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# 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

consumer mood states and purchase intentions (e.g., Law, Wong, & Yip, 2012). Affective responses can include a range of emotions, such as like, dislike, love, hate, pride, anger, lust and guilt (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Numerous frameworks explicating the range of possible human emotions exist (e.g., Plutchik, 1980; Richins, 1997; Watson & Tellegen, 1985), although a detailed review is beyond the scope of this paper. However, brief attention is paid to Richins' (1997) Consumption Emotions Set (CES), which extended Plutchik's (1980) seminal work in identifying fundamental human emotions to identify emotions consumers regularly experience during consumption experiences. The CES is particularly informative due to its previous application in advertising research, inclusion of most if not all emotions encountered in consumption situations, coverage of common emotions from the psychology literature, and the division of emotions into positive and negative affect to determine consumer attitudes (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). Before proceeding, however, it is instructive to define positive and negative affect. According to Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988), "Positive Affect (PA) reflects the extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, active, and alert. High PA is a state of high energy, full concentration, and pleasurable engagement, whereas low PA is characterised by sadness and lethargy" (p. 1063). Meanwhile negative affect is described by Watson et al. as a "general dimension of subjective distress and unpleasurable engagement that subsumes a variety of aversive mood states, including anger, contempt, disgust, guilt, fear, and nervousness, with low NA being a state of calmness and serenity" (p. 1063).

The CES (Richins, 1997) comprises 16 clusters of emotions, each containing two or three lower-order emotions; for example, frustration and irritation are lower order emotions to the fundamental emotion of anger. Positive emotion clusters include romantic love, love, peacefulness, contentment, optimism, joy, excitement, and surprise. Negative emotion clusters include anger, discontent, worry, sadness, fear, shame, envy, and loneliness. Beyond the 16 emotion clusters, four less prevalent emotions are acknowledged: guilt, pride, eagerness, and relief.

## 2.2. Affective responses to advertising

An early theory of advertising (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961) included cognitive (thoughts), affective (emotional) and conative (motivational) functions to explain the effectiveness of advertising. A sequential process was proposed where brand/product awareness results in brand/product knowledge (cognitive), leading to brand/product preference (affective), with convictions then leading to purchase (conative). While cognitive awareness can lead to emotional response, Spreading-Activation Theory (Collins & Loftus, 1975) explains that emotions can also actively facilitate information processing. Neurologists suggest that attention is largely outside of conscious control, and that emotion rather than cognition determines what individuals attend to (Du Plessis, 1994). Thus, automatic emotional responses to advertising can result in further cognitive consideration about the brand/product (LeDoux, 1996). Emotions are therefore crucial in the advertising process and serve as a "gatekeeper" for further cognitive functions (Poels & Dewitte, 2006).

The impact of unconscious cognitive and emotional processing is highlighted by findings that exposure to a stimulus can generate preferences for it, even if viewers cannot consciously recall the exposure (Zajonc, 1968). Thus, mere repeated exposure to advertisements may unconsciously produce more favourable opinions about the advertised product/brand. Emotions are always present, but the extent to which they guide decisions is situation dependent. Unconscious feelings most likely guide uncomplicated decisions, whereas conscious feelings likely guide more complex choices (Hansen & Christensen, 2007).

While little is known about gambling advertising processes, tobacco and alcohol advertisements have been shown to evoke affective responses and, subsequently, to influence purchase behaviours by increasing product desirability and strengthening consumer identification with the product (Henriksen et al., 2008). An Australian study of young people found that a vodka promotion induced positive emotions by promoting decreased stress and increased enjoyment (Jones & Donovan, 2001). Moreover, adolescents with a favourite cigarette advertisement were twice as likely to have started or be willing to start smoking three years later, compared to those without a favourite advertisement (Pierce, Choi, Gilpin, Farkas, & Berry, 1998). In sum, affect plays a crucial role in mediating the impacts of an advertisement on viewers. Emotions can guide attention and direct information processing, but can also be evoked once cognitive processing has occurred.

## 2.3. Gambling promotion through televised sport: potential impacts on vulnerable groups

Although research addressing the promotion of potentially harmful products through sport, particularly tobacco, alcohol and junk food, is well established (Howard & Crompton, 1995; Lamont et al., 2011), researchers have only recently commenced examining potential impacts on viewers of gambling promotion through televised sport. A recent study in Queensland found that exposure to gambling promotions created higher awareness and recall for sports betting brands promoted during match broadcasts, with 58% of adults able to recall at least one gambling brand (Hing, Lamont, et al., 2014). Higher exposure and favourable attitudes to sports-embedded gambling promotions, along with higher problem gambling severity, predicted future sports betting intention amongst adults (Hing, Lamont, et al., 2014). Of concern, adolescents watched more televised sport with gambling promotions than adults, with more than two-fifths recalling at least one gambling brand (Hing, Vitartas, et al., 2014). Adolescents with higher exposure to gambling promotions during televised sport had greater brand awareness and recall, more positive attitudes towards gambling sponsors, and greater intention to gamble earlier in life (Hing, Vitartas, et al., 2014).

