern that youth are often exposed to the sponsorship promotions, thereby providing a link between exposure and consumption. In contrast, sport event organizers relish this type of sponsorship because positive association with powerful brands brings attention to their event. As well, they argue that the banning of this type of sponsorship will lead to the loss of these events and the economic benefits derived. The tobacco and alcohol industries, similar to other sponsors, see value in associating themselves with sporting events for a multitude of reasons, such as their huge potential media exposure, potential for increased sales, brand awareness through signage and logo usage, brand positioning, and corporate responsibility.

Considerable research has been done on the tobacco issue as it relates to sport (e.g., Danylchuk, 2000; Dewhirst, 2004; Dewhirst & Sparks, 2003; Sparks, 1997; Turco, 1999; Wenner, 1993), especially in light of fairly recent tobacco legislation in many countries. In some countries (e.g., Canada, New Zealand, Norway), tobacco companies have discontinued sponsoring sporting events due to legislated restrictions. Some countries similarly regulate alcohol advertising and sponsorship in sport (e.g., United Kingdom) while others ban it (e.g., France). It is rare though to find sporting event organizers opposed to food and non-alcoholic beverage sponsors. Nonetheless, one recent example occurred when the Canterbury District Health Board, the largest corporate team in the 2006 Christchurch, New Zealand City-to-Surf Fun Run, withdrew its support from the event arguing that the sponsor Powerade was high in sugar, promoted obesity, and was unhealthy.

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While previous research has examined public opinion toward tobacco and alcohol sponsorship of sporting events (e.g., Danylchuk, 2000; [Kropp, Lavack, Holden, & Dalaks, 1999](#)), there is an absence of corresponding research for food and non-alcoholic beverage sponsorship. As such, the focus of this study is an investigation of the opinions of consumers towards the appropriateness of food and non-alcoholic beverage sponsorships of sporting events in relation to other products. Research of this nature is particularly timely in light of the current obesity issue considering that many food and beverage products, especially those high in calories, fat, salt, and sugar, contribute to the obesity problem.

The Obesity Issue

Obesity is currently considered the number one health concern in many countries and is viewed as a worldwide epidemic that is moving along at an unchecked speed (International Obesity Task Force, 2006). In fact, the term “globesity” has been coined to describe this worldwide epidemic (Dickson & Schofield, 2005). Recently, fat was labeled the “new tobacco” according to the Canadian Heart and Stroke Foundation (2006). A similar new catchphrase concerning age, given the state of baby boomer heart health, is “60 is the new 70”. Health officials have warned that obesity threatens to produce a crisis in terms of heart disease and stroke (Canadian Heart and Stroke Foundation, 2006). Furthermore, obesity is considered the number one risk factor for developing diabetes, now viewed as a bona fide epidemic (Hamilton, 2007) with diabetes deaths predicted to double in the next 10 years (WHO, 2006). These statistics are so alarming that the term “diabesity” has been used to refer to the epidemic.

The implications of obesity are particularly disturbing in regard to children as a growing body of research indicates children are becoming fatter and more sedentary at younger ages, leading to higher rates of cardiovascular illness, diabetes, and other complications related to obesity ([Roblin, 2007](#)). Consequently, it has also been suggested that in this generation of children, the parents will have a higher life expectancy than their children if the trend is not reversed (“Parents could outlive,” 2006). According to researchers’ analyses of medical reports on obesity from 1980 to 1995 and World Health Organization (WHO, 2000) data that tracked the growth rate of obesity in school-age populations in 25 countries and in preschoolers in 42 countries, the prevalence of obesity increased in almost all the countries for which data was available. Scientists have found children are being set up for a lifetime of health problems because of habits established at very young ages and even in utero.

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According to the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, this epidemic of pediatric obesity may become the most important and devastating public health challenge of the 21st century and is not just limited to North America (“Parents could outlive,” 2006). The percentages of overweight children are also expected to increase significantly in poorer countries in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America due to a variety of reasons, such as an infiltration of Western fast food outlets and habits. In India, for example, the “nouveau riche” spends more money than ever on eating out and buying processed food, while many children in contrast are dying of malnutrition (“India’s newly rich,” 2005). According to a report by the International Obesity Task Force in 2006, countries such as Mexico, Chile, Brazil, and Egypt have obesity rates comparable to fully industrialized countries. The report also estimated that, for example, one in five children in China will be overweight by 2010. In fact, the Canadian Medical Association has indicated that China now has the highest rate of pre-school obesity in the world. These children are being bombarded with marketing communication, like they are in the West, influencing them to eat all the wrong foods. Living in isolated areas is no longer a safeguard to securing quality of life or traditional eating habits. Children are being exposed to the world’s marketing power, most notably through advertising, and consequently, governments are being pressured to intervene with bans and policies (Grier, S. A., Mensinger, J., Huang, S. H., Kumanyika, S. K., & Stettler, N., 2007; [Mueller, 2007](#)). As well, health promotion advocates are arguing that the emphasis needs to be placed on promotion of healthy practices and prevention of obesity rather than on treatment. For example, measures are already being taken in some countries, such as banning trans fats, banning junk food sales in schools, incorporating taxes on unhealthy food and making healthy choices cheaper and more readily available, imposing tax breaks on children’s sports, legislating against direct advertising of junk food toward children, and coordinating a national heart health policy ([Roblin, 2007](#)). Even the WHO has been proactive in their initiatives. As part of the implementation of the WHO Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health (DPAH), and in preparation for the WHO European Region Ministerial Conference on Counteracting Obesity, WHO organized a Forum and Technical Meeting on the marketing of food and non-alcoholic beverages to children in

