

# Alcohol marketing during the 2020 Six Nations Championship: A frequency analysis

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# Executive Summary

## Background and aims:

European countries have varied approaches to regulating alcohol sport sponsorship and advertising during sporting events. For example: France's Évin Law prohibits alcohol sports sponsorship, the Republic of Ireland (hereafter 'Ireland') will soon introduce new controls that partially prohibit alcohol advertising in (or on) the sporting area, and the United Kingdom (UK) has a permissive self-regulatory approach. European-wide tournaments, such as the rugby union Six Nations Championship, provide a real-world opportunity to examine how these varied control contexts influence marketing practice. We used the 2020 Six Nations Championship to examine: (1) the frequency and nature of alcohol marketing during the tournament; (2) how Ireland's impending restrictions may influence alcohol marketing practice during televised sport; and (3) to what extent France's Évin Law impacts on the frequency and nature of marketing during the tournament.

## Methods

A content analysis was conducted on all verbal and visual references to alcohol (lasting >1 second) during televised broadcasts of the 2020 Six Nations Championship, an international rugby union tournament. A purposive sample of four matches were recorded as broadcast on television in the UK. This included two matches played in Ireland (vs. Scotland and vs. Wales), one played in Scotland (UK) (vs. England), and one played in France (vs. England). Two matches were broadcast on a non-commercial channel (BBC) and the other two on a commercial channel (ITV). All matches were played before the COVID-19 pandemic caused the tournament to be postponed and latterly completed without spectators present in stadiums. For each alcohol reference, we recorded: (1) whether it appeared in-play or out-of-play; (2) where it appeared in the broadcast (e.g., within sporting area); (3) the format (e.g., static advertising or match equipment); (4) the brand featured; (5) how long it appeared on screen; (6) how many identical references were visible simultaneously; and (7) the content of the reference (e.g., logos, indirect references, generic reference, age-restriction warnings, and responsible drinking messages).

## Findings

Alcohol marketing was most frequent in the match played in the UK, with an average of approximately 5 references per broadcast minute. This was followed by the two matches played in Ireland (average of approximately 4 references per broadcast minute) and the match played in France (average 1 reference per broadcast minute). In all four broadcasts, and in all three countries, references were mostly observed during the match and in high-profile locations, including large static logos in the middle of the pitch and logos on the match equipment (e.g., on the ball and goal posts). In Ireland and Scotland, almost all references contained explicit branding, whereas most references in France used 'alibi' marketing (i.e., the phrase 'Greatness' as opposed to brand name 'Guinness', albeit presented using similar fonts and colour). In all four broadcasts, no references contained age restriction warnings and only a minority had clearly visible responsible drinking messages.



## Conclusions

Alcohol marketing appeared frequently in televised broadcasts of the 2020 Six Nations Championship. The data have mixed implications for Ireland's scheduled restrictions on advertising during sporting events. On the one hand, the data show the new controls will prohibit some frequently used marketing activities, for example the highly visible static logo in the middle of the pitch that was frequently shown. On the other hand, the data also show alcohol marketing already appears in a variety of other locations that will not be restricted by Ireland's new controls, for example pitch side advertising and advertising placed around the stadium structure. These places, which fall outside the sporting area stipulated by Ireland's impending controls, will provide high-profile opportunities to either preserve or displace marketing activity. Concerning France, alcohol sponsorship was still evident through alibi marketing, despite the practice being seemingly prohibited under the wording of the Évin Law. As such, questions remain over the monitoring and enforcement of the French law, a finding which has implications for the changing context in Ireland and any consideration of controls in either the UK or elsewhere.



# 1. Introduction

Exposure to alcohol marketing communications is causally associated with consumption, including among young people (Jernigan et al., 2017; Sargent & Babor, 2020). Sponsorship, in particular, is a powerful communications tool which allows marketers to use attractive associations with sports to build and reinforce brand salience and foster emotional connections with consumers (Alcohol Action Ireland, 2015; British Medical Association, 2009; Hastings et al. 2010; Purves 2017). In the Republic of Ireland (hereafter ‘Ireland’), live televised sport is popular with young people (Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, 2021) and exposure to sponsorship has been found to increase their recall of alcohol brands who sponsor rugby teams (Houghton et al., 2014). In the UK, around a third of young people recall seeing alcohol sport sponsorship in the past week (Critchlow et al., 2019) and they can recall the sponsorship arrangements between alcohol companies and leading national and international football teams (Alcohol Concern et al., 2015). In France, three-fifths of young people recall seeing alcohol marketing through sporting and cultural events in the past year (Gallopel-Morvan et al., 2017).

European countries have varied approaches to regulating alcohol sport sponsorship. For example, France’s Évin Law prohibits sports sponsorship, Ireland will introduce new controls in November 2020 to prohibit advertising in (or on) the sporting area, and the United Kingdom (UK) has a permissive self-regulatory approach. European-wide tournaments, such the rugby union Six Nations Championship, provide a real-world opportunity to examine how these varied regulatory contexts influence marketing practice. In this report, we use the 2020 Six Nations Championship to examine: (1) the frequency and nature of alcohol marketing during the tournament; (2) how Ireland’s impending restrictions may influence alcohol marketing practice in future iterations of the tournament; and (3) to what extent France’s Évin Law impacts on the frequency and nature of marketing during the tournament.

