



# Affective response to gambling promotions during televised sport: A qualitative analysis<sup>☆</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

Gambling promotions extensively punctuate contemporary televised sport broadcasts and concerns have been raised about their potential impacts on vulnerable groups. Research suggests advertising can shape individuals' emotions, or affect, towards a product/brand and can subsequently influence purchasing decisions. Consequently, understanding how promotion of gambling influences sport viewers is an important although sparsely addressed area of research. This paper presents exploratory research on affective responses towards gambling promotions displayed during televised sport. Eight online focus groups were conducted with a sample of regular sports viewers in Queensland, Australia. Participants were exposed to a variety of gambling promotions used in National Rugby League match telecasts. Utilising adaptive theory, themes reflecting affective responses to each promotional technique were identified. A range of positive and negative affective responses were identified including arousal, joy, anger and worry. A conceptual model representing emergent affective response categories, message delivery techniques and moderating variables is proposed to inform a broader future research agenda examining how gambling promotions during televised sport influence affective response and concomitant gambling intention.

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## 1. Introduction and background

Sport holds a privileged position within society, being “eulogised by educators, philanthropists and social reformers, appropriated by politicians and promoted by the modern state” (Hargreaves, 1986, p. 1). Consequently, marketers of potentially harmful products such as tobacco, alcohol and junk food have long turned to sport to target impressionable audiences and to leverage off sport's positive image (Howard & Crompton, 1995). The effectiveness of marketing harmful products through sport has triggered significant regulatory reform, particularly for tobacco marketing, although other harmful products face fewer restrictions, including gambling. Today, sport organisations are increasingly partnering with

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gambling companies to tap into lucrative revenues from sponsorship, advertising and product fees (Deloitte, 2012; Lamont, Hing, & Gainsbury, 2011). Consequently, many sporting events and broadcasts are now replete with gambling promotions and advertisements. Coinciding with this intensification of gambling promotions during sporting fixtures have been increases in both sports betting participation and associated gambling problems. It is therefore important to understand how consumers respond to gambling marketing during sporting events to inform research into causal pathways between this marketing and gambling behaviour and problem gambling.

Gambling is a significant public health issue, mainly because of its potential to lead to problem gambling. Problem gambling is characterised by difficulties in limiting money and/or time spent on gambling, which leads to adverse consequences for the gambler, others, or for the community (Neal, Delfabbro, & O'Neil, 2005). Prevalence studies conducted in 202 jurisdictions which measured the rate of problem gambling in the adult population indicate that between 0.5% and 7.6% of the adult population experienced a severe gambling problem in the preceding 12 months. Further, each problem gambler is thought to negatively affect another ten people (Productivity Commission, 2010). Thus, the financial, relationship, health, vocational, and legal consequences of problem gambling lead to substantial economic and social costs, estimated at \$4.7 billion per annum in Australia (Productivity Commission, 2010). The marketing of gambling through sport is thought to increase problem gambling, particularly in relation to sports betting, although causation has not been established (Hing, Lamont, Vitartas, & Fink, 2014; Lamont et al., 2011; Thomas, Lewis, McLeod, & Haycock, 2012).

Notwithstanding jurisdictional variance in the legality of sports betting and promotion of gambling through sport broadcasts (e.g., Danson, 2010), in countries including Australia, sports betting participation has risen markedly, in contrast to declining participation in other gambling forms (Hing, Gainsbury, et al., 2014). Australian sports betting expenditure doubled between 2010 and 2011 (Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform [JSCGR], 2011), with 13% annual growth expected in future years (Deloitte, 2012). This rise in sports betting and related gambling problems may be partly attributable to prolific sports-embedded advertisements that promote easily accessible wagering sites through Internet and mobile devices (Hing, Gainsbury, et al., 2014). Indeed, sports betting now accounts for 53% of the global online gambling market (H2 Gambling Capital, 2013).

The concomitant increase in sports betting participation and sports betting problems with the proliferation of gambling promotions during sport has prompted a community backlash. Governments, researchers and community groups have voiced concerns about potential impacts on sport audiences, particularly for vulnerable groups including children, youth and problem gamblers (JSCGR, 2011; Lamont et al., 2011). In Australia, gambling promotion is most heavily embedded in the two dominant professional sport leagues: the National Rugby League (NRL) and Australian Football League (AFL). Milner, Hing, Vitartas, and Lamont (2013) found that gambling promotions constituted 2.5% of total broadcast time during sampled NRL match broadcasts and were often embedded within actual telecasts, as well as during commercial breaks. Similar results were found by Thomas, Lewis, Duong, and McLeod (2012) in relation to live and broadcast AFL matches. Consequently, sports viewers are forcibly exposed to gambling promotions. While this exposure risks increasing problem gambling amongst adults, it may normalise gambling amongst children and adolescents, thereby increasing problem gambling in the future (Hing, Vitartas, Lamont, & Fink, 2014).

This issue is also of considerable relevance to sports administrators. While sport organisations face pressure to prioritise economic and legal obligations in their fiduciary duties, they also have a responsibility to consider negative impacts of their practices on society more broadly. Indeed, a core argument of corporate social responsibility (CSR) proponents is that organisations have an obligation to safeguard and improve the welfare of society as a whole (Redmond, 2006). Lamont et al. (2011) argue that “Promotion of gambling products through sport sponsorship raises a host of questions relating to CSR. Ethical considerations of the potential negative impacts of gambling advertisements, particularly amongst vulnerable populations, are especially relevant” (p. 251). Research on the impacts of gambling advertising through sport is therefore warranted to assist sports administrators in making informed strategic decisions.

Little is currently known about how sports viewers respond to gambling promotions during sporting events, including those embedded in widely viewed sports broadcasts. While previous studies have audited these promotions (Milner et al., 2013; Thomas, Lewis, Duong, et al., 2012), documented related community attitudes (Thomas, Lewis, McLeod, et al., 2012), and examined associations between exposure to this marketing and gambling and problem gambling (Hing, Lamont, et al., 2014; Hing, Vitartas et al., 2014), none have thoroughly investigated emotional responses amongst viewers. As we discuss below, examining emotional responses to these promotions is important, because emotional responses to stimuli such as advertising are thought to play a pivotal role in shaping purchase intentions. This study therefore aimed to explore sport viewers' affective responses to gambling promotions during televised sport and identify attributes of promotional messages potentially influencing these responses. The results inform a conceptual model which may underpin future investigations on the influence of gambling promotions on sport viewers, to inform public health and policy initiatives to minimise any associated harm.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Affect

Affect is a psychological construct encompassing individuals' experiences of emotion resulting from interaction with stimuli (Harmon-Jones, Gable, & Price, 2013). It is thus a useful construct to understand how promotional messages influence

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