Oslo, Norway in May 2006. The results of the forum recommended that WHO:

(a) support national action to protect children by substantially reducing the volume and impact of commercial promotion of energy-dense, micronutrient-poor foods and beverages to children, (b) address issues such as cross-border television advertising and global promotional activities, and (c) consider the development of an international code on the marketing of food and beverages to children.” (“Marketing of food,” 2006, p. 1)

“ . . . should organizations seeking sponsorship align themselves with food and beverage sponsors that are not considered healthy? And at the other end of the spectrum, should fast food and soft drink sponsors agree to partner with sport organizations?”

The Obesity Link to Sponsorship of Sporting Events

As research has shown that tobacco, alcohol, and fast-food advertising positively affects consumption (Grier et al., 2007; Mueller, 2007; Saffer & Dave, 2006; Woodside, 1999), which is a motive of sponsors, then one might suggest that having sponsors linked to less healthy and nutritious food (e.g., fast food) and non-alcoholic beverages (e.g., soft drinks) may contribute to the obesity problem. A further question relates to whether the usage of these products is socially responsible from the perspective of both the sponsor and sponsee. In other words, should organizations seeking sponsorship align themselves with food and beverage sponsors that are not considered healthy? And at the other end of the spectrum, should fast food and soft drink sponsors agree to partner with sport organizations? The global popularity of fast food and soft drink sponsorship suggests that this is indeed a common occurrence.

This paradox relates to the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR), whereby organizations have responsibilities beyond profit maximization (Carroll, 1979, 1999; Moir, 2001), namely social and environmental responsibilities in business operations and in interactions with stakeholders (van Marrewijk, 2003). As evidenced in the research, the corporate motives for sponsorship have changed over time. Whereas the early motives were primarily philanthropic in nature, along with an image and awareness focus, emphasis has shifted to motives associated with more quantifiable business objectives, namely, sales and market share (Lough, Irwin, & Short, 2000). However, within the last decade, another shift has occurred where CSR has taken on greater importance (Dean,

2003). For many organizations, this has extended into the sponsorship realm, as evidenced by market research conducted by Sponsorium, which reported that there has been an increase in the attention paid by sponsors to CSR elements of their deals in the last two years (Sport Business, 2009).

This emphasis on CSR is also related to purchase intentions and loyalty. For example, in GlobeScan research done for Hewlett-Packett Canada Co. in 2007, 92% of survey respondents indicated that they are more likely to purchase products that come from companies that are socially and environmentally responsible. Further, 91% of respondents indicated that they prefer to work for these same types of companies. Similarly, Marin, Ruiz and Rubio (2009) found that CSR initiatives were linked to consumer loyalty because of a more positive evaluation as well as a stronger identification the consumer has with a company that chooses to engage in CSR practices. They noted that consumers might evaluate an organization based on consistency in which the entity supports the greater welfare of the community and society. Although they commented that criteria such as price, quality, and brand familiarity are most important to consumers, their findings suggest that CSR is less of a short-term profited minded strategy and more of a relationship that develops over time helping to create brand loyalty. These findings support the notion that companies must embrace CSR and make it part of their brand message.

Sport organizations are no exception and may similarly engage in CSR initiatives because of the belief that such efforts help foster perceived consumer value for their brand (Babiak & Wolfe, 2007). Though this study does not examine CSR from the perspective of organizations engaging in direct initiatives (e.g., charitable donations, cause-marketing activities), it does suggest that the “strategic choice” in sport sponsorship can “fit” within a CSR framework. The active choice of organizations to take a stand against forming relationships with organizations or other brands that may not be in congruence with their own values, is arguably a “strategic marketing perspective” that lends support to being socially responsible.