## 1.1. Sponsorship of the 2020 Six Nations Championship

Rugby union is a popular sport in Europe which has a longstanding relationship with alcohol companies (e.g., Houghton et al., 2014; Purves & Critchlow, 2020). The Six Nations Championship, one of the sport’s most high-profile events, is an international rugby union competition contested annually between six European Nations (England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, France, and Italy). The tournament began in 1883 as the Home Nations Championship, and involved England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. It became the Five Nations when France joined in 1910, and the Six Nations when Italy joined in 2000. The tournament is currently broadcast in more than 180 countries worldwide, reaching a combined audience of over 125 million (Six Nations Rugby, 2017), and over one million spectators attend the matches every year (BBC Sport, 2017).

Sponsorship of the Six Nations Championship provides a high-profile opportunity to capitalise on the global appeal of the tournament and reach audiences through a combination of traditional broadcast activities (e.g., televised/radio broadcasts of



the matches and paid for commercial adverts) and complementary non-broadcast marketing (e.g., outdoor advertising, social media coverage, limited edition packaging, fan zones, branded merchandise, competitions and so forth). Guinness were the primary sponsors of the 2020 Six Nations Championship, signing a six-year sponsorship deal in 2019. They replaced the tournament's long-standing primary sponsorship deal with the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), which ended in 2017, and the one-year deal with NatWest (a subsidiary of RBS), who sponsored the 2018 tournament. The Guinness sponsorship deal was reportedly worth £6m for the 2019 tournament, increasing to around double that figure in the final year of their deal in 2024 (Slot, 2018). Guinness have a long historical association with rugby. This includes sponsorship of the Guinness PRO14 tournament (a European competition for rugby union clubs) and reported partnerships with the four Home Nation Unions (England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales) and leading European clubs (e.g., Leinster and Munster). In addition to Guinness, the individual national teams also have their own respective sponsors. For example, among other non-alcohol sponsors, the Scottish national rugby union team is endorsed by Tennent's lager (Purves and Critchlow, 2020).

## 1.2. Regulation of alcohol sport sponsorship in the Six Nations Championship

The European countries that host, and participate in, the Six Nations Championship have varied approaches to regulating alcohol sport sponsorship and advertising during sporting events, ranging from statutory prohibition to permissive self-regulation. Below, we provide short summaries of the approaches in France, Ireland, and the UK. These are the three countries sampled in this report and represent three different regulatory approaches.

### 1.2.1. France: The Évin Law

In France, the Évin Law (also known as the Loi Évin) strictly regulates alcohol marketing and explicitly prohibits any sponsorship activity which directly or indirectly promotes a beverage containing more than 1.2% Alcohol-By-Volume (ABV) (Republique Francais, 2017). The Évin Law has consistently been circumvented and has been subject to several amendments since it was introduced in 1991 (Gallopel-Morvan et al., 2017). Efforts to undermine the Évin Law have included circumventing the ban on sponsorship of sporting events through 'alibi marketing', the practice of using features that are synonymous with a brand but without making an explicit reference. For example, during the UEFA EURO 2016 football tournament, lead sponsor Carlsberg only used their slogan "Probably...the best in the world" on the advertising hoardings around the pitch, with the text presented in the same font and colours as used for their main brand name (Purves et al. 2017a). The practice of alibi marketing has been used elsewhere, for example to circumvent a ban on tobacco advertising in Formula One (Barker et al., 2019; Grant-Braham & Britton, 2012). Alibi marketing does appear to be in contravention of the Évin law, particularly given the text of article L3323-3 which prohibits: "Propaganda or advertising in favour of an organisation, service, activity, product or article other than an alcoholic beverage which, by its design, use of a name, trademark, advertising emblem or other distinctive sign, recalls an alcoholic beverage." To date, however, we cannot find evidence of a court adjudicating on alibi marketing, despite documented instances in the UEFA EURO 2016 football tournament, the UEFA Champions League, the rugby union Challenge Cup,

and previous iterations of the Six Nations Championship (Barker, Bal & Murray, 2021; Purves et al. 2017a). The reasons why alibi marketing has been routinely permitted therefore remain unclear.

### 1.2.2. Ireland: The impending Public Health (Alcohol) Act controls

In Ireland, the Public Health (Alcohol) Act (hereafter ‘the Act’) was signed into law in October 2018. In addition to marketing, the legislation also covers wider aspects of alcohol regulation, for example minimum pricing and controls on the display of alcohol in retail settings, which are discussed elsewhere (O’Dwyer, 2019). The Act contains a variety of controls on alcohol marketing including, but not limited to, restrictions on where alcohol advertising can be placed (e.g., not on public transport/at transport hubs), limiting advertising to only factual information, and mandating health messaging on packaging. The controls will be phased in by the incumbent Minister for Health. As part of the marketing controls, the Act will prohibit alcohol advertising in, or on, a sports area during a sports event and prohibit sponsorship of events aimed at children (or where the majority of participants are children) or events that involve motor racing/vehicles (Sections 15 & 16) (Oireachtas, 2018). These sections will become mandatory from 12th November 2021 and will, for example, prohibit alcohol companies from placing logos on the pitch (e.g., behind the posts and in the centre of the pitch) (Houghton & McInerney, 2019). To our understanding, the legislation will not prohibit the presence of logos on the match-shirts of players and officials, advertising pitch-side or around the structure of the stadium, or consumption of alcohol products by spectators. The changing nature in Ireland therefore provides a unique opportunity to capture pre- and post- evaluation data of how the controls impact on marketing practice.

