

Sports betting and advertising

Nerilee Hing



This paper reviews the growth of sports betting and the accompanying proliferation of sports betting advertising, with particular focus on its integration into sporting events and broadcasts. It draws on lessons from the advertising of other potentially harmful products, and synthesises research into gambling advertising and the promotion of sports betting.

KEY MESSAGES

- Sports betting has grown substantially and is emerging as a significant contributor to problem gambling, especially among younger adult males.
- There is considerable community opposition to the prolific promotion of gambling through sport, especially related to potential negative impacts for children, adolescents, young men and problem gamblers.
- Research into the advertising of other harmful products suggests advertising increases uptake and consumption, especially in the adolescent starter market.
- Research into sports betting advertising suggests it can shape gambling attitudes, intentions and behaviours, and impacts most negatively on existing problem gamblers and sports bettors.

Sports betting is the only gambling form for which participation rates have increased during the last decade (Gainsbury et al., 2014). Approximately one in seven (13%) adult Australians now gambles on sport (Hing, Gainsbury et al., 2014). Expenditure doubled between 2005–06 and 2011–12, with continued growth predicted (Deloitte, 2012; Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform [JSCGR], 2011).

This growth has been accompanied by extensive promotion of sports betting during live and televised sport, as well as through newer media such as the Internet, mobile platforms and social media. Concerns about the potential negative impacts of this advertising have been widely voiced, especially for children, adolescents, young men and problem gamblers.

The growth of sports betting in Australia

- The growth of sports betting can be partly attributed to the growth of online gambling.
- Half of all sports betting is now conducted online.
- Many commercial arrangements now exist between sporting entities (events, clubs, stadiums, etc.) and bookmakers.
- These arrangements have increased sports betting marketing and contributed to its growth.

Expansion of Internet gambling has driven the recent growth of sports betting, which comprises 53% of the international online gambling market (H2 Gambling Capital, 2013). Australians now have convenient, 24/7 and mobile access to betting websites, meaning they can gamble from nearly any time and place. Sporting events are packaged with Internet gambling, and bettors can readily

compare wagering products for an increasing array of Australian and international sporting events (JSCGR, 2011). Australians can bet online on dozens of different sports with the numerous sports betting operators licensed in Australia or with offshore wagering sites illegally providing these services to Australians.

These factors are shifting betting away from land-based outlets, with at least half of sports betting now conducted online (Hing, Vitartas, & Lamont, 2014; JSCGR, 2013). Key advantages of the online mode are convenience, price, comfort, and the greater number of betting options available (Hing, Gainsbury et al., 2014).

A 2008 Australian High Court decision provided further impetus to the expansion of sports betting. It removed restrictions preventing bookmakers licensed in one jurisdiction from advertising in another. This change prompted the entry of corporate bookmakers into the Australian sports betting market to capitalise on Australians' penchant for both gambling and sport.

Many sporting events, teams and stadiums have now entered into commercial marketing arrangements with these corporate bookmakers (Lamont, Hing, & Gainsbury, 2011). This practice is most prominent in the two largest Australian sports, the National Rugby League (NRL) and Australian Football League (AFL). These sports attract about half of all sports betting in Australia, with a doubling of turnover expected within five years from \$750 million to \$1.5 billion on the NRL and from \$900 million to \$1.8 billion for AFL (Deloitte, 2012). Because these codes receive marketing and product fees based on betting revenues, sporting bodies are also motivated to maintain and promote a competitive, innovative wagering product (Deloitte, 2012).

The growth of sports betting advertising and promotion

- Sports betting advertising has proliferated, using a wide range of media and promotional techniques.
- Sport is now a marketing platform for sports betting operators, with concerns that this encourages gambling uptake, especially among youth and young adult males.

Marketing is critical for sports betting operators to compensate for intense competition, limited price elasticity and little product differentiation (Nettleton, 2013). Promotional techniques used include broadcast advertising on TV and radio, online pop-ups on Internet sites, celebrity brand ambassadors, inducements, direct and third party email and SMS, and loyalty programs (Gambling Compliance, 2013). Sponsorship and promotions have also been embedded into sporting fixtures, as discussed later. Operators provide mobile sports betting apps, stream live coverage of sporting events, and promote sports betting through smartphones and email, including improved odds, money back guarantees, betting tips, offers of credit and bonuses including “free” bets and deposits (Hing, Cherney, Blaszczynski, Gainsbury, & Lubman, 2014). The aim is to recruit, register and retain active customers (Weibe, 2008).