Although limited research exists on sport-related gambling promotions, extensive research confirms that exposure to alcohol and tobacco advertisements during televised sport increases product/brand awareness (Jones, Phillipson, & Barrie, 2010), heightens consumption intention (e.g., Stacy, Zogg, Unger, & Dent, 2004), and increases consumption behaviour (Nelson & Wechsler, 2003). Longitudinal studies have further confirmed a direct association between exposure to alcohol advertisements and subsequent drinking behaviours (e.g., Stacy et al., 2004). It is therefore likely that gambling promotion through televised sport may facilitate brand awareness, consumption intention, and actual product engagement; however, research on these issues is fledgling.

Numerous studies have shown that gambling advertisements across a range of media impact significantly on youth (Derevensky, Sklar, Gupta, & Messerlian, 2010; Hing, Vitartas, et al., 2014). For example, 10–18 year old youth in Canada were acutely aware of gambling advertisements, with two-fifths reporting that advertisements would encourage them to purchase lottery tickets (Felsher, Derevensky, & Gupta, 2004). Meanwhile, Griffiths and Barnes (2008) found that 40% of a sample of young adults participated in online gambling as a result of advertising.

Research has also drawn attention to the potential influence of gambling promotions on problem gamblers. In Binde's (2009) qualitative study of problem gamblers, slightly over half reported advertising as marginally affecting their gambling problem, while one-fifth reported a tangible impact. A key conclusion was that advertisements could trigger intention and behaviour, undermining efforts to abstain from gambling, as confirmed by other research (Hing, Cherney, Blaszczyński, Gainsbury, & Lubman, 2014). Because gambling promotions are embedded in televised sport (Milner et al., 2013), avoiding exposure is not always possible for problem gamblers, and implications of this "forced exposure" are not well understood. Furthermore, specific targeting of young males is also prominent (Thomas, Lewis, McLeod, et al., 2012). Indeed, Petry (2003) identified that sports bettors are predominately younger males with moderately severe gambling problems.

#### 2.4. Techniques used to promote gambling through televised sport

Gambling promotions embedded in televised sport include company logos and graphics, celebrity endorsement, static and dynamic advertising, and live studio cross-segments where gambling company representatives discuss movement of betting odds and promote special offers (Hing, Vitartas, et al., 2014; Milner et al., 2013; Thomas, Lewis, Duong, et al., 2012). Embedding brands and sponsor references in sports programmes optimise these promotions' effectiveness, especially to the young male target audience for sports betting companies (Milner et al., 2013), because they enable viewers to prolong the escapism offered by televised entertainment by engaging in the advertised activity (Hackley & Tiwsakul, 2006). As explained by McCracken (1986), advertising is a key conduit of cultural meaning, imbuing consumer goods with significance beyond their utilitarian character and commercial value. Embedded promotions also create a "symbiotic relation between promotional communication and mediated entertainment" that "abolishes the category boundary that separates the two" (Hackley & Tiwsakul, 2006, p. 64). This makes it difficult for viewers, particularly children and youth, to distinguish between sporting and promotional programme features (McMullan, 2011). Consequently, promotion of gambling during televised sport can portray gambling as a normal, commonplace activity (Lamont et al., 2011; Thomas, Lewis, McLeod, et al., 2012).

Celebrity endorsement is said to increase brand familiarity and be especially effective when consumers transfer positive feelings for celebrities onto products/brands they promote (Biswas, Biswas, & Das, 2006; Keller, 1993; Stone, Joseph, & Jones, 2003). For example, Keller (1993) suggests that brand associations can be influenced when a brand becomes linked with a celebrity through endorsements. Indeed, McDonald and Andrews (2001) demonstrate how Nike analysed Michael Jordan with human flight to create the "Air Jordan" brand, which resulted in Nike dominating the US athletic shoe market in the 1990s. Biswas et al. (2006) suggest that celebrity endorsement is effective because it assists consumers in overcoming information asymmetry between buyers and sellers during product purchase decisions. Consequently, the presence of information asymmetry invokes a degree of perceived risk within prospective purchasers. Drawing on Kelman's (1961) identification theory, Biswas et al. argue that celebrity endorsement can influence consumers' attitudes when "an individual adopts behaviour derived from another person or a group because this behaviour is associated with a satisfying self-defining relationship to this person or group" (Kelman, 1961, p. 63). Thus it is plausible that positive identification with a familiar sporting identity may reduce perceived risk for prospective purchasers of unfamiliar products.

Sporting identities often promote gambling during sport broadcasts as part of match commentary teams, and many player uniforms display sponsored gambling logos (Hing, Vitartas, et al., 2014; Milner et al., 2013). A celebrity endorser has been defined as "any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement" (McCracken, 1989, p. 310). Use of celebrity athletes has personal relevance to and effectively targets young male viewers who see these athletes as role models (Milner et al., 2013; Thomas, Lewis, Duong, et al., 2012). However, few studies to date have examined whether celebrity endorsement of gambling products during televised sport generates positive affect, thus it is unclear whether sport viewers' gambling intentions and behaviour are influenced by this promotional technique.

In sum, recent studies have provided embryonic insights into the nature of gambling promotions during televised sport. However, sport viewers' affective responses to these promotions are poorly understood. Given that positive emotional responses to advertising can increase consumption of advertised products, understanding if and how different gambling promotional techniques evoke positive affect amongst sport viewers is important, due to the risk of increasing gambling-related harm. An exploration of this issue was the basis for the following study.



### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Research design

An interpretive, exploratory research design informed by adaptive theory was utilised. Whilst grounded theory advocates commencing research with as little pre-conceived theory as possible, adaptive theory equally emphasises tenets of inductive and deductive research. Proponents of adaptive theory argue that over-reliance on existing frameworks can result in theoretical stagnation, but they also challenge a core tenet of grounded theory that “theorising must be continuously emergent” (Layder, 1998, p. 20). Consequently, analysis of data in an adaptive theory context allows for inductive theory generation, whilst allowing data to be filtered through relevant theoretical concepts and frameworks (Layder, 1998).

#### 3.2. Recruitment and sampling

Using purposeful selection criteria (Neuman, 2007), a market research company recruited a sample of Queensland adults who regularly watch televised sport. After appropriate screening questions, a diverse sample of sport viewers by age, gender, metropolitan/regional location, and participation in sports betting (regular sports bettors and non-sports bettors) was assembled. The sample was devised as four sub-samples, with two focus groups per sub-sample. Eight focus groups were divided into groups of younger (18–29) and older (over 30 years) regular and non-sports bettors. A target of three males and three females was set for each focus group. However, last-minute unavailability and technical issues necessitated replacing some participants at short notice, whilst some were unable to participate.

The final sample comprised 39 regular sports viewers: 21 males, 18 females; 18 aged 18–29 years, 21 aged 30–60; 18 regular sports bettors, and 21 non-sports bettors. Consistent with the broad purpose of qualitative research, to generate “snapshots” of social reality, a diverse rather than representative sample was important (Neuman, 2007), so research findings may not be representative of the population. Instead, the value of this research lies in its rich insights into sports viewers' affective responses to gambling promotions embedded in televised sport.

#### 3.3. Data collection

Data collection through online focus groups facilitated an environment in which participants could clarify, question and challenge other participants' responses, enhancing data richness in comparison to one-on-one interviews (Neuman, 2007). Because of the geographical dispersion of participants and the need to preserve anonymity, focus groups were conducted utilising online conferencing software. Reid and Reid (2005) argue that online focus groups are advantageous over face-to-face (FTF) focus groups because of the convenience offered to participants, along with visual anonymity which may encourage more candid responses. In their empirical comparison of the efficacy of online versus FTF focus groups, Reid and Reid (2005) concluded that, “there was no difference in the number of new ideas/answers generated, suggesting that although the CMC [computer-mediated communication] groups contributed less, what they did contribute was more useful for the discussion topic” (p. 154). Hence the usefulness of online focus groups in this study which was required to incorporate a wide geographic scope.

The software allowed participants to converse whilst sharing text, images, documents, videos and other online content. Participants' faces were not visible to one another and only first names were revealed to the group. Instructions were emailed to participants in advance including a web link to their session and information that the focus group topic was “televised sports” to prevent prejudiced opinions being formed beforehand. Each session began with introductions and an overview of the focus group format. Participants were then informed that “Tonight's focus group is about exploring your perceptions surrounding the promotion of gambling during televised sporting events.” The moderator ensured each participant had an opportunity to speak on each issue, to overcome the absence of face-to-face interaction. Discussion areas included awareness of gambling promotions during televised sport, unprompted affect towards gambling promotions, and prompted affect to a range of stimuli and their perceived effectiveness. Each session was recorded (audio and visual) using the software's recording function.

Utilising the software's audio-visual features, various still shots and video clips were played, extracted from NRL telecasts and a related football entertainment show (Table 1). Selection of audio-visual stimuli was informed by a content analysis of NRL and AFL match broadcasts (Milner et al., 2013) which catalogued the range of promotional techniques deployed by sports betting and other gambling operators. Following display of each promotion, and utilising a semi-structured interviewing approach, focus group participants described their response and explained why or why not that promotion might encourage them to place a bet. Two interview schedules were developed, one each for the non-sports bettor and regular sports bettor groups.

#### 3.4. Data analysis

Focus group recordings were transcribed verbatim and imported into NVivo 10 (QSR International, 2013) to facilitate coding and cross-case analysis. Data pertaining to participants' affective responses to the gambling promotion stimuli were