### 1.2.3. The United Kingdom: A self-regulatory approach

Unlike France and Ireland, the UK does not have any legislative restrictions on alcohol sport sponsorship. Instead, activities are self-regulated by the alcohol industry (Portman Group, 2014). Among other stipulations, the Portman Group’s Code of Practice on Alcohol Sponsorship indicates that all sport sponsorship relations must include a recognisable commitment to promoting responsible alcohol use and/or supporting diversionary community activities and must not: (1) sponsor individuals under 18 years old, teams or events where three quarters of the participants are under 18 years old, or teams or events aimed at (or with particular appeal to) under 18s; (2) place logos on slogans on merchandise which has a particular appeal to, or is intended for, those under 18 years old; (3) deliberately and prominently feature people who are, or look, under 25 years old in marketing activities; or (4) imply it is acceptable to consume alcohol before, or during, a sporting activity or suggest that alcohol enhances sporting performance or success. These code items mirror previous guidelines set out by the Scottish Government and Alcohol Industry Partnership (SGAIP, 2009). Wider evaluation evidence, however, has queried the extent to which self-regulatory codes are effective (Noel et al., 2017a; Noel et al. 2017b; Alcohol Change, 2018).

### 1.3. Research objectives

To date, research examining the frequency and nature of alcohol marketing practice during the Six Nations Championship has either only examined matches played in one country (Scotland) and before Guinness became the lead sponsor (Purves & Critchlow, 2020) or has only focused on the activities of the lead sponsor during active play (i.e. Guinness references in the match, excluding pre- and post-match or half time references and those of other brands) and with limited examination of reference characteristics (Barker et al., 2021). European-wide tournaments, such as the Six Nations Championship, also provide an important real-world opportunity to examine how the different regulatory contexts in the host countries influence the marketing practices of alcohol brands. This, in turn, provides important evaluation evidence concerning the effectiveness of existing legislation, for example the Évin Law, and to inform the potential impact of new restrictions elsewhere, for example the scheduled controls in Ireland. We therefore used the 2020 Six Nations Championship to examine:

1. The extent, nature, and frequency of alcohol sport sponsorship in televised broadcasts of the 2020 Six Nations Championship.
2. To what extent Ireland's future controls will impact on the frequency and nature of alcohol marketing in future Six Nations Championship matches held in Ireland?
3. To what extent, if at all, France's Évin Law impacts on the frequency and nature of alcohol marketing during the Six Nations Championship and/or whether alibi marketing tactics are used to circumvent the legislation?





## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Study design

A frequency analysis was conducted on all verbal and visual references to alcohol during a sample of four televised matches from the 2020 Six Nations Championship, as broadcast in the UK. The study design is informed by, and is based on, previous research into alcohol sponsorship in the UK (Graham & Adams, 2014; Purves and Critchlow, 2020) and at international football tournaments (Adams et al., 2014; Purves et al., 2017a; Purves et al., 2017b).

### 2.2. Sample of broadcasts from the 2020 Six Nations Championship

A purposive sample of four matches from the 2020 Six Nations Championship were recorded as broadcast in the UK in 2020 (Table 1). To ensure representativeness, we purposively selected two matches broadcast on a public service channel (BBC), where commercial advertising breaks are not permitted, and two matches broadcast on a commercial channel (ITV), where commercial advertising breaks and sponsorship lead-ins are featured. All selected broadcasts were recorded in their entirety through an online media recording service available through academic institutions (Box of Broadcasts). Each recording included all normal playing time, added time, half-time analysis, commercial breaks, interviews with players and staff, and all pre-and-post match studio punditry. As per previous research, we excluded any pre-or-post match discussion, interviews, or highlights that were not part of the scheduled broadcast (e.g., content through on-demand television, content on sports news websites, or additional content available through interactive television).

**Table 1. The 2020 Six Nation Championship matches/broadcasts analysed**

| Fixture              | Host City          | Date              | Broadcast channel    | Length (mins) <sup>4</sup> |
|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Ireland vs. Scotland | Dublin             | 1st February 2020 | ITV <sup>2</sup>     | 180                        |
| France vs. England   | Paris <sup>1</sup> | 2nd February 2020 | BBC One <sup>3</sup> | 160                        |
| Ireland vs. Wales    | Dublin             | 8th February 2020 | ITV <sup>2</sup>     | 190                        |
| Scotland vs. England | Edinburgh          | 8th February 2020 | BBC One <sup>3</sup> | 190                        |

**Notes:**

- 1 Match played in France where the Évin law prohibits alcohol sport sponsorship.
- 2 Commercial broadcaster, where advertising breaks permitted.
- 3 Non-commercial broadcaster, no advertising breaks permitted.
- 4 Broadcast length as reported in Box of Broadcasts (BoB)

To meet the research aims, the sample was purposively designed to include matches played in Ireland, the UK, and France. The sample was limited to four broadcasts due to the combination of programme length (range: 160 to 190 mins) and the extensive and detailed nature of the coding, a factor known through a previous assessment of

a Six Nations match using this codebook (Purves and Critchlow, 2020). Existing research, focusing on the 2019 Six Nations tournament when Guinness were still the lead sponsor, provides an estimate of the overall volume of references during active play across all tournament matches (Barker et al., 2021). We purposively chose two matches played in Ireland (at the Aviva Stadium in Dublin) to generate data relevant to Ireland's impending new restrictions on advertising at sport. We purposively chose one match played in France (at the Stade de France in Paris) to generate comparative data concerning the volume and type of references that appeared in a country that already had restrictions on alcohol marketing at sporting events, and to examine whether previous examples of the use of alibi marketing to circumvent the Évin Law (Purves et al. 2017a; 2017b) also applied to rugby. We also chose to include one match played in the UK (at Murrayfield Stadium in Edinburgh) for insight into a country currently operating a self-regulatory approach and with no impending change in controls.