Purpose of the Study

In light of the proposed connection between the usage of food and beverage products as sponsors of sporting events, particularly those that are considered less healthy choices, and the obesity issue, coupled with the linkage to CSR, it was considered of interest to investigate this issue in more depth. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to examine the opinion of consumers toward the usage of food (healthy and non-

healthy choice) and beverage (non-alcoholic) products as sponsors of sporting events. University students, adults, and seniors comprised the sample. As tobacco and alcohol have been questioned in regard to their suitability as sponsors of sport, and in many countries restricted through legislation and bans, they were also under study along with other product categories. Specific research questions guided this study: Are food and beverage products appropriate sponsors for sporting events? Is there any distinction between the types of food and beverage products (i.e., healthy versus non-healthy) in regard to sponsorship? Is food and beverage viewed any differently than tobacco and alcohol as sponsors? Should government legislation control the involvement of these sponsors? Previous research has determined that alcohol sponsorship is viewed more favorably than tobacco sponsorship because alcohol consumption is perceived as being more socially acceptable than smoking (e.g., L'Huillier & Hirons, 1997; McAllister, 1995). Therefore, it seemed logical to predict a similar finding in this study. As food is a survival necessity (in contrast to tobacco and alcohol), it also seemed logical to suggest that food sponsorship would be viewed more favorably than alcohol and tobacco sponsorship.

A secondary purpose of this study was to determine the viewpoints of these consumers according to behavioral and demographic variables, specifically, smoking, drinking, and exercise habits, and gender, age, and educational background, respectively. As there is evidence of a causal relationship between advertising and consumption (Grier et al., 2007; Mueller, 2007; Saffer & Dave, 2006; Woodside, 1999), it was proposed that those who are smokers, drink alcohol, eat fast food and "junk" food, and consume less healthy non-alcoholic beverages might also have more positive attitudes toward these types of sponsorship. Also, it seemed logical that those who exercise regularly would be less likely to smoke (Faulkner, Bailey, & Mirwald, 1987; Kaczynski, Manske, Mannell, & Grewal, 2008) and might be more conscious of eating habits (Mueller, 2007), thereby having less positive attitudes toward these types of sponsorship than non-exercisers.

The benefits and detriments of tobacco, alcohol, and choice of food consumption have received a large amount of attention over recent decades in various forms of media and in many educational settings. Therefore, it was predicted that those individuals who have a higher educational background would have less favorable attitudes toward tobacco, alcohol, and less healthy foods as suitable sponsors for sporting events than those with a lower educational background.

Although research in Canada has shown that Canadians have started moving toward a more bal-

anced and healthy eating pattern, a trend started by the country's aging population and helped along by improved food labeling practices (NDP Group, 2006), other research has shown that rising obesity rates and declining levels of physical activity among baby boomers, the largest-ever generational cohort, threatens to produce a crisis in terms of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes (Canadian Heart and Stroke Foundation, 2006). In fact, as previously noted, it has been suggested that the current generation of children will not outlive their parents, for the first time ever. Therefore, it was predicted that younger participants in this study would have more favorable attitudes towards fast food and junk food sponsorship than older participants.

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Method

Research Method

This study utilized a mixed method explanatory sequential design that combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches in a sequential fashion with the collection of quantitative followed by qualitative data (Creswell, 2005; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006). The essence of this form of research is that both quantitative and qualitative methods, in combination, provide a better understanding of a research problem or issue than either method alone (Creswell, 2005). The explanatory sequential design is used to explain the quantitative data in more depth with qualitative data (Creswell, 2005). Hence, there were two phases to the study. The first phase involved a quantitative approach consisting of a two-part written survey. The purpose of the survey was to attain the perceptions of a diverse group of participants regarding the appropriateness of various forms of sport sponsorship and to determine whether there were any differences according to the demographics of gender, age, educational background, as well as smoking, eating, and exercise habits. The first part of the written survey contained three questions. The first question asked the participants to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1" (strongly disagree) to "5" (strongly agree) their level of agreement towards various categories of sport sponsorship, namely tobacco, alcohol (beer, liquor, wine), food (commonly referred to as "fast food" and non-fast food), and non-alcoholic beverages (soft drink/cola, juice, tea/coffee, sport drink, water). They were also asked whether government should make laws to prevent certain forms of sponsorship (i.e., alcohol, fast food and

snack, soft drink). A second question was open-ended and requested the participants to provide reasons for their differences in opinion among tobacco, alcohol, food, and non-alcoholic beverage sponsors, as well as among the various forms of alcohol (i.e., beer, wine, and liquor), food (i.e., healthy and less healthy foods), and non-alcoholic beverages (i.e., soft drinks, juice, tee/coffee, sport drinks, water). A third question contained a list of 20 possible sporting event sponsors and asked the participants to rate the three most appropriate and three least appropriate ones. The sponsors contained in this list were not just limited to tobacco, alcohol, food, and non-alcoholic beverages. For example, financial institutions (e.g., bank, lending institution) and telecommunication companies (e.g., cell phone, telephone) were among the possible event sponsors from which respondents could choose. The second part of the survey contained some general demographic questions concerning gender, age, and educational background, as well as smoking, eating, and exercise habits.