**Table 1**  
Summary of gambling promotion stimuli.

Promotion type	Description	Stimuli used in this study
Fixed advertisements	Perimeter signage at sporting venues carrying advertisers' logos; strategically positioned signage captured by television cameras during broadcasts.	Still shot extracted from NRL match with Centrebet advertisement visible in the background.
Gambling operator logos and graphics	Gambling operator logos and graphics displayed as temporary digital overlays embedded into sports broadcasts.	Still shot extracted from NRL match featuring match play with Keno logo digitally overlaid in top left-hand corner.
Gambling operator sponsorships	Placement of sponsor logos on athletes' uniforms to gain media exposure.	Still shot from a televised NRL match of football players whose uniforms displayed the logo of a gambling operator.
Celebrity endorsements	Gambling operators' strategic use of well-known sporting identities to promote their products, such as television advertisements.	Short video clip in which a 1990s football star plays the lead role in an ad promoting Keno. Portrays a party atmosphere, with dancing and a giant-sized Keno mascot. Football player verbally promotes Keno using statements such as 'Remember, when you play Keno, there's always a chance to win \$1 million every three minutes!
Gambling operator sponsored segments	Brief cross from match commentators to a gambling operator representative (typically during breaks in play such as half-time) where the representative updates betting odds movements for the match and often promotes exotic bets.	Approximately 60 seconds of video excerpt from NRL match half-time segment. The broadcaster crosses to a representative of TAB Sportsbet where the well-dressed representative discusses recent movement of betting odds with the aid of visual graphics.
Displays of live betting odds	Graphical promotions displaying live betting odds as a digital overlay during various times of a match broadcast.	Still shot extracted from NRL match where a promotional graphic displaying head-to-head betting odds is displayed during pre-match commentary.
Commentary around betting odds	Gambling promotions through commentary pertaining to live betting odds which occur in two formats: (1) during match play when match commentators verbally update betting odds movements, sometimes in tandem with a digital graphic overlaid on the televised picture; and (2) commentary around betting odds during sports entertainment shows	Video excerpts from Channel Nine's <i>Footy Show</i> . Segment features five prominent current and ex-rugby league players discussing a Centrebet promotion. Prospective bettors are encouraged via commentary and visual graphics to register online as a new 'client' of Centrebet to become eligible for the promotion. Discussion is jovial and current players joke about not being able to bet on games themselves.

analysed utilising an adapted three-stage process: (1) preparing and organising the data; (2) reducing the data; and (3) "representing" the data (Creswell, 2007).

In Stage One, broad codes reflecting emergent affective response themes were recorded in NVivo. Consistent with adaptive theory (Layder, 1998), codes were allowed to emerge naturally but were then labelled and interpreted based on human emotion frameworks (Richins, 1997; Watson & Tellegen, 1985). Stage Two involved revisiting the data and matching text with each affective response category (Creswell, 2007). At this stage, participant demographic profiles were created to facilitate attribution of evidence and cross-case analysis. Axial coding then consolidated codes into interconnecting categories, creating "sub-nodes" for each overarching node, again utilising human emotion frameworks to assist code labelling. Cross-case analysis was then undertaken using the query function of NVivo. Particular attention was paid to identifying differences in responses between regular sports bettors and non-sports bettors. Stage Three involved "selective coding" and thus building a "story" (Creswell) by reassembling the deconstructed data as a narrative, enabling conclusions to be presented against the overarching research aim.

Efforts to maximise reliability (trustworthiness of the data) included having a professional service transcribe the focus group recordings, checking these transcriptions against the recordings, and inspecting the data for inconsistencies in individual participant's responses (Stiles, 1993). The focus group moderator (also the analyst) also periodically reflected his understanding to participants during the focus groups to check accuracy of interpretation, in a process known as recycling (Atwood & Stolorow, 1984). Validity (trustworthiness of interpretations) is enhanced by using a range of participants' quotes to support the interpretation of findings, as well as by expressing the results tentatively in recognition that qualitative research does not seek to predict or generalise, but instead aims to explore and enhance understanding of the human experience (Stiles, 1993).

#### 4. Findings

Data analysis revealed a range of affective responses which were broadly categorised into positive, negative and neutral affects. Emergent themes within each broad category are presented in ensuing sub-sections. It is possible that there may be commonalities across some categories, however they are separated for analytical purposes. In the representative quotations indicated, the acronyms RSB and NSB denote regular sports bettors and non-sports bettors, respectively, and the participant's age group is also noted.

#### 4.1. Positive affect

Four themes encapsulating positive affective responses emerged: arousal, optimism, excitement and joy.

##### 4.1.1. Arousal

This category was adapted from [Watson and Tellegen's \(1985\)](#) framework and encapsulated participants' reports of experiencing arousal towards gambling brands/products through exposure to various promotional stimuli. However, degree of arousal varied across different promotion types and some nuances between sports bettors and non-sports bettors were identified. Amongst both sports bettors and non-sports bettors, dynamic promotions aroused more interest than fixed/static promotions. Promotions with betting odds updates also generated arousal amongst both groups because they leverage off viewers' involvement in a particular match. These promotions seemed particularly effective if displayed during gaps in match play.

Numerous non-sports bettors stated that live odds updates could arouse their interest in placing impulse bets. For example, Todd (18–29, NSB) stated that “for me the most effective is the live betting. It could make me place a bet,” while Bethany (30–60, NSB) added “you'd be really tempted just to put \$10 on the one that's at \$6.50 just in case they won . . . I guess the element that makes the promotion effective is that people think that they're going to make a quick buck”; hence, “tempting” potential rewards appear to be an antecedent to feelings of optimism or hope.

Promotions emphasising “good value” betting odds were seen by some non-sports bettors as capable of arousing intention to place impulse bets. However, arousal seemed more likely when non-sports bettors are attached to a particular match. Tom (18–29, NSB) explained that “I have to have watched the whole game so I know what the vibe is for the game.” Similarly, John (18–29, NSB) explained:

If I wasn't interested in having a bet and it was one of the live [studio] crosses, and I was already paying attention to the program, then [it is] possible I might [place a bet] because I would automatically start paying attention to it.

Promotions emphasising ease of access to gambling and invoking a sense of urgency appeared capable of arousing non-sports bettors to experiment with betting. However, this group had resisted sports betting to date, suggesting that arousal alone is insufficient to prompt consumption behaviour.