The proliferation of sports betting advertising in Australia

- In 2012, 3,069 individual sports betting advertisements were relayed over all forms of media, not including social media communications.
- These included 528 individual sports betting advertisements, which were collectively played over 20,000 times on free-to-air TV, and more frequently on pay TV.
- The value of sports betting advertising on television quadrupled between 2010 and 2012.

Source: Ebiquity (2012).

The saturation of sports betting advertising has prompted controversy and concern. Sport is now used as a marketing platform to deploy huge investments of money by sports betting operators to recruit and retain customers through advertising, merchandising and celebrity endorsements that incorporate sport products, images, usages and icons (Dyall, Tse, & Kingi, 2007; McMullan, 2011; Monaghan, Derevensky, & Sklar, 2008). Particular concerns are that this marketing can encourage consumers to consider gambling as sport, and that young people are learning about gambling through sport programming and merchandising. This can normalise and legitimise gambling uptake at a young age (Dyall et al., 2007; McMullan, 2011; Monaghan et al., 2008).

The clear target market for most sports betting advertising is young adult males. Strategies include using celebrity role models, attractive female presenters and models, and the repositioning of sports betting as an activity for successful, professional young men (Milner, Hing, Vitartas, & Lamont, 2013). Advertising attempts to appeal to this market through engaging notions of masculinity, team loyalty and sporting knowledge (Thomas, Lewis, McLeod, & Haycock, 2012).

However, it is the embedding of sports betting promotions into live and televised sport that has attracted most controversy in Australia. This practice has been fuelled by the escalation of sport sponsorships and advertising rights purchased by sports betting operators.

Sports betting promotions embedded into live and televised sport

- Sports betting advertising and promotions have proliferated during televised sport.
- Embedded sports betting promotions during sports broadcasts mean they cannot be avoided while watching a game.

Since 2009, sports betting promotions have been increasingly embedded into live and televised sporting events. Promotional techniques have included fixed advertising signage, dynamic advertising such as rotating and electronic banners, commercial break advertising, team sponsorship and integrated advertising incorporating live betting odds (Thomas, Lewis, Duong, & McLeod, 2012).

How much is gambling promoted during sport?

- An audit of eight AFL match broadcasts in 2011 identified 50.5 marketing communications promoting seven wagering brands, totalling 4.8 minutes per match.
- Four live AFL matches held at two major stadiums in 2011 promoted nine wagering brands during an average of 59 marketing communications.
- An audit of two weeks of televised NRL and AFL programs in 2012 identified 72 gambling communications, mainly for corporate bookmakers, constituting 2.5% of broadcast time.

Source: Milner et al. (2013); Thomas, Lewis, Duong et al. (2012).

This embedded advertising can be particularly powerful because very little can be avoided by skipping through or muting advertisements and it is likely to evoke an emotional rather than rational response (Milner et al., 2013). Promotions occur at critical points when audiences are most attentive (e.g., when points are scored). Gambling logos on player uniforms and stadium signage are continuously displayed, sports betting operators have regular sponsored segments, and betting is promoted by celebrity presenters and match commentators. The message is that the excitement of watching the game is heightened by wagering on its contingencies and outcome (Milner et al., 2013).

Community concerns and government inquiries

- A community backlash about sports betting promotions during sport prompted two government inquiries.
- This led to curtailment of in-match commentary and on-screen displays of live betting odds.

The avalanche of sports betting advertising prompted a community backlash. Substantial concerns related to its potential impact on the estimated 39,000 children and adolescents who watch each live sports broadcast in Australia (JSCGR, 2013). Promoting gambling in a “family-friendly” environment may normalise gambling among young viewers, with gambling becoming an integral part of sport, potentially grooming a new generation of problem gamblers (Hing, Vitartas, & Lamont, 2013, 2014; Hunt, 2013; Lamont et al., 2011; McMullan, 2011). Young people may be unable to distinguish the persuasive intent of embedded promotions, which may be particularly influential during impressionable adolescent years when peer and media influence is especially strong (Hing, Vitartas, Lamont, & Fink, 2014).