A written survey was deemed appropriate for this study because it has the ability to capture the perceptions of a large and diverse group of participants. However, it is limiting from the perspective that participants may not be able to elaborate on their responses. Therefore, it was believed that a more open-ended and concentrated approach involving a diverse group of participants could enrich the study and help explain or build upon initial quantitative results. Consequently, the second phase of the study utilized a qualitative focus group approach. Its purpose was to elaborate on the perceptions of various forms of sponsorship, but to also determine the thought process involved when making decisions about sponsorship. Two one-hour focus group sessions of six participants per group were conducted. Four questions formed the basis of the discussion. The first question asked the participants to reflect how they would make a decision on the type of sponsor if they were in charge of soliciting sponsorship for a sporting event. The second question asked them on what basis they would make a decision about the suitability of sponsors for a sporting event. The third question asked their opinion about appropriate and inappropriate sponsors. The final question asked whether government should become involved in legislation regarding types of sponsorship.

Participants

Written survey. University students (varsity and non-varsity athletes), fitness club members, and older adults at a center for activity and aging ($N = 253$) were administered the written survey. All participants completed the survey for a response rate of 100%.

Focus groups. There were two focus groups consisting of six participants in each group ($N = 12$) and included a variety of constituents—students (philosophy, sport marketing), professors (sport nutrition, health promotion, and ethics experts), coaches, athlete, personal trainer, hospital administrator, primary care and sport medicine physician, event coordinator, marketing coordinator, and sponsor.

Procedures

Written survey. The survey instrument was pilot tested with a Kinesiology sport management graduate class to verify clarity and time for completion. In addition to the graduate students, a panel of experts consisting of three sport management faculty members provided suggestions for modification to the survey instrument. Formal approval to distribute the written surveys was then sought from the university's Director of Athletics and Recreation, the Director of the Canadian Centre for Activity and Aging, two professors in the School of Kinesiology, and the owner of a local fitness club.

Intercollegiate athletes were asked to complete the survey at the end of a practice. Similarly, senior level undergraduate Kinesiology students were asked to complete the survey at the end of a class. Participants at the activity and aging centre and local fitness club were asked to complete the survey at the completion of their exercise workout.

Focus groups. A list of potential focus group participants was created by the researchers. It was deemed appropriate to include a variety of constituents who could potentially provide a diversity of opinions. Therefore, the participants were purposely selected based on their expertise. They included university students, athletes, coaches, professors with specific expertise (i.e., health, ethics, and nutrition), an event coordinator, a marketing coordinator, and health care professionals (physician and hospital administrator). These individuals were e-mailed a letter of invitation to participate in the focus group. The letter of invitation included the questions that would be discussed at the focus group session in order to provide them with an opportunity to prepare their responses. Participants were told in the letter of invitation and at the focus group session that confidentiality would be guaranteed and that no names would be ascribed to the feedback. The focus group sessions were tape-recorded and detailed notes were taken by the research team.

Data Analyses

Written survey data were assessed for frequencies, percentages, and means and standard deviations. Factorial analyses of variance (ANOVA) and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were employed to test the

differences in opinion concerning the tobacco, alcohol, food, and non-alcoholic beverage sponsorship between groups of subjects differentiated according to the demographic and behavioral variables. Focus group information was analysed according to frequency, comparison, and emanating themes.

Results

Phase One: Written Survey

Participant profile. A total of 253 people completed the survey instrument. The respondents included varsity athletes (20.2%), Kinesiology students (27.7%), sport marketing students (17.8%), seniors (22.9%) and members of a fitness club (11.5%). The majority of respondents were female (59.7%) and younger than 25 years (61.3%). The remaining individuals ranged in age from 26-55 years (13.4%) to over 56 (25.3%). The majority of respondents were university educated. Specifically, 14.2% had completed a graduate degree, 28% an undergraduate degree, and 32% were in the process of completing a degree.

