

# Instabrand courtside: a content analysis of marketing strategies by food and beverage brands during the 2021 Australian Open tennis tournament

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**A**lcohol use and poor diet are amongst leading risk factors for disease burden, ranked third and sixth for contribution to disease burden respectively in Australia in 2015.<sup>1</sup> Alcohol use has been estimated to be responsible for 4.5% of the total burden of disease and injury including liver disease and cancer, road traffic injuries and self-harm injuries.<sup>1</sup> Teenagers and young adults are at particular risk of alcohol harms, with greater likelihood of drinking to intoxication compared with other age groups<sup>2</sup> and greater exposure to alcohol marketing.<sup>3</sup> The 2019–2028 Australian National Alcohol Strategy's third objective includes implementing measures to reduce the exposure of young people to alcohol advertising including online and at sporting events.<sup>2</sup> Dietary risk contributes significantly to rates of heart disease, diabetes, stroke and bowel cancer.<sup>1</sup> A contributing factor to poor diet is the frequent consumption of foods prepared outside the home, such as fast foods, other takeaway foods and café and restaurant meals and snacks.<sup>4</sup> Consumption of takeaway food has been associated with increased energy intake and an excess of saturated fat, sodium and added sugars, particularly among males and younger adults.<sup>4</sup> One survey of 18–30-year-old Australians revealed 40% of their energy intake and sugars and 47% of their sodium intake came from food prepared outside the home.<sup>5</sup> Restricting the advertising and promotion of unhealthy products is a key policy pillar in non-communicable disease prevention.<sup>6,7</sup>

## Abstract

**Objective.** To examine the marketing techniques food and beverage brands use on Instagram, as part of their sport sponsorship strategy.

**Methods.** We conducted a qualitative content analysis of 31 Instagram accounts during the 2021 Australian Open tennis tournament. Branded food and beverage posts with tennis-linked content were coded based on an initial screening and previously published frameworks.

**Results.** Of the 152 included posts, 92% were made by food and beverage companies that were official 'partners' of the Australian Open. Products in posts were mostly discretionary foods and alcohol. The most frequently used strategies were 'Engagement' (89%) and 'Branding' (80%) and nearly half (45%) of alcohol posts invited direct consumption of their product.

**Conclusions.** The powerful combination of sport and social media are utilised by brands to interact and build relationship with consumers while promoting the consumption of alcohol and discretionary foods – products which impede rather than promote health. The indirect marketing techniques favoured by brands make this form of advertising difficult to identify and control.

**Implications for public health.** These results highlight the need for counter-marketing, policy and regulatory actions to remove unhealthy food and alcohol from sport and reorient sponsorship of sporting events towards products that promote health.

**Key words:** unhealthy product marketing, sport, prevention, chronic disease, social media

Historically, one channel through which unhealthy foods and alcohol have been promoted is sponsorship of sport including the use of professional athletes to market products.<sup>8</sup> Sponsorship of sports or sporting events can effectively reach and influence spectator awareness of, and preference for, the advertised products.<sup>9</sup> For example, positive associations between exposure to alcohol sport sponsorship and alcohol consumption have been found in several countries, including Australia.<sup>10</sup> More recently however, the marketing of unhealthy foods

through sport has combined with the reach and appeal of social media to provide a uniquely powerful channel to promote consumption.<sup>8,11</sup> Consumers engage heavily with social media while watching live sports<sup>12</sup> and companies can tap into a sport club or sports competition's social media follower base, using the popularity of sports to promote brands and products to large audiences.<sup>11</sup>

Social media platforms allow for a more powerful connection with consumers compared with traditional media because of

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the ability for brands to reach and interact with consumers in real time.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, social media provides brands with access to consumers who are networked to each other providing greater potential for marketing messages to be amplified.<sup>13</sup> Social media places less emphasis on specific product information and more on building relationships with a brand's consumers and highlighting the social and symbolic use of the brand's products.<sup>14</sup> The Instagram platform, for example, is commonly used by food and beverage brands to promote their products with little or no regulatory restrictions.<sup>14</sup> Its interactive nature and ability to tailor advertising to specific needs and interests (due to the extensive consumer data captured) can increase the receptivity of the advertising through the power of personal connection.<sup>14</sup> As of January 2021, more than half of the global Instagram population was aged 34 years or younger<sup>15</sup> making it an attractive platform for brands targeting products to this demographic. Increasingly food and beverage companies are utilizing social media platforms to reach their audiences through direct brand or indirect influencer advertising.<sup>16</sup>