## 2.3. Responding to COVID-19

The 2020 Six Nations Championship was halted in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The tournament resumed in October 2020 with matches played 'behind closed doors' (i.e., without spectators and limited to essential players, match officials, and broadcasters). We decided not to include matches that took place after the tournament resumed. One of the main research objectives is to examine to what extent, if at all, Ireland's impending controls will affect alcohol marketing references in future iterations of the Six Nations Championship. It is intended, and indeed likely, that future iterations of the tournament – as well as other sporting events in Ireland – will be played with spectators present again, and the 2018 legislation was designed with this in mind. A brief review of matches played after the tournament resumed highlighted fundamental differences to those played beforehand, including empty stadia seating being repurposed to display large static advertising and no supporter references in the crowd (e.g., consuming alcohol or wearing branded merchandise). We therefore decided these broadcasts were incongruent to the long-term intended context in which Ireland's controls will be implemented in. Moreover, given the small sample, we were concerned that matches during the pandemic may over- or under-represent the overall volume and frequency of alcohol marketing, may misrepresent the locations and format of references typical when supporters are present, and would confound the ability to compare across countries (e.g., if the match in France was during the pandemic and the match in the UK was not).

## 2.4. Defining alcohol marketing references

Consistent with previous research, a reference was defined as any visual and/or verbal reference to alcohol or an alcohol brand that lasted for one second or more during the broadcasted programme or commercial break (Purves et al., 2017a; 2017b). References were counted each time they appeared, irrespective of how long they lasted or whether they had been seen previously (e.g., pitch side advertising hoardings first shown during live match action and later again in a replay of that action). A new reference was counted each time the camera angle changed shot, even if the reference source remained the same (e.g., if a pitch-side advertising board was first visible in a close up shot and then again when the camera moved back to the wide-angle lens). A new reference was also counted if a reference went out of shot for at least a second (e.g., if the camera panned away from an advertising board and back again). If multiple references of a varied

nature were visible at the same time (e.g., shirt sponsorship and a static advertising board), each was recorded as a separate reference. If multiple identical references were visible at the same time (e.g., if logos could be seen on multiple players' shirts simultaneously) these were coded under 'number of identical references visible at the same time' (details below).

## 2.5. Coding alcohol references

All references to alcohol were captured using an existing detailed codebook developed to analyse alcohol marketing at the UEFA EURO 2016 football tournament (Purves et al., 2017a). The codebook has been shown to have acceptable inter-rater reliability among the current research team (Purves et al., 2017a). The codebook has also been previously adapted to code an international rugby union match (Purves & Critchlow, 2020) and a pilot on the current broadcast sample highlighted no significant changes were required to either the content or response options. Almost all coding in this study was conducted by Richard Purves (RP), with a small amount of the Ireland vs. Wales match coded by Nathan Critchlow (NC). Any new or ambiguous references that arose during the coding were discussed and agreed between the research team.

During the coding, each individual reference was coded on the following criteria (a full copy of the codebook is available on request from the research team, or as reported in existing publications – Purves et al. 2017a; 2017b):

- Whether the reference appeared in play (i.e., during the first and second half of the live match action) or out-of-play (e.g., pre-match, half-time, post-match, or commercial breaks).
- Type of reference (e.g., visual, verbal, or both).
- Location of reference (e.g., whether it appeared around the pitch border, in the TV studio, within the sporting area, or during a commercial break).
- Format of reference (e.g., static pitch-side advertising, branded merchandise, match equipment, or electronic advertising).
- Duration of the references (measured in seconds, using timer on the Box of Broadcast media player).
- Number of identical references visible at the same time (e.g., if logos could be seen on a variety of shirts at the same time or multiple identical pitch side advertising hoardings were visible in a wide angle shot).
- Alcohol brand featured.
- Content of reference (e.g., did it feature a brand logo, was there a brand slogan, was it just a generic reference with no brand present?)
- Whether the reference included an age restriction warning and/or a responsible drinking message (e.g., “please drink responsibly” or “For the facts: DrinkAware.co.uk”).



## 2.5. Data analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS version 27. All broadcasts were analysed separately, rather than as a grand sample, to provide granular understanding of the frequency and nature of alcohol marketing references under the regulatory contexts in each country. Prior to analysis, the data for each broadcast were screened to detect any coding inconsistencies or logically implausible references (e.g., a reference that said it was both in the crowd but was electronic advertising). For any implausible instances detected, the original broadcast footage was reviewed (all references were time stamped to facilitate checking) and the coding was agreed and updated by the research team.

For each broadcast, frequencies and percentages were computed for: (1) the total number of alcohol marketing references observed; (2) whether the reference was observed in-play vs. out-of-play; (3) the location of reference (e.g., within the designated playing area or in the crowd); (4) the format of reference (e.g., branded merchandise or match equipment); (5) the alcohol brands featured; (6) the content of the advert (e.g., logos, slogans, indirect references); (7) and whether an age restriction warning and/or responsible drinking message was included. Medians and Inter-Quartile Ranges (IQR) were computed for the duration of references and identical references visible at the same time. For each broadcast, we calculated the average number of references per minute (total number of references / total length of broadcast reported on Box of Broadcasts) and the estimated frequency in seconds (60 seconds / average number of references per broadcast minute).