Participants were also asked to provide information about their consumption of alcohol and fast food, as well as their exercise and smoking behaviors. The drinking habits varied widely from never (7%) to a few times per year (12%), a few times per month (41%), a few times per week (31%), and daily (8%). Only 10% reported that they never eat fast food, whereas others indicated a few times per year (43.9%), a few times per month (39.1%), and a few times per week (5.9%). The majority of respondents were exercisers. Forty-six percent indicated they exercise a few times per week and 45% reported that they exercise daily (44.7%). Only 2% exercised a few times per year and 5% a few times per month. The vast majority of respondents were non-smokers (89.7%).

Consumer opinion of sponsorship. Table 1 depicts the most appropriate forms of sponsorship for sport amongst food, non-alcoholic and alcoholic beverage, and tobacco according to the five-point Likert scale. Tukey's HSD indicated that water companies ($M = 4.29$), sport drink companies ($M = 4.27$), healthy snack companies ($M = 4.22$) and juice companies ($M = 4.08$) were the most appropriate forms of sponsorship. Tobacco companies ($M = 1.79$) were found to be the least appropriate sponsor for sport. Respondents indicated that they were not in favour of government making laws to prevent fast food companies ($M = 2.35$), alcohol companies ($M = 2.30$), and soft drink companies ($M = 2.15$) from sponsoring sporting events.

Another survey question contained a list of 20 possible sporting event sponsors and asked the participants to rate the three most appropriate and three least

Table 1.
Means and Standard Deviations of Participants' Opinions of Sport Sponsors

Type	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Water Company	4.29	.96
Sport Drinks	4.27	.93
Healthy Snacks	4.22	.83
Juice	4.08	.79
Coffee/Tea	3.40	1.01
Soft Drink	3.28	1.11
Beer	3.18	1.27
Fast Food	3.01	1.21
Junk Food	2.95	1.17
Liquor	2.91	1.26
Wine	2.81	1.16
Tobacco	1.79	1.06

appropriate ones. As previously mentioned, the sponsors contained in this list were not delimited to tobacco, alcohol, food, and non-alcoholic beverages (see Tables 2 and 3). The list was coded accordingly (i.e., 1 = appropriate, 2 = not appropriate, and 3 = not chosen). Frequencies were produced according to the respondents' selections of most appropriate and least appropriate sport event sponsors, thus enabling a valid percentage for each of the 20 items on the list to be calculated for the entire sample. Sporting goods companies (56.5%) and sport drink and water companies (52.6%) stood out to be the most appropriate sponsors. The next most appropriate sponsors were food companies (not fast food-related) (23.7%) and financial institutions (18.6%). Tobacco stood out to be the least appropriate sponsor (59.7%) followed by alcohol (28.5%) and fast food (23.3%).

Participants were asked to provide reasons for their differences in opinion among tobacco and the various forms of alcohol (i.e., beer, wine, and liquor), food (i.e., healthy and less healthy foods), and non-alcoholic beverages (i.e., soft drinks, juice, tea/coffee, sport drinks, water). In total, 142 out of 253 participants completed this question (56.1%).

The majority of respondents commented that tobacco companies do not belong as sponsors for sporting events (66%), and cited several reasons, such as tobacco's harmful effects on people's health (i.e., causes lung and tongue cancer, its strong addictive nature). The negative impact that smoking has on athletes (i.e., impedes training of athletes, decreases athletic performance) was also mentioned. Respondents noted the harmful effects of second-hand smoke, and the general health hazard it presents to everyone.

Table 2.
Participants' Opinions of Most Appropriate Sponsors

Type	Frequency	Valid Percentage (%)
Sporting Goods Company	143	56.5
Sport Drink and Water Company	133	52.6
Other Food Company Not Consider Fast Food (i.e., cereal, yogurt)	60	23.7
Financial Institution	47	18.6
Local Small Business	31	12.3
Transportation Company	21	8.3
Beer Company	18	7.1
Beverage Company (i.e., soft drink, juice, tea)	16	6.3
Electronics Company	16	6.3
Clothing or Shoe Company Not Sport Related (i.e., jeans)	12	4.7
Automobile Company	12	4.7
Tele-communication Company (i.e., cell, telephone)	11	3.6
Snack Company (i.e., potato chips, chocolate bars)	9	3.6
Home Related Company (i.e., paint, building supply)	6	2.4
Cosmetic Company	5	2.0
Fast Food Company (i.e., burger, pizza)	5	2.0
Service/Utility Company (i.e., insurance, law, medical)	4	1.6
Wine	1	.4
Liquor	1	.4
Tobacco	1	.4

Some participants indicated that alcohol companies should also not be allowed to sponsor sporting events (11%). Reasons for excluding alcohol companies included the detrimental effect on the body, the potential hindrance to athletic performance, and problems with crowd behavior during an event. However, the same number of respondents (11%) felt that alcohol companies should be allowed to sponsor sporting events. These respondents cited reasons such as alcohol being a part of the social aspect of sport, and that it is acceptable for athletes to enjoy a drink after the event. Further, some commented that alcohol is not harmful in small quantities (unlike tobacco's harmful effects), and can even be healthy.