While previous studies have examined the promotion of unhealthy food and alcohol through sport<sup>11,13</sup> and social media,<sup>13,17</sup> there is little research which explores the ways in which food and beverage brands utilise social media as part of their sport sponsorship strategies. We conducted a content analysis of food and beverage promotion, delivered through the social media platform Instagram, during the 2021 Australian Open (AO) Grand Slam tennis tournament with the aim of informing policy and counter-strategies to reduce population exposure to the marketing of unhealthy products.

## Methods

### Account selection

A retrospective content analysis of 31 public Instagram accounts was conducted capturing food and beverage posts made in the two-week lead up to, and the two weeks of, the 2021 AO tennis tournament. Accounts included the official AO Instagram account, Tennis Australia account, tennis player accounts (including the top five male and female seeds, players reaching the quarter-finals and Australian tennis players ranked in the top 100). Food and beverage sponsors (termed 'partners') of the 2021

AO were located on the official AO website and those with an active Instagram account were included in the study. Five of the eight food and beverage partners listed on the website had active Instagram accounts: Piper Heidsieck (champagne), Peroni Italia (beer), Canadian Club (whiskey), Grainshaker Australian Vodka and Uber Eats. The three other listed partners without active Instagram accounts were Treasury Wines Estate, Pure Blonde Organic Cider and Luzhoulaojiao (Chinese alcoholic beverage).<sup>18</sup>

### Data collection

Instagram accounts were accessed during the second week of March 2021. All image and video posts made during the four-week study period (25 January – 21 February 2021) were retrieved using screen capture technology and archived. Posts were included if they made any reference to the 2021 AO in the image, video or post wording and included a reference to, or inclusion of, a food or beverage tied to a brand. Posts that included pictures of generic food consumption by players (i.e. a player sitting in a café eating breakfast or unbranded drinking water on the tennis court) were not included. Posts made by brands that did not in any way link their product to the tennis tournament were also excluded. There were 179 posts related to food or beverage tied to a brand during the study period and 152 of these had direct reference to the tennis/AO (Figure S1, Supplementary Materials). General account statistics including the total number of posts made throughout the four-week study period and the number of account followers was also recorded.

### Coding framework development and coding methods

A coding framework was developed based on an initial screening of the captured posts and previously published frameworks.<sup>14,19,20</sup> Two researchers (BE & AG) used the framework to independently code a subsample (10%) of all captured posts to assess inter-rater reliability, with 91% agreement on codes across the posts. Discrepancies between coding were discussed between researchers and where necessary through consultation with a third researcher (BF). Through these discussions, coders were able to agree on refinements to the definitions used to categorise posts and the coding framework was revised to improve clarity of definitions in line with methodology outlined by O'Connor & Joffe (2020).<sup>21</sup> The

posts were then coded by BE using the updated framework. Consultation with a second researcher (AG) was made for any posts with ambiguous codes ( $n=13$ ).

### Data extraction

Each post was reviewed for the date of post, type of post (image, moving image or video), number of likes or views and the product featured. The use of tennis imagery [e.g. tennis balls, racquets, tennis courts or the AO symbol] as well as the inclusion of tennis players (through naming, tagging or image) was also recorded as well as a range of other marketing strategies used by the brands. Each post was checked for every code in the framework. The coding framework is summarized in Table 1.

Foods featured in the posts were classified as either a *discretionary food*\* or a *five food group food*\* according to the Australian Dietary Guidelines.<sup>22</sup> The nutritional quality of food products featured in posts was further assessed by calculating the Health Star Rating using the official "Health Star Rating Calculator".<sup>23</sup> The Australian Health Star Rating system is a government-endorsed front-of-pack labelling system used to summarise the nutritional profile of packaged foods. The system takes into account the total energy (kilojoules), the quantity of ingredients linked to chronic disease risk (saturated fat, sodium and sugar) as well as the amount of fibre, protein, fruit, vegetable, nut and legume content.<sup>23</sup> The more stars, the healthier the overall profile. Table 2 provides the Australian Dietary Guideline classification and the health star ratings of branded products featured in posts.