This “gamblification” of sport may transfer images associated with sport to promote gambling as healthy, harmless fun that, like sport, relies primarily on skill (Hing, Vitartas, & Lamont, 2014; Lamont et al., 2011; McMullan, 2011). Sports betting is becoming culturally embedded among young males, who report that peer discussions now include betting odds and that they feel pressured to gamble to fit in with peers (Thomas, Lewis, McLeod et al., 2012). These promotions also undermine responsible gambling messages targeting young men, who are also the most at-risk group for gambling problems (Delfabbro, 2012).

These promotions can also negatively affect problem gamblers. Services report increases in the number of clients seeking help for sports betting-related problems (Hunt, 2013; Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, 2013). For example, at the University of Sydney Gambling Treatment Clinic the proportion of clients with sports betting-related problems increased fourfold between 2006–07 and 2010–11, with sports-embedded promotions reported as contributing substantially to these clients’ problems and relapses (University of Sydney Gambling Treatment Clinic, 2011). One study has shown that one-sixth of problem/moderate risk Internet gamblers nominated sports betting as their most problematic gambling form (Hing, Gainsbury et al., 2014). Being younger, male, married and gambling on sports, races or poker predicted problem/moderate risk gambling among these Internet gamblers.

Community concerns about sports-embedded gambling promotions include that it ...

- may normalise gambling among children and young people;
- may be grooming a new generation of problem gamblers;
- promotes gambling as healthy harmless fun that, like sport, relies on skill;
- has become part of young male culture;
- undermines responsible gambling messages; and
- may be contributing to the increase in problem gambling related to sports betting.

Source: Hing, Vitartas & Lamont (2014); Lamont et al. (2011); McMullan (2011); Thomas, Lewis, McLeod et al. (2012).

Concerns about sports-embedded gambling promotions led to a ban on in-match promotion of live betting odds

Community concerns about sports betting promotions during sports broadcasts were debated during three government inquiries:

- The *Inquiry into Interactive and Online Gambling and Gambling Advertising* (JSCGR, 2011) subsequently recommended a ban on promoting live odds during sport, and a mandatory national code for wagering advertising covering inducements to bet, responsible gambling messages, and restricting certain forms of advertising.
- The *Review of the Interactive Gambling Act* (Department of Broadband Communications and the Digital Economy [DBCDE], 2012) similarly recommended an industry code to ensure related advertising is not contrary to community standards.
- The *Inquiry into the Advertising and Promotion of Gambling Services in Sport* (JSCGR, 2013) recommended: legislation if industry does not make appropriate changes; the current exemption of gambling advertising for sporting programs be reviewed; nationally consistent requirements for responsible gambling messages to counterbalance promotion of gambling; the amount of betting advertising at sporting venues and sports betting merchandise for children be reviewed; and further research on the longer-term effects of gambling advertising on children.

Following community concerns raised in these inquiries, Australian government pressure led to amendments to broadcast advertising codes from August 2013 to stop in-match commentary and on-screen displays of live betting odds. Other promotional practices continue, including live odds promotions before match commencement. Ironically, airing of the statutory message to “gamble responsibly” has decreased with curtailment of live odds messages (Hing, Vitartas, & Lamont, 2014).

What lessons can be learned from the advertising of other potentially harmful products?

- Because comparatively little research has been conducted into gambling advertising, lessons can be learned from other fields.
- Exposure to alcohol, tobacco and junk food advertising can contribute to their uptake and consumption.
- Promoting potentially harmful products through sport can enhance awareness, recall, purchase intention and consumption.

Research indicates that exposure to alcohol, tobacco and junk food advertising contributes to their uptake and consumption, especially among adolescents (e.g., Connolly, Casswell, Zhang, & Silva, 1994; Dixon, Scully, Wakefield, White, & Crawford, 2007; Ellickson, Collins, Hambarsoomians, & McCaffrey, 2005; Evans, Farkas, Gilpin, Berry, & Pierce, 1995; Pierce, Choi, Gilpin, Farkas, & Berry, 1998; Tye, Warner, & Glantz, 1987; Unger, Johnson, & Rohrbach, 1995). For example, most longitudinal studies support a relationship between exposure to alcohol advertising and subsequent adolescent alcohol use, and heavier drinking among existing drinkers (Anderson, De Bruijn, Angus, Gordon, & Hastings, 2009). Each additional alcohol advertisement viewed by 15 to 26 years olds has been found to increase their alcohol consumption by 1% (Snyder, Fleming Milici, Slater, Sun, & Strizhakova, 2006).