Amongst regular sports bettors, promotions during match play also stimulated arousal, particularly for “exotic” impulse bets (i.e., bets on individual events and contingencies within a match, such as number of goals scored, points won or penalties awarded): “it's not pre-recorded . . . that little bit at the end with the \$11 try scorer is probably a bit of a dangling of the carrot . . . you start to think of the exotic bets” (Jack, 30–60, RSB). Further, promotions attempting to make viewers feel “comfortable” with a particular gambling company appeared capable of arousing regular sports bettors to choose that company over its rivals. Anna (30–60, RSB) explained that promotions portraying a company as “friendly” and/or “helpful” could sway her choice of company.

##### 4.1.2. Optimism

Optimism is a category recognised within [Richins' \(1997\)](#) CES and was observed in the present study. Promotions portraying an air of professionalism (e.g., live studio crosses with a well-groomed and well-spoken presenter) appeared to yield positive affect, reflecting optimism. Optimism manifested in two ways. Firstly, regular sports bettors in particular reported feeling confident that placing a bet is the “right decision,” an acceptable practice that successful people do. Michelle (30–60, RSB) observed “the way that he's dressed . . . he looks successful and wealthy and he's coming to you from Sportsbet,” whilst Jack (30–60, RSB) added “It makes it very accessible and very main stream. Business men and doctors are wearing suits and ties like this guy, and it's okay to go and spend a dollar on betting.”

Promotions utilising celebrity endorsement instilled a degree of trust within some respondents, reflecting optimism that the company is “credible.” For example, some participants felt that a gambling company could be trusted with sensitive personal information such as credit card details due to its endorsement by a well-known football entertainment show:

I think the fact that they are being endorsed by a well-established TV show . . . says something about the legitimacy of that company. I would feel more comfortable giving my information to a company like that (Lucy, 18–29, RSB).

##### 4.1.3. Excitement

Bright, cheery promotions seemed to evoke excitement; a further affect category recognised in [Richins' \(1997\)](#) CES. Numerous non-sports bettors suggested that promotions can destigmatise gambling by portraying it as a fun, harmless activity. Annette (30–60, NSB) reflected that a Keno advertisement incorporating upbeat music with people smiling and dancing was one that she “actually found . . . to be a very bright, cheery ad and it makes it look like a lot of fun, that everybody is doing it . . . I find it actually quite effective and certainly it gets your attention.”

Moreover, promotions pointing out significant movement in betting odds during a telecast were reported by some regular sports bettors as evoking feelings of excitement which could trigger impulse bets. Participants explained that, because they have invested time in watching a match, they develop an emotional connection with that match:

Because of halftime I think I'm already emotionally invested into the game and then when I see these odds pop up and I see a long shot I get a little excited, so out comes my phone (Anna, 30–60, RSB).

#### 4.1.4. Joy

Promotions involving joviality and humour seemed effective in generating joy because a viewer's sense of humour could be tapped, hence capturing their interest. This category was also labelled according to Richins' (1997) CES. Harry (18–29, RSB) explained that a promotional segment of a sports entertainment show in which current players light-heartedly discussed betting options made him feel happy and thus receptive towards the message: "I thought it was a bit more effective because it actually had the players and sort of talking it through and making a joke made it seem a bit more light hearted." Regular sports bettors regularly referred to a perception that gambling is a fun, harmless activity, such as Anna (30–60, RSB):

We really relate to something just really light-hearted and humorous. I think if it gets too serious or too full on with the technical we just tune it out because we're on there because we want to see the game ... that's what you're after, the light-heartedness, the fun, and you're not really in it for something serious.

Thus, some gambling promotional techniques generate positive affective response around joy and happiness by appealing to viewers' sense of humour. This may normalise and destigmatise gambling by positioning it as a fun and socially accepted activity.

#### 4.2. Negative affect

Negative affect manifested in the form of worry and anger, which are both categories of negative affect within Richins' (1997) CES. Data pertaining to both themes are discussed below.

##### 4.2.1. Worry

Regular and non-sports bettors expressed worry about the potentially harmful effects of gambling promotions on children and the need to mitigate these risks. As Michelle (30–60, RSB) noted, "the kids can't help but see it; it's on the back of their favourite players," and added that "it does cross the line with me personally with children seeing that and asking questions and being interested in something that isn't something that they need to know about." In this sense, worry appeared an antecedent to anger.

Worry also manifested in relation to potential role model effects of high-profile athletes endorsing gambling companies/products. Jack (30–60, RSB) felt that "there are some ethical issues" around gambling promotions to which children are indiscriminately exposed. Worry manifested in parents' narratives of how gambling promotions sparked an interest around gambling in their children. For example, Michelle (30–60, RSB) recounted that her children had become inquisitive:

They go "Oh, they're not the favourites, how much do we get for our money if we've put on \$10? What does the line mean in the difference?" They've always been fully aware throughout the commentary of the match when it says "[if Billy] Slater scores a try it's going to be a dollar something-something to score the first try."

Other dimensions of worry included that gambling promotions during televised sport make it difficult for parents to raise awareness amongst their children of the dangers of gambling, and that these promotions are not being effectively regulated to prevent harm.