A number of respondents (14%) noted that any sponsor is acceptable for a sporting event, and cited reasons such as it is the consumer's responsibility to make appropriate choices, and that society should be pro-choice. Others (8.5%) responded that the athletes ultimately benefit from the support and that they are in need of donor money for the event to take place. In total, 10 respondents (7%) commented that fast food

companies do not belong as a sponsor for sporting events, because fast food is unhealthy and a poor match to sport's healthy message. In contrast, seven respondents (4.9%) commented that healthy food companies make good sport sponsors and are most appropriate because they promote a positive association between health and sport. One respondent indicated that coffee is not an appropriate sponsor for sporting events because people do not tend to drink coffee when they watch live sports.

Effect of consumption variables. A MANOVA was performed to identify the extent to which any variation was present between the respondent opinions of alcohol companies' sport sponsorship involvement and their consumption behaviour of alcohol. A significant multivariate effect for sponsorship of alcohol was found, Pillai's Trace = .124; $F(12,744) = 2.666$, $p < .01$, with 12.2% of the variance accounted for by consumption behaviour. According to Levene's test, there were significant differences between consumers of beer and liquor beverages, such that the greater the consumption patterns, the more respondents were in

Table 3.
Participants' Opinions of Least Appropriate Sponsors

Type	Frequency	Valid Percentage (%)
Tobacco	151	59.7
Liquor	72	28.5
Fast Food Company (i.e., burger, pizza)	59	23.3
Wine	41	16.2
Beer	38	15.0
Cosmetic Company	30	11.9
Snack Food (i.e., potato chips, chocolate bar)	26	10.3
Service Utility (i.e., insurance, law, medical)	17	16.7
Home Related Company (i.e., paint, building supply)	16	6.3
Clothing or Shoe Company Not Related to Sport (i.e., jeans)	9	3.6
Local Small Business	8	3.2
Automobile Company	7	2.8
Financial Institution	4	1.6
Transportation Company	4	1.6
Electronics Company	4	1.6
Telecommunication Company (i.e., cell, telephone)	3	1.2
Food Not Considered Fast Food (i.e., cereal, yogurt)	3	1.2
Beverage Company (i.e., soft drink, juice, tea)	3	1.2
Soft Drink and Water Company	1	.4
Sporting Goods Company	1	.4

favour of beer and liquor companies sponsoring sporting events ($p < .05$). No significant differences were found for the opinions of wine companies and consumption patterns of the respondents. Another MANOVA also indicated a significant effect for consumption of fast food, Pillai's Trace = .122; $F(8, 492) = 3.651$, $p < .01$, with 11% of the variance accounted for by consumption behaviour. Findings replicated that of alcohol whereby the more the respondent consumed fast food, the more appropriate they felt fast food companies would be in sponsoring sport ($p < .05$). As the majority of participants in the study were regular exercisers (90%) and non-smokers (90%), and hence no appropriately sized groups to make within group comparisons, MANOVAs were not conducted.

Effect of demographic variables. Univariate tests demonstrated significant differences between groups and their opinions of sport sponsorship. In particular, men responded that tobacco $F(1, 251) = 8.22$, $p < .05$; beer $F(1, 251) = 15.11$, $p < .05$; soft drink $F(1, 251) = 8.99$, $p < .05$; and fast food companies $F(1, 251) = 11.46$, $p < .05$, were more appropriate sponsors of sport than women. Respondents under the age of 40

indicated that beer $F(3, 249) = 21.19$, $p < .05$; liquor $F(3, 249) = 20.66$, $p < .05$; and fast food companies $F(3, 249) = 4.51$, $p < .05$, were more appropriate sponsors of sport than respondents over 40 years old. Overall, females and older participants tended to have less favorable attitudes toward the various forms of sponsorship than males and younger participants, respectively. Finally, the higher the educational level, the less favorable the attitude toward the various forms of sponsorship.

Phase Two: Qualitative Approach

Two separate focus groups were conducted with six participants in each group ($N = 12$).

Deciding on sponsors. In regard to how one would make a decision on sponsors for an event, the first focus group believed that having an understanding of a company's financial capacity for sponsorship is a necessary consideration. As well, it was deemed important to consider the "match" or "fit" of the company with the sport event itself. This group suggested that consideration of the potential sponsoring company's ethics and beliefs is important in creating a win-win relationship for the athletes, the sponsor, and the event host.

Further consideration should be given to the potential sponsoring company's image in terms of its appropriateness as a sponsor.