## 3. Results

### 3.1. Alcohol references in the matches played in Ireland

Overall, 1,444 references to alcohol were observed across the two matches played in Ireland: 690 vs. Scotland and 754 vs. Wales (both at the Aviva Stadium in Dublin) (Table 2). This equated, on average, to 3.8 references a minute in the broadcast vs. Scotland (approximately once every 16 seconds) and 4.0 references a minute vs. Wales (approximately once every 15 seconds). In both broadcasts, most references appeared during in-play (63.2% and 60.9%, respectively), the median duration of references was 3 seconds (both IQR: 2-6 seconds) and most references related to lead tournament sponsor, Guinness (97.5% and 97.7%, respectively).

In both broadcasts involving matches played in Ireland, the most frequent location of references was within the sporting area (52.5% vs. Scotland and 49.2% vs. Wales) (Table 2). Other locations included around the border of the sporting area (e.g., advertising hoardings), in the TV studio (e.g., static logos for decoration on studio backdrops), in the crowd (e.g., supporters consuming alcohol), video segments (e.g., features or highlights of other matches), the stadium or area structure (e.g., advertising hoardings affixed to the upper tiers), integrated graphics (e.g., score graphics or transitions between replays) and, in the case of the match vs. Wales broadcast on ITV, sponsorship lead-ins (i.e. short idents before and after commercial breaks that promoted Guinness as the lead tournament sponsor).

In both broadcasts involving matches played in Ireland, the most frequent format of references was static advertising (45.7% vs. Scotland and 38.6% vs. Wales). This included, but was not limited to, the large Guinness logo painted on the centre of the pitch, logos on interview boards and in the TV studio, and static advertising on the stadium structure. In both broadcasts, around a quarter of references appeared on the match equipment (22.5% vs. Scotland and 28.6% vs. Wales). This included logos on the flags which marked the boundaries of the pitch, logos on the coverings around the goal posts, and logos on the match ball. Approximately a fifth of references (20.7% vs. Scotland and 22.5% vs. Wales) were for electronic advertising hoarding, particularly around the pitch and upper tiers of the stadium that were frequently visible through various camera angles.

**Table 2. Summary of alcohol references in the four 2020 Six Nations Championship broadcasts analysed**

| Codebook variable                          | Ireland vs. Scotland  | Ireland vs. Wales   | Scotland vs. England   | France vs. England <sup>1</sup>  |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| Total references in broadcast              | 690   | 754   | 961  | 193  |
| Average references per minute <sup>2</sup> | 3.8   | 4.0   | 5.1  | 1.2  |
| Approximate frequency <sup>3</sup>         | 16 secs   | 15 secs   | 12 secs  | 50 secs  |
| Proportion of references in play           | 63.2%   | 60.9%   | 68.0%  | 82.4%  |
| Proportion of references out of play       | 36.8%   | 39.1%   | 32.0%  | 17.6%  |
| Most popular locations of references       | Within sporting area (52.5%)<br>TV studio (12.5%)<br>Border of sporting area (12.0%)    | Within sporting area (49.2%)<br>Border of sporting area (12.9%)<br>Video segments (11.7%) | Stadium structure (36.2%)<br>Within sporting area (34.0%)<br>Border of sporting area (12.1%) | Within sporting area (74.6%)<br>Video segments (13.0%)<br>Border of sporting area (8.8%) |
| Most popular formats of references         | Static advertising (45.7%)<br>Match equipment (22.5%)<br>Electronic advertising (20.7%) | Static advertising (38.6%)<br>Match equipment (28.6%)<br>Electronic advertising (22.5%)   | Static advertising (59.9%)<br>Match equipment (18.8%)<br>Electronic advertising (13.7%)      | Static advertising (81.3%)<br>Electronic advertising (12.4%)<br>Match equipment (3.1%)   |
| Most featured brand                        | Guinness (97.5%)  | Guinness (97.7%)  | Guinness (50.8%)   | Guinness (96.9%)   |
| Median duration references                 | 3 secs (IQR: 2-6)   | 3 secs (IQR: 2-6)   | 4 secs (IQR: 2-7)  | 4 secs (IQR: 2-6)  |
| Median number identical references         | 1 ref (IQR: 1-4)  | 1 (IQR: 1-4)  | 2 refs (IQR: 1-3)  | 1 ref (IQR: 1-1)   |
| Features brand name or logo                | 98.7%   | 99.3%   | 94.7%  | 10.3%  |
| Features slogan or tagline                 | 0.3%  | 0.1%  | 1.1%   | 0.0%   |
| Indirect / Alibi marketing reference       | 0.0%  | 0.1%  | 0.3%   | 88.1%  |
| Generic reference (i.e., no brand)         | 1.3%  | 0.5%  | 5.0%   | 1.6%   |
| Features responsible drinking message      | 3.5% <sup>4</sup>   | 5.8%  | 0.4% <sup>4</sup>  | 0.0% <sup>4</sup>  |
| Features age restriction warning           | 0.0%  | 0.0%  | 0.0%   | 0.0%   |

**Notes:**

IQR Inter-Quartile Range

1 Match played in France where the Évin Law prohibits alcohol sport sponsorship

2 Total references in match / by number of minutes in the broadcast



- 3 60 (seconds in a minute) / average number of references per minute (second rounded to the nearest integer for ease)
- 4 References 'unsure' for responsible drinking messages (i.e., likely there, but unclear in broadcast, for example too distant from camera, obscured by player, or truncated); Ireland vs. Scotland (18.8%); Ireland vs. Wales (13.0%); Scotland vs. England (2.6%); France vs. England (1.0%).