Use of sport to promote potentially harmful products is a long-established practice that appears effective in enhancing awareness, recall, purchase intention and consumption. For example, exposure to tobacco advertising at sporting events has been linked to increased awareness,

experimentation and use of tobacco products (Ledwith, 1984; López et al., 2004; Pierce et al., 1998; Sparks, 1999; Vaidya, Naik, & Vaidya, 1996). An Australian review concluded that the synergistic relationship between alcohol and sport is a key contributor to alcohol-related harm (Jones, 2010).

However, assessing the impact of advertising is notoriously difficult. Debates continue as to whether advertising increases overall consumption or affects only market share. It is difficult to reliably measure advertising exposure, identify causal pathways, and account for other influential factors on consumption (Binde, 2014; Nelson, 2010; 2011). These limitations also apply to research examining the impacts of gambling advertising.

Impacts of gambling advertising

- Advertising typically depicts gambling as exciting, glamorous and skillful, promising easy financial and social rewards.
- Youth and problem gamblers appear to be especially influenced by gambling advertising.
- Bonus offers for sports betting appear to particularly increase Internet gambling among problem gamblers.

Advertising typically depicts gambling as an exciting, glamorous and attainable lifestyle promising easy financial and social rewards. Gambling is often portrayed as a routine, everyday activity and it is increasingly likened to sport (Derevensky, Gupta, Messerlian, & Mansour, 2009; McMullan, 2011; McMullan, Miller, & Perrier, 2012; Monaghan et al., 2008).

Gambling advertising appears to have more impact on certain groups of people. Research has shown that youth have high exposure to gambling advertising and may be particularly influenced by it (Derevensky et al., 2007; Derevensky, Sklar, Gupta, & Messerlian, 2010; Friend & Ladd, 2009; Korn, Hurson, & Reynolds, 2005; Korn, Reynolds, & Hurson, 2005). Adolescents and children are aware of and can recall specific slogans and jingles and may feel they are being groomed to gamble (Amey, 2001; Korn, Hurson et al., 2005; Korn, Reynolds et al., 2005). Further, research has revealed that advertisements can increase adolescents' desire to experiment with gambling and prompt a gambling session (Derevensky et al., 2007; Korn, Hurson et al., 2005; Korn, Reynolds et al., 2005). Greater media exposure to gambling advertisements and promotions has also been associated with more positive youth gambling attitudes and intentions towards gambling (Hing, Vitartas & Lamont, 2014; Lee, Lemanski, & Jun, 2008).

Gambling advertising themes

Within television advertising, gambling is portrayed as ...

- like a sport;
- a natural activity;
- a way to enhance your status;
- a reprieve from mundane activities;
- part of a routine;
- a way to prosper;
- a reoccurring activity;
- a positive, life-changing force.

Source: McMullan & Miller (2008)

Online gamblers are also influenced by gambling advertising. One-tenth of Internet gamblers reported that marketing and promotions were critical to their initial uptake and 29% reported increased online gambling expenditure as a result of viewing promotions (Hing, Gainsbury et al., 2014). However, this marketing has had less success in converting non-gamblers to gambling (Binde, 2009; Hing, Cherney et al., 2014).

Gambling advertising can have particularly negative impacts on problem gamblers. Compared to other gamblers, problem gamblers report gambling advertisements as being a greater stimulation to gamble, a larger influence on spending more than intended, and an encouragement to them to think they can win (Binde, 2014; Clarke et al., 2006; 2007; Schottler Consulting, 2012). Problem gamblers also report that gambling advertisements can remind them about gambling, trigger gambling urges, provide inducements to gamble, further increase gambling involvement and undermine attempts to moderate their gambling (Hing, Cherney et al., 2014). Bonus offers for sports betting, such as money-back guarantees and “free” bets that require matching deposits appear to particularly increase Internet gambling among problem gamblers (Hing, Cherney et al., 2014). Youth problem gamblers also report stimulation to gamble from gambling advertisements (Derevensky et al., 2010; Felsher, Derevensky, & Gupta 2004a; 2004b; Korn, Reynolds et al., 2005).

