

# SPORT SPECTATOR BEHAVIOUR - THE INFLUENCE OF ALCOHOL ON PERCEPTION AND RECOLLECTION OF SPORT SPONSORING

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## Abstract

### Introduction and research question

Several studies show a link between sports fandom and alcohol consumption. One study of nearly 12,000 U.S. college students demonstrated that sports fans among college students were more likely to drink and drank more heavily than non-sports fans (Nelson & Wechsler, 2003). A recent study published in Germany showed that sports fans consumed considerably more beer than the average German citizen (SPORTFIVE 2010). However, no studies have been carried out on the influence of alcohol on sport spectators' perception and recollection of sponsors. It is mainly through research on driver performance that a lot is known about the effect of alcohol on sensory and perceptual behaviour as well as on more complex cognitive functioning such as divided attention. The study at hand aims to find out more about the acute effect of alcohol on perception and recollection of sport sponsoring.

### Literature Review

Sport sponsorship offers marketers a way to establish and enhance brand awareness with a vast global audience. For sponsoring to be effective, the audience needs to see the advertisement and process the information. Bearing in mind that a large proportion of sport spectators is likely to be under the influence of alcohol, it is relevant to establish the effect alcohol has on perception and information processing of sport sponsoring. Viewing a sports match involves processing a multitude of sensory input. Several studies carried out on tasks requiring divided attention (attending to one source of information whilst excluding the other) reveal alcohol-induced impairments (e.g. Schulte et al. 2001). Furthermore, it has been established that alcohol negatively influences the speed of information processing (e.g. Tzambazis & Stough, 2000). The question is: does

alcohol's negative effect on visual attention and information processing also apply to the field of sports marketing?

### Methodology

Sport spectators' perception and recollection of sponsors was studied using a combined method of physiological measurements (eye-tracking and electrodermal response) and interviewing. The theoretical basis of this study is the experience map (Ellert, G., Rocholl, E. (2009): The Experience Map, in: Ellert et. al. 2011). In this explorative study, 171 subjects (male and female, aged 18-61) were shown a clipping of a football match. Through the aforementioned combined methodology, implicit subject experience was measured through eye-tracking (perception) and electrodermal response (emotional involvement) and explicit subject experience was measured through pre and post interviewing. Eye-tracking rendered information on fixation count and fixation duration. Electrodermal response was measured to gain insight into the subjects' emotional involvement throughout the match. The questionnaires provided information on brand recollection, brand involvement, sports interest and socio-demographic variables. In order to measure the influence of alcohol, 81 randomly selected subjects consumed 1 litre of beer approximately 30 minutes before viewing, whereas the control group (n=90) consumed no alcohol. None of the subjects had alcoholic beverages 24 hrs previous to testing. Confounding variables influencing perception and recollection of sponsors, such as gender, brand involvement and occurrences on the football field were accounted for.

### Results, discussion and implications

Differences in perception and sponsorship recollection were found between subjects under the influence of alcohol and sober subjects, some of which significant. Firstly, results show clear differences in fixation count (the amount of time a subject focuses on something) and fixation duration (how long a gaze is held). The experimental group showed fewer but longer fixations than the control group. Furthermore, it was found that subjects that were under the influence follow the game differently. Whilst sober subjects use 'slow' moments in the game to look around and focus on stadium advertising, subjects under the influence of alcohol seem less focused on the game itself and looked at advertising at seemingly random moments. Finally, interview results show that the experimental group remembered slightly fewer brand names than the control group.

The study at hand offers a first insight into the influence of alcohol on sport spectator's perception and recollection of sponsoring. As recollection correlates with visual focus it is argued that reduced recollection is due to a different way of viewing, rather than it being the direct effect of alcohol on recollection. This is in line with a study carried out by Tzambazis and Stough (2000) showing that alcohol does impair visual information processing, but does not impair visual memory or short-term memory. Good news for sponsors, as this implies that an intoxicated audience can still be reached. However, in order to analyse and ultimately increase effectiveness of stadium advertisements, our findings suggest future studies in sport marketing should include alcohol as an important confounding variable.

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