## Results

### Account characteristics

Details of the 31 included accounts are provided as supplementary material (Table S1). During the study period a total of 1,081 posts were made across the included accounts. Of the 31 accounts only 10 accounts made posts which met the inclusion criteria during the study period. These 152 posts were retrieved and coded.

Tennis player accounts made up 75% of the included accounts but were responsible for only 4% of the food and beverage posts made throughout the study period. The five AO 'partners' were responsible for the vast majority of posts (92%) with the remaining

posts being from the official AO account which were part of a 'paid partnership' with Piper-Heidsieck Champagne (4%). A paid partnership on Instagram signifies a business arrangement between the parties involved (Instagram, 2021). The account with the largest number of posts was Uber Eats meal delivery service with 69 of the 152 included posts (45%). The prevalence of other posts linking the brand with the AO were: 27 from Piper-Heidsieck, 25 from Grainshaker, 16 by Peroni and the lowest was for Canadian Club (n=3).

### Food and beverage products featured in posts

The proportion of food-related posts (Uber Eats, Old El Paso Meal Kits, Chobani Yogurt, Vegemite, Eniq Electrolyte Powder) and alcohol-related posts (Piper Heidsieck Champagne, Peroni Beer, Canadian Club, Grainshaker Vodka) was similar, with 49% and 51% each of the total posts, respectively.

Aside from Chobani yogurt (which featured in one post by tennis player Elina Svitolina) branded food items were discretionary and received a maximum of 2.5 stars. The majority of Uber Eats delivery service posts included unbranded food images linked to the Uber Eats brand. These unbranded food items were a mix of discretionary and five food group foods, though their unbranded nature made exact ingredient and nutrient composition difficult to determine.

### Marketing strategies used

Each brand used multiple marketing strategies as part of their AO-linked posts. An overview of the marketing strategies used by each brand is provided in Table S2 (Supplementary Material). Note 'Recipe/consumption strategies' does not appear in the table as no posts used this strategy.

Across all posts for both alcohol and food brands, the most frequently used strategies were 'Engagement' (89%) and 'Branding' (80%). 'Engagement' posts were those that prompted further engagement by the Instagram user by using hashtags, tagging of individuals or asking the user to share the post or to tag a friend. Humour was often used by food brands (71% of posts), although this was almost exclusively by Uber Eats.

### Tennis-linked content

Brands commonly featured tennis-linked content including the use of players in

**Table 1: Summary of coding framework including codes and definitions used.**

Codes	Definition
Post Type	Whether the post includes a still image, moving image or video
No. of Likes	The number of likes an image post has received
No. of views	The number of views a video post or moving image post has received
Paid Partnership	Post is specifically labelled as a paid partnership
<b>Marketing Strategy:</b>	
<b>Tennis-Linked Content:</b>	
Tennis images present	Images of balls, racquets, tennis courts, AO symbol present
Tennis player named or tagged	Post names or tags a tennis player without player image or video present (current or past tennis players included).
Tennis player Image	Post includes player image or player in a video of a player (current or past tennis players included).
<b>Celebrity or Influencer present</b>	Celebrity or social media influencer in image or video post
<b>Calls to Action:</b>	
Invitation to consume product	Contains a direct call to consume/use product at the Australian Open, at a specific venue or at home. This includes the 'order now' directive at end of Uber Eats video posts.
Engagement	Posts that prompt further online interaction by using hashtags, tagging individuals or call to share post or tag a friend.
Competitions	Any contest that involves participant entry.
<b>Price promotion</b>	Limited offers or discounts on products
<b>Product Characteristics:</b>	
Branding	Clear branding of food or beverage present in image, video and/or post wording
Product imagery (without branding)	Picture of products without labels or branding elements
Recipe/consumption suggestions	Suggests ways to consume product or recipe involving product. This includes food setting suggestions.
<b>Corporate Responsibility:</b>	
Corporate social responsibility/philanthropy	Statements of partnerships with charitable organisations and/or ethical or sustainable practices by brand
COVID-19	Mention of or reference to the COVID-19 pandemic or the lockdown associated with it. Includes images of mask-wearing.
<b>Emotional Appeals/Personification Techniques</b>	
Humour	Post uses humour such as cartoons, jokes and friendly banter.
Fun/happiness	Images with non-verbal displays of happiness such as smiling or laughing
Friendship and socialisation	Shows groups of friends depicting themes of friendship, connectedness and socialisation. Includes post mentions of sharing product with friends or family.

