

Using Heroes to Spruik Zeros: An examination of how zero-alcohol beers are promoted alongside sport

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Introduction / Issues: Alcohol sponsorship of sport is associated with alcohol use among young people. Little research to date has examined the messages and tactics of companies promoting zero-alcohol beverages alongside sport. We used a case study approach to examine marketing and sponsorship tactics and messaging of zero-alcohol beer products relating to sport.

Method / Approach: We undertook a qualitative content analysis of the social media pages and websites of three zero-alcohol beers sold in Australia, Heineken, Nort and Zero Sports Beer, to identify marketing messaging and sponsorship or alignment with sporting events and sportspeople. We compared these with marketing tactics used by alcohol brands identified in the literature.

Key findings / Results: In Case study 1, Heineken sponsored the Melbourne Grand Prix, using their Heineken 0.0 branding for their 'when you drive, don't drink' campaign, at their pop-up racing activation and for any product endorsements by famous drivers, but their regular branding for race day side events. In Case study 2 and 3, Nort and Zero Sports Beer sponsored hyperlocal sports events. Key messaging focused on consumption of zero alcohol products as rewards for competing, with Zero Sports Beer extending this by promoting their product specifically as a healthy recovery drink. Similarly to the advertising messages of alcohol products, communication strategies in sponsorship campaigns included calls to collaborate, compete, celebrate and consume.

Discussions and implications for policy: Findings illustrate zero-alcohol beer brands are strongly aligning themselves with sport through the sponsorship of sporting events and individual sportspeople, and using interactive techniques to promote their products.

Implications for practice or policy: Discussions around the regulation of sports sponsorship and advertising should consider zero-alcohol products, and how their classification as soft-drinks may impact future regulation.