##### 4.2.2. Anger

Anger is recognised in Richins' (1997) CES framework as a broad emotion category, with frustration and irritation being related sub-emotions. Anger about the presence of gambling promotions during televised sport was evident in varying degrees amongst both regular and non-sports bettors. Some participants expressed vehement disapproval, whilst others expressed mild irritation. Anger and irritation were aroused due to perceptions that gambling promotions contribute to normalisation of a known harmful activity, gambling companies are seeking to position gambling as synonymous with sport, and the pressure tactics used in some promotions stimulate interest in gambling.

Non-sports bettors tended to more strongly express anger than regular sports bettors. Some considered that gambling is incongruent with the ethos of sport and were therefore angry that gambling promotions have infiltrated sport so extensively: "I've seen poker machines advertising their logos on the football jerseys. I just disagree with this. It's just promoting it" (Johanna, 30–60, NSB). Extensive promotion of gambling was seen as trivialising sport, with money perceived as taking precedence over sporting competition: "I just sort of feel like you're watching the football game for the football game, not to gamble on it" (Brooke, 30–60, NSB). Irritation was also evident in narratives of forcibly being exposed to gambling promotions when uninterested in gambling and the constant presence of gambling promotions in televised sport:

It's too intrusive. It's stupid. There's no point in having it there. This stuff before the game, they should be doing pre-game interviews, talking about what's happening, not just focusing on what the odds are (Matt, 30–60, NSB).

Participants with children expressed anger about the potential effects of these promotions on children: "little kids just look up to these boys as a hero and you know, if they are promoting something like this, they are just taking it on" (Johanna, 30–60, NSB).



Irritation was also expressed by some regular sports bettors because of the constant presence of gambling promotions, which they perceived as stimulating impulse betting. These participants typically placed their bets in advance and preferred to watch matches without these distractions. As Harry (18–29, RSB) explained:

I also don't like betting that way because the odds are always lower and it bugs me because I don't like seeing them . . . I just like to put it on beforehand and then sit back and actually enjoy the game.

#### 4.3. Neutral affect

Although neutral affect is not explicitly recognised within Richins' (1997) CES and Watson and Tellegen's (1985) two-factor structure of affect, it is recognised as a state in which neither positive nor negative affect are evoked in other empirical studies (e.g., Harmon-Jones et al., 2013). Neutral affect towards the gambling promotion stimuli resulted under some circumstances in the present study. Static promotions were widely perceived by regular and non-sport bettors as providing limited information and lacking a call to action, therefore generating mostly neutral affect. For example, in response to a gambling company logo on a football player's jersey, Lisa (18–29, NSB) recounted:

I don't really have a positive or negative reaction to it . . . I generally look at their numbers first as opposed to their sponsors, and it's just not something that has stuck out to me.

The promotions typically generated mostly neutral affect amongst non-sports bettors. As Mike (18–29, NSB) noted, "if I was watching the game already I wouldn't be interested in it anyway." Jane (18–29, NSB) added, "when those live cross things happen . . . I don't really watch them at all." Because of their general disinterest in gambling, non-sports bettors appeared to deliberately shift their attention away from gambling promotions.

Neutral affect was also expressed by regular sports bettors who researched and placed bets in advance and who were therefore unlikely to be tempted by promotions during match telecasts. Anthony's (18–29, RSB) quote below reflects this notion:

I usually get the majority of my stuff done before the games. The odds I'm not that interested in and even if they come up and I've followed it through with bigger odds for a certain try score, I've already got my kind of interest in that game because I've got my bet on it already. So no matter how they do it, it's not something that really grabs me.

## 5. Discussion

Whilst a range of positive, negative and neutral responses were identified, affective responses varied widely according to (1) the way promotional messages were delivered, and (2) the context of message delivery. Findings are discussed in light of these two sources of variance to develop a conceptual model informing a future research agenda around affective response to gambling promotions during televised sport.

### 5.1. Message delivery

Affective response varied widely across different types of promotions. Milner et al. (2013) describe static messages as fixed advertising (e.g., stadium signs captured by television cameras), and gambling company logos and graphics (e.g., logos on player uniforms and digitally overlaid on the screen). Static messages were widely considered ineffective in generating positive affect, being subsumed within the milieu of advertising "clutter." Static messages appear constrained in conveying product information and, coupled with short exposure durations, were perceived by participants as ineffective in attracting their interest. Nevertheless, the mere exposure effect (Zajonc, 1968) suggests these messages may have unconscious effects on viewers. According to Zajonc's theory, although static messages may not have consciously stimulated gambling intention amongst sport viewers who participated in this study, the mere presence and frequent displays of such static messages may stimulate a degree of brand awareness and preferences, although further research is needed to confirm mere exposure effects in this context.

Integrated promotions which are directly based on movements in match play and thereby link the audience to the unfolding story, such as commentary and displays of betting odds, evoked more positive affect than non-integrated promotions. Regular sports bettors typically expressed positive affect whilst non-sports bettors largely responded negatively, though some non-sports bettors explained that integrated promotions could evoke some interest in gambling. Plot placements such as these appear an effective form of embedded marketing because they may unconsciously transfer affect from the emotionally rich sport broadcast to the integrated product in an affective rather than cognitive fashion.

However, affective responses also differed according to whether promotional messages were delivered implicitly or explicitly. Implicit promotions were blended into broadcasts as background items during match play (i.e., static advertising or embedded commentary around betting odds). These promotions arguably rely on viewers' attentiveness to initially notice the message, along with their predisposition towards the promoted product/service, although the mere exposure effect may still be operative (Zajonc, 1968).