**Table 2: Nutritional quality of food products featured in Instagram posts.**

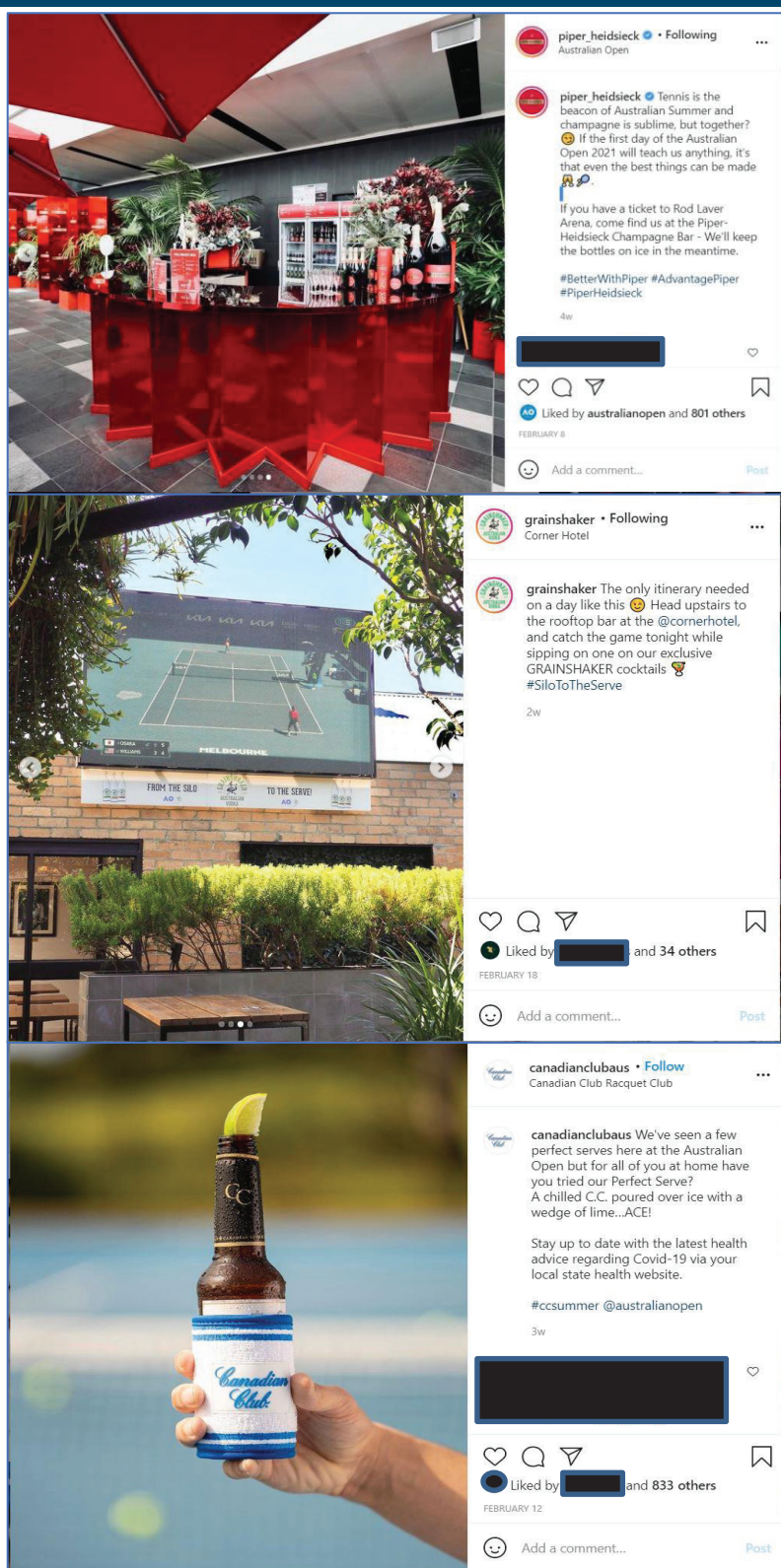
Company	Product featured in posts	Instagram account featured on	Australian Dietary Guideline Food Classification*	Health Star Rating
Bega	Vegemite	Ash Barty [ashbarty]	Discretionary	★
Chobani	Plain Greek Yogurt	Elina Svitolina [elisvitolina]	Five Food Group food	★★★★★
Old El Paso	Tortilla Pockets Kit	Alex De Minaur [alexdeinaur] Nick Kyrgios [K1ngkyrg1os]	Discretionary	★★☆
Uber Eats Delivery (branded)	Ben & Jerry's Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough Ice-cream	Uber Eats [ubereats_au]	Discretionary	★☆
Ben and Jerry's	Ben & Jerry's Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough (Dairy-Free) Ice-cream		Discretionary	★☆
Hungry Jacks	Whopper®	Uber Eats [ubereats_au]	Discretionary	★★
Uber Eats Delivery (Unbranded)	Burgers Ice-cream Sandwiches/Subs Pizza Sushi		Discretionary Discretionary Five food group food Discretionary Five food group food	