The second focus group also mentioned the role that personal ethics and the potential sponsoring company's business ethics play in decision making. They suggested that researching the parent corporation of the potential sponsor was an important consideration that would impact their decision. Hence, the overall values, morals, goals, and purpose of the potential sponsor, as well as their treatment of employees, would constitute factors in their decision. This group discussed whether a healthy message could be delivered to the audience and the athletes from this sponsor.

Suitability of sponsors. The first focus group commented on whether or not there was an apparent sport connection with the sponsoring company. If there was no such connection, the group discussed whether the sponsoring company could indeed "create" a connection to the event itself so that it would be a suitable sponsor. The notion that there is a recent convergence of sport and entertainment was noted, with the idea that an entertainment sponsor can now be good for the sporting brand. There was admission that the type of event (i.e., pro versus university/college or high school) is typically related to the type of audience in attendance and is cause for concern due to factors such as legal drinking age. This group felt strongly that the influence on the younger audience is important to consider when examining the suitability of the sponsoring company. As well, the idea that a suitable sponsor would promote a healthy message through celebration of the body and activity was important. Again, this group suggested that the sponsor should have a positive image, and ideally be affiliated with sport.

The second focus group commented that the degree of harm needed to be assessed because there are many gray areas that exist when evaluating suitability. Discussion centered on larger societal issues of how we are currently living our lives, and whether the sponsoring company would be promoting a positive and healthy message. The notion of the company's corporate image, and the message they wished to send to the audience was an important factor in determining suitability for this group. The issue of suitability to the athlete was also an important part of the discussion. This group felt that athletes should eat well and fuel their body properly. Ideally then, the group believed that companies promoting a similar message and that were grounded in good research proving the positive effects their product could have on an athlete, would be the most suitable form of sponsor for sport.

Appropriate and inappropriate sponsors. The first focus group believed that soft drink companies are

inappropriate sponsors for sporting events in the educational environment, specifically elementary and high schools. As well, tobacco and alcohol companies were considered inappropriate sponsors in this same environment. This group also believed that any company sending a negative message, either through their product or their corporate behaviour (e.g., treatment of employees), were not suitable candidates for sponsoring sporting events.

The second focus group indicated that it was inappropriate for any company with questionable treatment of employees to sponsor sport. An example of an appropriate sport sponsor was Health Canada. As well, companies with messages grounded in good research stating that the product is a healthy choice would also be appropriate for sponsoring sport. Other appropriate sponsors included fitness clubs and large companies, such as technology, manufacturing, and transportation companies.

Government legislation. Opinions were mixed in the first focus group as to whether government should become involved in legislating the type of sponsor for sporting events. It was suggested, however, that if government is to become involved, then it should begin by focusing on preventing the amount of smoking in movies and television through product placement legislation.

The second focus group suggested that drastic change is needed to curb the direction in which our society is currently going. There was a sentiment that research needs to be clearer before any legislation by government occurs, as there is a large degree of variability. For example, there is continual discrepancy surrounding foods that are considered healthy and non-healthy. It was noted that too many policies are problematic because it would result in a feeling of "big brother is watching". However, this group did concur that if policy made a positive difference and research supported the decision to make laws governing companies that could sponsor sport, they would be in favour of some degree of legislation provided it would not eliminate pro-choice. The group was supportive of placing a tax on junk food and controlling pricing such that healthy food would be less expensive.

Discussion

Overall, attitudes toward food and non-alcoholic beverage sponsorships of sporting events were more favorable than alcohol sponsorships, followed by tobacco sponsorships. These findings confirm previous research that alcohol sponsorship is viewed more favorably than tobacco sponsorship because alcohol consumption is perceived as being more socially acceptable than smoking (e.g., L'Huillier & Hirons,

1997; McAllister, 1995). Moreover, there is support for the contention that food and non-alcoholic beverages provide a better fit with sport sponsorship than alcohol and tobacco. It appears logical that food sponsorship would be viewed more favorably than alcohol and tobacco sponsorship because food is a basic survival necessity, in contrast to tobacco and alcohol. Hence, the findings were not particularly surprising.

Attitudes towards food and non-alcoholic beverage products that are perceived to be healthy (e.g., cereal and energy bars, sport drinks, water, juice) were more favorable than those perceived to be less healthy (e.g., hamburger, pizza, chocolate bars, potato chips, soft drinks). In spite of the appearance that people possess the knowledge to distinguish between healthy and less healthy choices, the current obesity statistics lead one to wonder whether this knowledge is having any effect. Further ongoing public education appears to be warranted. The findings also support the notion that greater emphasis needs to be placed on the prevention of obesity rather than its treatment. One might then suggest that marketing communication vehicles, such as advertising, might incorporate an educational component to assist with this initiative.