Gambling advertising to date has not been found to motivate many people to commence gambling; however, it can increase gambling among existing gamblers (Binde, 2007; 2009; 2014; Derevensky et al., 2010; Hing, Cherney et al., 2014). Advertisements have particular potential for harm if they reinforce inaccurate beliefs about gambling and increase gambling among people who are already heavy gamblers (Productivity Commission, 1999; Schottler Consulting, 2012).

Impacts of sports betting advertising

- The vast majority of adults and adolescents watch televised sport and are therefore exposed to embedded gambling promotions.
- Sports-embedded gambling promotions can normalise gambling, especially among children, adolescents and young adult men.
- These promotions are likely to increase sports betting problems, especially among existing sports bettors and problem gamblers.

Many young men consider sports-embedded betting promotions as unavoidable, unnecessary and aggressive, sending a dangerous message about the social acceptance of gambling and its normalised association with being a sports fan (Thomas, Lewis, McLeod et al., 2012). Peer pressure to gamble has reportedly increased among young men, as friendship groups have regular discussions about sports betting odds (Thomas, Lewis, McLeod et al., 2012). University students who watch more gambling-sponsored sports broadcasts were found to be more likely to use the sponsors’ products, especially students who already have gambling problems (Hing et al., 2013). Even children can correctly assign gambling sponsors to particular sports or teams (Pettigrew, Ferguson, & Rosenberg, 2013).

The vast majority of adults and adolescents watch televised sport and are therefore exposed to these promotions. In Queensland, over half of adults and two-fifths of adolescents could recall, unprompted, at least one gambling brand from watching televised sport (Hing, Vitartas, & Lamont, 2014). Further, adults, adolescents and sports bettors who were exposed to more sports-embedded gambling promotions were found to have greater intentions to bet on sports (Hing, Vitartas, & Lamont, 2014). Additionally, sports bettors with gambling problems in Queensland reported that these promotions had worsened or maintained their problems (Hing, Vitartas, & Lamont, 2014). Problem gamblers were particularly attracted to promotions featuring micro-bets placed on short-term contingencies during match play (Hing, Vitartas, & Lamont, 2014). Thus, these promotions are likely to be increasing sports betting participation and sports betting problems, especially among existing sports bettors and problem gamblers.

Research into the effects of sports-embedded gambling promotions is in its infancy. Early research suggests that it is increasing gambling participation, gambling problems and the normalisation of gambling among adults, adolescents and children.

Implications for stakeholders

- Measures are needed to minimise sports betting problems, including community education and social marketing targeted at high-risk groups to counter messages promoting sports betting.
- Harm minimisation measures provided by sports betting operators need to be rigorous, efficacious and well promoted to bettors so they can opt to track their betting, self-exclude, set betting limits and establish deposit limits, and easily access gambling help resources and services.
- As demand for help for problem sports bettors increases, services will need to provide appropriate treatment, including treatment and self-help measures tailored to sports bettors.
- Exemptions for sport-integrated gambling marketing during general TV viewing times, and the quantity and types of advertisements and promotions allowed during live and televised sport could be reviewed.
- The types of sports betting advertising allowed could also be reviewed, with particular attention to bonus promotions such as money-back guarantees and “free” bets requiring matching deposits.
- Ongoing research into sports betting is needed to ensure that policy developments, industry regulations, public health measures and gambling help services are informed by current knowledge and awareness of shifting trends.
- In particular, further research is needed to better understand the role of sports betting advertising in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviours and to untangle causal pathways between exposure and consumption, especially among vulnerable groups.

Further reading

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Professor Nerilee Hing is Director of the Centre for Gambling Education and Research at Southern Cross University.

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Australian Institute of Family Studies
Level 20, 485 La Trobe Street
Melbourne VIC 3000 Australia
Phone: (03) 9214 7888 Fax: (03) 9214 7839
Internet: <www.aifs.gov.au>

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