Notes:

\*Discretionary foods: Defined as not essential or necessary part of healthy eating patterns. They are generally high in saturated fat, added sugars and salt and alcohol.<sup>22</sup>

Five Food Group food or beverage: a food or combination of foods from the five food groups listed in the Australian Dietary Guidelines: vegetables and legumes; fruit; grain(cereal) foods; lean meats and poultry; milk, yoghurt, cheese and alternatives.<sup>22</sup>

Figure 1: Branded examples of image post of direct call to consume an alcoholic beverage at the AO, at another site to watch the AO and to consume at home.



their marketing. Posts were tagged as having tennis-linked content if they made a direct mention of (such as a hashtag), or contained an image related to, the AO tennis tournament. Of the included posts, 75% contained tennis images such as racquets, balls or the AO symbol, 39% named or tagged a tennis player and 22% included a player in the image or video of the post. Tennis linked content was used more often in food posts (89%) than alcohol posts (61%). Brands that used tennis players in a direct way (i.e. interacting with the brand and/or product) included Chobani, Vegemite, Old El Paso, Piper-Heidsieck and Uber Eats. Examples of these can be found as Figures S2-3 (Supplementary Material). Brands also referred to or used players in a more indirect way. For example, referencing a match between two players or using cartoon images of players, a strategy most commonly employed by Uber Eats.

### Use of celebrities/influencers

Brands used (non-sport) celebrities or influencers in 23% of posts that featured alcohol and 21% of posts featuring food brands. With the exception of the use of the well-known actor Sacha Baron Cohen in humor-driven Uber Eats posts, non-sport celebrities or Instagram influencers were featured exclusively in alcohol-related posts. In all posts ( $n=18$ ) the celebrity/influencer was pictured directly interacting with the product by holding a glass or bottle of the branded beverage. Images were usually in a social setting related to the AO (e.g. an outdoor bar at the AO grounds) (13/18); 3/18 posts pictured a celebrity or influencer consuming the product at 'their home'. Celebrities were also featured in posts of 'launch events' for alcoholic beverages with posts showing where they had attended branded events at the beginning of the AO to 'launch' their product as the 'official champagne' or 'official vodka' of the AO.

### Direct call to consume product

Nearly one third of all posts included a direct call to action (such as sharing the post with friends or to consume the product) with 45% of alcohol brand posts using this strategy (Table S2 and Example, Figure 1). Calls specified whether this was at a specific venue located at the AO (29%), at a site (such as a hotel or restaurant) to watch the tennis (36%) or at home (33%) with only one post not specifying the location for consumption.

Calls to consume were limited to alcoholic beverage brands except for the Uber Eats 'order now' directives for users to order food to their home. Alcohol brands commonly used images depicting fun and happiness (36%), friendship and socialisation (39%) with pictures of young adults enjoying their product in social settings related to the AO.

### COVID-19

References were also made to the COVID-19 pandemic in the Instagram posts captured throughout the study period. Alcohol brands referenced COVID-19 or the associated lockdown in 19% of their posts, including images of bar-staff wearing masks while serving alcohol (n=2) as well as posts which alluded to the pandemic in text. For example, "please stay safe, stay strong and stay home. We will get through this together #bettertogether #betterwithpiper". Direct reference to the pandemic was only made in 3% of the food-related posts.

### Discussion

Our study provides a comprehensive analysis of how food and beverage brands have utilised a major sporting event to create sport-linked social media posts to engage with, influence and directly invite AO spectators to consume their products. The products featured in this study of Instagram posts included alcoholic beverages and energy dense, nutrient poor, discretionary foods that are associated with increased risk of chronic disease.<sup>22</sup> These are products which undermine rather than promote health and their linkage with health-promoting sport has implications health promotion efforts.