In both broadcasts involving matches played in Ireland, almost all references featured a brand name or logo (98.7% vs. Scotland and 99.3% vs. Wales). Only a small proportion were generic (e.g., fans consuming alcohol in the stadiums) and almost none were indirect/alibi marketing (Table 2). No references in either broadcast were observed to contain an age restriction warning, including the sponsorship lead-ins or references in commercial adverts on ITV. Only a small proportion of references were observed to have a responsible drinking statement (3.5% vs. Scotland and 5.8% vs. Wales). This included references to Drinkaware on the base of the goal posts, on pitch side advertising hoarding, and in the sponsorship lead-ins. It should be noted, however, that 18.8% of references in the broadcast vs. Scotland and 13.0% of references vs. Wales were coded as 'unsure' for responsible drinking messages. These codes represented cases where it was likely that a responsible drinking message was present, but this could not be verified. Examples included when the camera angle was too far away to clearly read the text (particularly on the rugby goal posts and flags where the writing was small and at the base) or because the message was obscured by other features (e.g., could not be seen behind the body of the players).

### 3.2. Alcohol references in the match played in Scotland (UK)

There were 961 references observed in the Scotland vs. England broadcast, played at Murrayfield Stadium in Edinburgh. This equated to, on average, 5.1 references per broadcast minute, or approximately once every 12 seconds (Table 2). Most references were observed in-play (68.0%), the median number of identical instances alongside each reference was two (IQR: 1-3) and the median duration of references was four seconds (IQR: 2-7).

The most frequent location of references in the match played in Scotland was on the stadium structure (36.2%), particularly static and electronic advertising hoarding on the upper tiers that was visible during large parts of the broadcast, including during the match and occasionally during studio punditry. Around a third of references appeared within the designated sporting area (34.0%), including the large 'Guinness' logo in the middle of the pitch. Concerning format, and similar to the broadcasts involving matches played in Ireland, the majority of references were static advertising (59.9%), including static advertising hoardings around the stadium, the static pitch logo, and logos on interview boards. Almost a fifth of references (18.8%) involved the match equipment (e.g., logos on the goal posts, boundary flags, or match ball) and approximately one-in-seven references (13.7%) were electronic advertising hoardings. Other reference formats included logos on interview boards, images of alcohol being consumed by supporters in the crowd, and branded merchandise worn by supporters.

Most of the references observed in the match played in Scotland were for Guinness (50.8%) or Tennent's (31.4%). The number for Guinness rose to 51.7% if also including references to 'Guinness Clear' which appeared on rain ponchos worn by some supporters; Guinness Clear is a term used by the brand to encourage consumers to drink water as part of their

responsible drinking activities (Guinness, n.d). Tennent's received considerable coverage due to the static advertising hoardings affixed to the upper tiers that were visible during large parts of the match play. Most references featured a brand logo or name (94.7%). No references were observed to contain an age restriction warning, and only a small number could be confirmed as containing a responsible drinking message (0.4%). For the latter, there were an additional 2.6% of references for which it was possible there was a responsible drinking message, but this could not be clearly seen, for similar reasons outlined in the Ireland broadcasts (e.g., the camera angle too far away to reasonably read or the message was obscured by other stimuli).

### 3.3. Alcohol references in the match played in France

There were 193 references observed in the France vs. England broadcast, played at the Stade De France in Paris (Table 2). This equated, on average, to 1.2 references a minute across the broadcast, or approximately once every 50 seconds. Most references were observed in-play (82.4%), most references appeared on their own (Mdn=1; IQR=1-1), and the median duration was four seconds (IQR: 2-6). Almost all references observed were for Guinness, lead sponsor of the 2020 Six Nations Championship (96.9%).

Owing to the Évin Law restrictions, most references (88.1%) were indirect forms of alibi marketing and appeared within the sporting area (74.6%). This was mostly accounted for by a large static advert situated right in the middle of the picture that said 'Greatness' (a word chosen and designed to resemble the 'Guinness' logo positioned in the middle of the picture in other matches). Only a small proportion of references directly referred to an alcohol brand through a name or logo (10.3%), the majority of which appeared in video segments showing footage from matches played in other countries where the Évin Law restrictions did not apply (e.g., replays, highlights, or feature packages). None of the references were observed to have either age restriction warnings or responsible drinking statements; two references (1.0%) were coded as 'unsure' for the latter where it was possible there was a responsible drinking statement on the base of the posts in highlights of other matches, but this could not be definitively seen in the recording (e.g., too small or obscured by the match action).

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Key findings

Our analysis of the 2020 Six Nations Championship observed frequent alcohol marketing references in all four broadcasts sampled. This included matches played in three countries with varying controls on alcohol sport sponsorship. References were most frequent in the match played in Scotland (UK), where no mandatory restrictions on alcohol sport sponsorship exist, with an average of five alcohol references per broadcast minute. This was followed by matches played in Ireland, where controls on some aspects of alcohol advertising during sport events will become mandatory in November 2021, with an average of approximately four alcohol references per broadcast minute. References were least frequent in the match played in France, where the Évin Law prohibits alcohol sport sponsorship, with an average of one reference per broadcast minute.

In all three countries, alcohol marketing references appeared in a variety of highly visible locations. For example, in all four broadcasts, the majority of references appeared in-play (i.e., during the match action), and therefore likely to coincide with maximal audience attention. Moreover, in the two matches played in Ireland, and the match played in France, at least half of the references were observed within the sporting area, again where audience attention is likely to concentrate. Moreover, in the two matches played in Ireland, and the match played in Scotland, around a fifth of references involved the highly visible match equipment itself, including logos on the match ball, flags marking the boundaries of the pitch, and covers on the rugby goal posts. No age-restriction warnings were observed in any of the broadcasts and, in all four broadcasts, only a minority of references contained clearly visible responsible drinking messages.