When additional sponsor types were listed as potential sponsors, respondents still selected those that had a link to sport as the most appropriate. This finding supports the contention that “fit” is a key factor when selecting a sponsor. Furthermore, it relates to van de Ven’s (2008) contention that in order to achieve certain marketing goals, organizations should select an issue that is a close fit with their own core values and competencies. For sporting organizations, it would make some sense to deal with issues related to health and well being or rather products and services to actually promote values similar to their own.

Although legislation exists in some countries that control tobacco and alcohol sponsorship of sporting events, there is an absence of such legislation for food and non-alcoholic beverages in Canada and the United States. Participants of the written survey were not in favor of government laws to prevent alcohol and less healthy food and beverage companies (i.e., fast food, soft drink) from sponsoring sporting events, whereas the focus group participants had mixed opinions. Many of these participants were quite supportive of policies and further research into the harmful effects of various foods and beverages.

It was also deemed important to examine the public opinions according to their habits and demographics. Both smokers and non-smokers agreed that tobacco companies are not appropriate sponsors for sporting events. This finding suggests that public education surrounding the harmful effects of tobacco have indeed

been successful. Alcohol consumers had more favorable attitudes toward alcohol sponsorship of sporting events than non-consumers. Furthermore, the greater the consumption habits, the more favorable the attitudes. The same held true for fast food consumers. That is, the greater the consumption habits, the more favorable the attitudes toward this type of sponsorship. These findings are again not particularly surprising if one considers that abstinence from certain products (e.g., alcohol) for some people may be related to their opinions about the potential negative effects.

Females and older participants tended to have less favorable attitudes towards the various forms of sponsorship than males and younger participants, respectively. As well, the higher the educational level, the less favorable the attitudes towards the various forms of sponsorship. With the exception of gender where there was no specific rationale to support any differences, these findings are congruent with the researchers’ predictions.

“The participants of this study suggested that sport event organizers and marketers should pay close attention to the type and fit of their sponsors, especially in light of the health issues associated with tobacco, alcohol, and fast food.”

Implications and Limitations

The participants of this study suggested that sport event organizers and marketers should pay close attention to the type and fit of their sponsors, especially in light of the health issues associated with tobacco, alcohol, and fast food. Admittedly, the sample chosen for this study was more highly educated and more physically active than the general population, and not necessarily representative of sport fans/spectators.

Additionally, the sample consisted exclusively of Canadian citizens. Therefore, generalizing these findings broadly is not warranted. Significant differences in opinions may be found if Canadian or American sports fans comprised the sample. Moreover, previous research has most closely linked purchase intention resulting from sport sponsorship with highly identified fans, rather than the general public.

While sponsorship support to run an event, league, or team is critical to their financial success, event organizers should carefully consider assessing the potential degree of harm related to specific types of sponsorship. Realistically, however, one might argue that it is difficult for event organizers and sport marketers to disassociate themselves from less “appropriate” sponsors that are willing to contribute significant sponsorship support. Nonetheless, those who are looking to secure sponsorships and send the proper mes-

sage would demonstrate a level of social responsibility by careful consideration.

Given the current obesity issue especially, sport organizations need to examine their social responsibility in the selection of sponsors. As noted earlier, CSR is an effective tool for corporations to enhance their reputation and build brand image and customer loyalty, as well as to positively influence society (Lewis, 2003). Therefore, sport organizations should align their messages and initiatives with types of sponsoring products or services that promote the value of health. In light of the obesity concerns, sport organizations/sponsees might enhance the marketability of their organization or event in their communities if they take a stance against what they feel is perhaps not the “best” choice, thus demonstrating a mindset of CSR. This could foreseeably translate into the elimination of fast food and soft drink beverages from the sponsorship equation.

From the perspective of the sponsor, they could leverage their association with the sponsee/sport organization and promote how their products/services do support healthy initiatives reflected in the latent value of sport. Most fast food companies, such as McDonald’s and Wendy’s, have already adopted this tactic through their healthy choice menus, thereby demonstrating a level of social responsibility. While greater corporate responsibility from the marketer in offering healthier products, promoting them via media to the appropriate age audience with messages that contain balanced nutritional information are positive measures, consumers must also take responsibility in learning more about diet and nutrition, and making healthier choices.

It is evident that sport event organizers/sponsees and sponsors have demonstrated a social responsibility in recent years in regard to other issues, such as tobacco and the environment. With tobacco, measures have occurred through restrictions and government legislation; with environmental concerns, numerous greening initiatives have been developed. Therefore, it seems plausible to suggest that similar efforts within the sponsorship realm should be made to address the challenging issue of obesity.

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