In contrast, explicit messages are “forced” on viewers, such as in studio crossovers to gambling company representatives where the broadcast is temporarily dedicated to that message. Explicit delivery evoked some strong negative affect, particularly amongst non-sports bettors who tended to express concerns about potential influences on children. Because explicit gambling promotions draw exclusive attention to the gambling product/brand being promoted, unless a conscious decision is made by the viewer to divert their attention elsewhere, exposure to that message is unavoidable. Further, concerns were raised by some parents around how explicit promotions undermine their efforts in educating their children of the dangers of gambling. It is possible, however, that these negative affective responses by some participants may reflect the Third Person Effect whereby individuals tend to believe that advertising influences others but not themselves (Davison, 2003) and that others need more protection than they themselves do (Ross, 1977). These effects have also been observed in relation to gambling advertising (Korn, Hurson, & Reynolds, 2005; Yuon, Faber, & Shah, 2000).

An additional implication of implicit versus explicit promotions is that timing of promotions appeared to influence participants’ affective response. Promotions during match play appeared to generate less positive affect than promotions during breaks in play. Participants recounted not noticing logos and graphics during play as they are focused on the match. However, data suggested that explicit messages during breaks in play could encourage impulse betting, particularly if viewers perceived odds as “good value” and related to a favoured team. Moreover, some non-sports bettors explained that explicit gambling promotions during voids in match play could serve as a trigger to experiment with gambling. Enhanced understanding of implicit versus explicit message delivery is therefore needed to inform regulatory considerations if governments are concerned with discouraging uptake of gambling by current non-gamblers.

Previous studies have examined the influence of celebrity endorsement on affective response in various advertising contexts and suggest celebrity endorsement can positively influence affective response (e.g., Biswas et al., 2006; Keller, 1993). In the present study, perceptions varied regarding the influence of celebrity endorsement in gambling promotions. Some participants felt that individuals or teams they were emotionally attached to could evoke positive affect towards the product/brand. Moreover, generational relevance seemed important; for example, younger viewers may not identify with an older identity’s celebrity status. These findings resonate with the proposition of Biswas et al. (2006) that celebrity endorsement may assist in reducing levels of perceived risk amongst prospective purchasers because of their positive identification with familiar sporting identities. In this case, risk presented as potential financial loss and to a lesser extent, particularly amongst non-sports bettors, social concerns about engaging in a perceived stigmatised activity. In this sense, endorsement of gambling products/brands by well-liked individuals or teams may reduce perceptions of risk about gambling, and concomitantly, reduce hesitations about gambling participation. However, as illustrated by participants who did not identify with the celebrity at hand, their affect seemed unaltered. Hence the absence of positive identification nullified the influence of celebrity endorsement for them.

Moreover, participants’ affective responses varied with how promotional messages were framed. Research informed by prospect theory (e.g., Kahneman & Tversky, 1979) suggests that attitude to risk varies according to whether a message emphasises gains or losses. Further, advertisers tend to favour positive message framing that highlights consumer benefits (Pervan & Vocino, 2008). In the present study, some promotional messages emphasised humour and joviality, whilst others adopted serious, professional tones and settings. Gambling companies therefore appear to favour positively framed messages. Indeed, previous research has found that gambling is typically depicted as an exciting, glamorous and attainable lifestyle promising easy financial and social rewards and is often portrayed as a routine, everyday activity that is increasingly likened to sport (McMullan, 2011).

## 5.2. Context of message delivery

Data suggested that different combinations of message delivery techniques can influence affective response. For example, it was observed that combining logos/graphics with integrated commentary may increase attention to the promotion, and therefore its effectiveness in stimulating interest and/or gambling intention. Further, affective response appeared to vary according to gambling status, age category, and/or gender of viewers. Sports bettors typically responded positively to gambling operator sponsored segments with some stating that “good value” odds for a favoured team could encourage impulse betting, while some female non-sports bettors explained they could also be attracted to gambling by these promotions. Similarly, influence of celebrity endorsement appeared to vary according to age, with younger participants seemingly less influenced by a football identity from an older generation. Clearly, sport viewers are not a homogenous group and research needs to consider the personal characteristics of viewers in researching impacts of promotional messages.

Research suggests that advertising has greater impact on consumers with high product involvement because they are more motivated to devote cognitive effort towards evaluating the merits of a product (e.g., Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). In the present study, sports bettors tended to respond more favourably to gambling promotions than non-sports bettors, who largely despised this practice. This aligns with previous findings that gamblers, particularly problem gamblers, are most stimulated to gamble by gambling advertisements (Binde, 2009; Hing, Cherney, et al., 2014).