For the two matches played in Ireland, and the match played in Scotland, where no mandatory restrictions on alcohol sport sponsorship applied at the time of the tournament, almost all references contained explicit mention of an alcohol brand, particularly for the lead sponsor of the tournament, Guinness. In the match played in France, where the Évin Law prohibits sport sponsorship, most references were in the form of alibi marketing (i.e., no brand name is mentioned, and the brand identity is distilled to basic components). This is a continuation of a technique known to have been used a range of previous sports tournaments in France (Barker et al., 2021; Purves et al., 2017a).

### 4.2 Policy implications

#### 4.2.1 Implications for the Republic of Ireland

From November 2021, Section 15 of Ireland's Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 will implement a mandatory prohibition on alcohol advertising in (or on) a sporting area, except for branded clothing containing names, trademarks, or logos (e.g., shirts). Our findings suggest mixed implications for the likely impact of this legislative change. On one hand, approximately half of the alcohol marketing references observed during the matches played in Ireland appeared within the sporting area, and most of these were not branded clothing (e.g., large static logo painted in the centre of the pitch, and logos for the lead tournament sponsor on the goal posts, boundary flags, and match ball).



As such, the targeted nature of the legislation will prohibit a considerable amount of marketing activity observed in high-profile and highly visible parts of the broadcasts of this tournament.

Conversely, however, the data also show that matches played in Ireland contained a range of other marketing references that were not in (or on) the designated sporting area. These included, but are not limited to, advertising hoardings around the pitch, advertising affixed to the upper stadium tiers, references in other parts of the stadium (e.g., in the interview areas or in the crowd), and references appearing elsewhere in the broadcast (e.g., TV studios, integrated graphics, sponsorship lead-ins, and commercial adverts). These marketing activities will not be restricted under the new Section 15 controls and will therefore provide continued opportunities for marketing placement and exposure during broadcasts of both future iterations of the Six Nations and of other sporting events with similar stadium structures (e.g., Gaelic football, hurling, and football). Moreover, for both future iterations of the Six Nations Championship and other sporting competitions, exposure to marketing within the sporting area will continue to remain possible during broadcasts of Ireland matches that are played abroad (including to alibi marketing if played in France) and in highlights or coverage of other matches played elsewhere (e.g., Premier League football from the UK).

Post-implementation evaluation will be essential to determine to what extent the overall volume of alcohol marketing during the Six Nations is impacted by the legislation and/or to what extent existing marketing activity is displaced to permissible locations and/or formats (e.g., more stadium structure advertising or more visible logos on the match clothing). Future consumer research is also required to examine the extent to which, if at all, these new restrictions impact on existing estimates of awareness of alcohol sports sponsorship in Ireland.

#### 4.2.2 Implications for legislation in France

Although France's Évin Law prohibits alcohol sport sponsorship, research into football tournaments has shown that alcohol companies use alibi marketing to preserve their brand visibility (Purves et al. 2017a). The data presented here corroborate that this technique is also used in rugby union matches in France, another high-profile sporting event. Specifically, although there were few references observed during the broadcast in France which explicitly featured the brand name 'Guinness' – and these were mostly limited to highlights of matches played elsewhere – around nine-out-of-ten references featured the term 'Greatness'. This alibi term was presented in the same colour and font and the traditional brand name, has a similar length and shape to the brand name, and appeared in similar high-profile positions as per the brand logo in matches played elsewhere (i.e., middle of the pitch). Anecdotal reporting suggests this use of alibi marketing in rugby union is longstanding. For example, when Heineken were lead sponsors of the European Rugby Champions Cup, this was rebranded to 'The H Cup' in France (Purves et al. 2017b) and Brains, a Welsh brewery and former sponsor of the national side, used puns to preserve their marketing activities for matches played in France (Kemp, 2009). This alibi term was also present in the 2019 Six Nations matches played in France, the first iteration in Guinness's current sponsorship deal (Barker et al., 2021). Moreover, and consistent with previous research into football (Purves et al. 2017a), none of the references to 'Greatness' were observed to have a responsible drinking statement, suggesting non-compliance with a further stipulation outlined in article L3323-4 of the Évin Law (Republique Francais, 2017).

The Évin Law phrasing does seemingly intend to prohibit the use of alibi (indirect) marketing (Faber, 2017). The law does appear to make concessions for multi-national events, broadly considered as those intended to be broadcast in a wide number of countries (i.e., not just targeting the French public) and/or where French broadcasters have limited control over the content displayed (Cairns, 2005). The law does, however, consider that the restrictions do apply to binational events that meet the following criteria: (1) involve at least one French team; (2) are considered to be directly targeted at French audiences; (3) and hosted and broadcast in France (Fabre, 2017). Put simply, in the context of the Six Nations Championship, the Évin Law acknowledges that French audiences may be exposed to alcohol marketing if their national team plays against England and the fixture takes place in the UK, but not if the same match takes place in France. While both matches are of substantial interest to French audiences, the French authorities have no jurisdiction over the marketing controls in the UK, albeit French broadcasters could take steps to obfuscate the marketing in the footage transmitted in their country (e.g., blurring or overlaying alternative graphics).

