



Abstract Title: Hijacked and leveraged: Big alcohol marketing in one Canadian community

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Introduction

Nova Scotia's culture of heavy alcohol consumption harms the health and well-being of the population (Taylor, 2015). To reduce the social, economic and health burdens of heavy drinking, a cultural shift is required. The influence of the global alcohol industry in promoting and shaping an alcogenic environment is at odds with the health of the public (Jernigan, 2012).

Objectives

This research uses a case study approach to 1) examine the public understanding of alcohol sponsorship during cultural events 2) the use of alcohol sponsorship, by alcohol brand Diageo, during the 2012 Tall Ships festival in Halifax, Nova Scotia 3) to determine next steps in suggesting adaptations to an existing municipal alcohol policy (MAP).

Methods

This research included peer-reviewed and grey literature to examine alcohol sponsorship during the Tall Ships festival. News articles, Canadian Sponsorship Award Criteria and photos from the festival provided understanding of how the alcohol industry operated. A review of jurisdictional policies provided insight to how other regions differentiate, or group, alcohol sponsorship and advertising policies. Scholarly texts were reviewed to determine the impact of having specific policies that restrict alcohol sponsorship during cultural and sport events.

Results

Municipal alcohol policy in place did not impact the opportunity for a major alcohol brand's pirate theme to 'hijack and leverage' an annual week-long, family-friendly

waterfront festival in 2012 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The major alcohol brand received a Canadian Sponsorship Marketing Award in recognition of their “capacity to use innovative leveraging methods for achieving corporate gains.” (Sponsorship Marketing Council Canada, 2017). The alcohol brand promotions included point of sale ads in alcohol retail outlets, a 5,000-person party, scantily clad attractive females available for photos and contests for trip winnings (Sponsorship Marketing Awards, 2015).

Public consultation with Nova Scotians revealed a counter-intuitive community perception of alcohol sponsorship as separate and distinct from alcohol advertising. Although *advertising* was seen as detrimental to the health of the public, *event sponsorship*, such as the sponsorship of the waterfront festival, would be considered acceptable (Labreque, 2015).

Conclusion

In all municipal policy documents, define sponsorship in practical terms: advertising that seeks to integrate and create associations between two groups; in this case, the major alcohol brand and a family-friendly festival.

Invite alcohol control stakeholders, researchers, policymakers and health promoters to work towards closing the gap in the public’s knowledge of alcohol industry sponsorship as alcohol advertising, as they are indeed one in the same.

References

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