Additionally, data suggested that impulse betting may result when sport is viewed in the company of others, reflecting previous findings on audience facilitation of gambling which results in higher betting intensity (Rockloff & Dyer, 2007). Impulse betting was also considered more likely when drinking alcohol, with a well-established link between alcohol consumption and increased risk-taking when gambling (Perese, Bellringer, & Abbott, 2005). Other contextual factors have been shown to influence likelihood of impulse betting. Hing, Vitartas, and Lamont (2013) found that sports bettors were

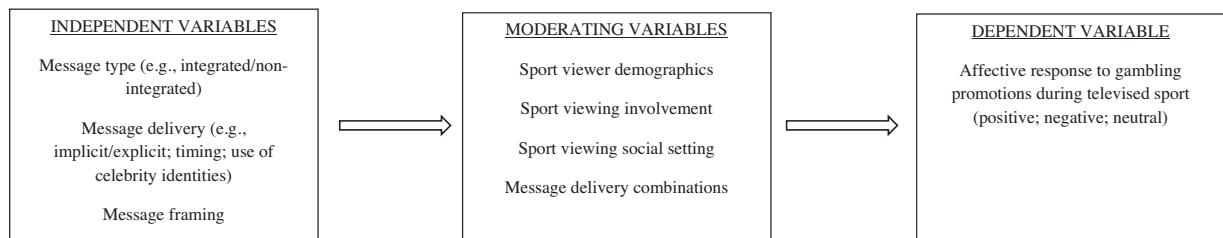


Fig. 1. Conceptual model to inform future research around sport viewers' affective responses to gambling promotions during televised sport.

most likely to place impulse bets if good odds were available, when it was a special match and when their favourite team was playing. Other facilitating factors were ease of access to sports betting facilities (watching in venues with sports betting facilities, having a sports betting account, Internet access during the match), and watching the match with other adults who have bet on it.

### 5.3. A conceptual model to inform future research

Fig. 1 presents a conceptual model derived from the data, depicting emergent affective response categories and gambling promotion message delivery variables. This model might underpin future research examining the interplay between message delivery and sport viewers' affective responses. Message delivery techniques are depicted as independent variables, and affective response as the dependent variable. The three-dimensional model also includes four moderating variables, reflecting the emergent message delivery context themes. Numerous hypotheses may be formulated from Fig. 1. While an exhaustive discussion of all possible hypotheses cannot be included here, pressing areas for future research based on current findings are outlined.

The small sample and interpretive nature of this study were not conducive to objectively analysing affective responses to different gambling promotions by sport viewers' demographic characteristics or levels of sport watching, sports betting or other gambling involvement. However, such research is critical to inform regulatory policy aimed at minimising potential harm for vulnerable groups of sport viewers, such as children, young people, at-risk and problem gamblers.

Sports-embedded gambling promotions are highly heterogeneous (Milner et al., 2013), and this study found that certain elements of gambling promotions particularly generate positive affect amongst some sports viewers. Because positive affect can heighten purchase intention (e.g., Henriksen et al., 2008), more conclusive empirical understandings of elements of gambling promotions generating positive affect amongst vulnerable groups are needed. This study also identified that gambling promotions vary in terms of message type, delivery format, timing, use of celebrity identities, and message framing. Future research should not only assess the effectiveness of individual message delivery techniques, but also examine how combinations influence affective response. Conjoint analysis could untangle separate effects when stimuli are combined.

The present study cannot provide definitive conclusions about which groups respond positively or negatively to different message framings. However, further research could enhance understanding of affective response amongst sport viewers of varying demographic and sport involvement characteristics. Our data suggested that younger sport viewers may be attracted to experimenting with gambling through messages framing gambling as light hearted and fun. Understanding how young males respond to different message framings is important, given they are the target market for these promotions and the demographic group most at-risk of problem gambling (Delfabbro, 2012).

Participants suggested that gambling can carry a negative stigma, although recent literature suggests this stigma is now largely confined to problem gambling (Hing, Holdsworth, Tiyce, & Breen, 2014). Certain message delivery techniques were seen as contributing towards destigmatisation and normalisation of gambling. For example, use of well-known sporting identities to endorse gambling leverages off positive affect held by sport viewers towards that identity (Stone et al., 2003), while use of humour, joviality, and professionally dressed presenters were also identified as normalising gambling, positioning gambling as fun, harmless and an avenue to success. Future research should examine how message delivery techniques contribute to the normalisation of gambling, given that this is likely to increase gambling consumption which, therefore, puts people at greater risk of gambling-related harm (Rockloff, 2012).

The above suggestions represent a starting point for a broad research agenda examining sport viewers' affective response to gambling promotions during televised sport. However, Fig. 1 is not an exhaustive framework of variables relevant to this issue. Future researchers must be attuned to identifying other latent variables not revealed by this study. For example, it is likely that psychological traits including impulsivity, risk-taking and sensation seeking (McDaniel & Zuckerman, 2003) are relevant; however, they were not specifically explored here.

## 6. Conclusion

Televised sport is now a widely used platform for the promotion of gambling, despite its potential to increase gambling-related harm, particularly among youth, young adult males and problem gamblers. However, a comprehensive

understanding of how sports viewers respond to gambling promotions has been lacking, despite the fact that advertising which evokes positive affective responses has been shown to increase consumers' positive perceptions of and engagement with a product/brand. This paper is amongst the first to empirically examine sport viewers' affective responses to gambling promotions during televised sport, identifying a range of positive, negative and neutral responses. A conceptual model was developed summarising these affective response variables, and emergent message delivery and moderating variables. This model might serve as a conceptual platform for a more intensive research agenda examining the interplay between these variables to better understand the impact of gambling promotions on sports viewers. Additionally, as the current findings are not representative, future research with representative samples is needed to verify and build on this study's findings.

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