The driving factor behind the continued appearance of alibi marketing for alcohol brands in France remains unclear. Three explanations are plausible: (1) the alcohol companies consider their alibi marketing activities are legally compliant with the spirit and wording of the Évin Law (albeit this may not have been explicitly tested in judicial process yet); (2) the spirit and stipulations of the Évin Law are not routinely or adequately monitored and enforced, leading to unsanctioned non-compliance; or (3) there is an adjunct agreement between those responsible for enforcing the Évin Law (e.g., authorities or regulators) and those responsible for complying (e.g., sporting and media organisations) that make alibi marketing permissible. The veracity of each or all the hypotheses could only be determined through further dialogue with, and disclosure from, relevant stakeholders in France. The continued presence of alibi marketing in France does, however, have implications for the regulators and policymakers overseeing the new restrictions in Ireland, namely whether alibi marketing will also be restricted under the wording of their legislation and what arrangements are in place to monitor and enforce the restrictions.

#### 4.2.3 Implications for legislation in Scotland and the UK

The current data mirror previous assessments which have shown that alcohol marketing appeared frequently during televised broadcasts of sport in the UK, including rugby union (e.g., Purves & Critchlow, 2020; Barker et al. 2021). Specifically, when compared to the exact same fixture assessed using the same detailed codebook in the 2018 iteration of the Six Nations Championship (Scotland vs. England played at Murrayfield Stadium in Edinburgh), both broadcasts had an average of around 4-5 references per minute, most references featured in play, most references appeared around the stadium structure, and the median length of references was around three to four seconds (Purves & Critchlow, 2020). This shows consistency in both the frequency, format, and presentation of alcohol marketing during rugby union over time. That most references did not have a clearly visible responsible drinking message is incongruent to the UK's existing self-regulation code that suggests that sponsorship should include a recognisable commitment to promoting responsible alcohol (Portman Group, 2014).

Compared to France and Ireland, the UK does not have any mandatory restrictions on sport sponsorship. To date, there has been little discussion of change to the self-regulatory approach among the UK Government, but there is some discussion among

some devolved nations. For example, Alcohol Focus Scotland (AFS) and Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP) have called on the Scottish Government to introduce comprehensive restrictions on alcohol sponsorship of professional sport and to implement independent monitoring and enforcement for these restrictions (Alcohol Focus Scotland and SHAAP, 2020; Macaskill, 2021). As part of their 2018 alcohol strategy, the Scottish Government have committed to holding a consultation concerning mandatory restrictions on alcohol marketing. This is anticipated to take place in early 2022, albeit there are no firm commitments on exactly what activities or controls are to be considered. While some aspects of alcohol marketing control are reserved to the Westminster Government (e.g., broadcast and cinema advertising) (Scottish Government, 2018) there is no apparent reason why control of sport sponsorship is not devolved. The experiences and implications discussed above for France (who have restrictions on alcohol sport sponsorship) and Ireland (who are planning to introduce controls) will likely provide important insight concerning the design, implementation, and enforcement of any change, at either a devolved or national level.

### 4.3. Limitations

The study is only based on a small purposively selected sample of matches from the 2020 Six Nations Championship as broadcast in the UK, with the sample sizes constrained by the in-depth and detailed nature of the coding and the number of references observed. Although the four matches represent a quarter of all fixtures played in the year's tournament (15), and include three of the six participating countries (France, Scotland, Ireland) with various marketing control contexts, the findings may not be representative of matches played in other venues (Wales, England, and Italy). Furthermore, as we only focused on the 2020 tournament, the findings may not be representative of past or future iterations, particularly due to changes in sponsorship relations (e.g., Guinness were not the title sponsor in our previous assessment in 2018). Data estimating the total volume of alcohol marketing across the 2019 iteration of the tournament are reported elsewhere (Barker et al., 2021). We also deliberately only sampled matches played before the tournament's enforced suspension due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and our findings should not be considered representative of the frequency, location, and format of references for matches played behind closed doors. We only examined UK broadcasts. While the footage of the actual match is likely to be same across countries (a 'uniform' or 'global' feed provided by the host country), the out-of-match references (e.g., in television studios, video segments, commercial breaks) may vary in broadcasts in Ireland and France. This report also only considers the frequency and format of alcohol marketing references during an international rugby union tournament. Findings may be different for club-level rugby union or other sports in the respective countries (e.g., hurling in Ireland or football in England). Finally, all matches were watched using an online media player (Box of Broadcasts) using standard PC monitors. While this was the most practical method, and the quality sufficient for coding, some audiences may have viewed the original broadcasts in sharper resolution and or larger screens (e.g., HD or 4K). This may have meant some of the responsible drinking messages coded 'unsure' in this study were visible and interpretable.



## 5. Conclusions

Alcohol marketing appeared frequently in televised broadcasts of the 2020 Six Nations Championship. The results have mixed implications for Ireland's scheduled restrictions on advertising during sporting events. On one hand, the data show the new controls will prohibit some frequently used marketing activities, for example the highly visible static logo that appeared in the middle of the pitch. On the other hand, however, the data also show that alcohol marketing already appears in a variety of other places that will not be restricted by Ireland's new controls, for example pitch side advertising hoardings and advertising hoardings placed around the stadium structure, to name only two. These activities will therefore provide high-profile opportunities to preserve or displace marketing activity. Concerning France, alcohol sponsorship was still evident through alibi marketing, despite the practice seemingly prohibited under the wording of Évin Law. As such, questions remain over the monitoring and enforcement of the French law, a finding which has implications for the changing context in Ireland and any consideration of controls in the UK.

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