Previous experimental research has shown that consumers hold more positive attitudes to unhealthy brands when they are linked with sport as they are viewed as being more aligned with healthy and active lifestyles.<sup>24</sup> Sport sponsorship can boost awareness, image and appeal for sponsored brands whether healthy or unhealthy, adding a 'health halo' to unhealthy food brands.<sup>9</sup> Known as 'image transfer', positive attitudes towards the sport or sporting event transfer over to the brand providing a level of 'permission' for the consumer to purchase the brand's products.<sup>25</sup> The brands included in our study directly linked themselves with an iconic Australian sporting event through their sponsorship of the AO, using the event as a conduit to engage with consumers.

Given sport's clear alignment with a healthy lifestyle, healthy foods are more plausibly aligned with sport and sporting events than unhealthy foods and alcohol.<sup>9</sup> Sport sponsorship is a potentially modifiable upstream factor that could be an opportunity for the promotion of healthy foods and lifestyles.<sup>9</sup> Sports clubs and sporting competitions are reliant on sponsorship so re-orienting organisations' sponsorship agreements away from healthier brands and alcohol towards healthier brands is a promising strategy for food and beverage sponsorship of sport.<sup>9</sup> Reorientation requires policy and regulation, including restrictions on marketing of alcohol and healthier food sponsorship criteria, to help support and guide sporting organisations to engage healthier sponsorship arrangements.

While traditional media 'pushes' content at consumers, generally highlighting a product's key attributes, social media delivers more engaged relationships, or 'pull', with interaction occurring between the brand and consumer as well as between consumers.<sup>13</sup> Social media facilitates interactions and networking and can generate emotional connectedness, evoking positive feelings towards the brand.<sup>19</sup> Traditional marketing strategies such as the use of competitions and price promotions were evident in our study but used less frequently than posts that directly engaged the user with another person or social setting (i.e. people interacting at an AO venue or related site). The shift from exposure to engagement in the age of social media is evident in our study. Our results show that posts were highly relational, involving well-known and liked players and celebrities and prompting direct interaction between the brand and Instagram users. The relational content helps brands couple themselves with spectators to share the experience of the tennis tournament. In these ways the brands are partnering with the spectators themselves.<sup>13</sup> A shared allegiance to sport helps brands relate to spectators on a common ground, going beyond traditional product promotion. Brand engagement with consumers through social media can be subtle as brands integrate their social media presence into consumers lifestyles.<sup>26,27</sup> These strategies may be more difficult to identify and control than traditional advertising. Regulation of social media promotions of unhealthy products should be a part of a comprehensive approach to reducing exposure to unhealthy product marketing

across all forms of media.

Our study also highlighted that the interaction between the brand and Instagram users is not confined to the online environment. Brands (particularly alcohol brands) used the platform to directly invite consumers to further engage with their products at venues at the AO, at sites to watch the tennis or in the comfort of their own home. For example, 'Head upstairs to the rooftop bar at the @cornerhotel and catch the game tonight while sipping on one of our exclusive GRAINSHAKER cocktails' (Grainshaker Vodka post, Figure 1). Hence, interactive platforms such as Instagram are being used as a mediator between the live sporting event and the home spectator experience to promote immediate consumption of their products. Such strategies amplify the connection between alcohol and sport and reinforce "the role of alcohol as part of the ritual of sport spectating" (p.33).<sup>13</sup>

The use of 'real-world tie-ins' as a strategy used in social media marketing, has been identified previously.<sup>27</sup> Tie-ins work to embed brands into the everyday lives of consumers and hence connect them more firmly to the advertised products.<sup>27</sup> In our study, not only did brands link themselves with the AO as a sporting event, some brands took the opportunity to leverage the currency of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown that occurred in Melbourne during the ATO. The use of celebrities, humor and the link to the current COVID-19 pandemic helped to reinforce a positive image for the food and alcoholic beverage brands in our study. These strategies can evoke emotion and solidarity between the brand and consumer, further strengthening the positive perception of the brand and its' products. Public health research and policy reform needs to take account the ways in which brands have shifted their marketing approaches in social media.<sup>28</sup>

Our study echoes previous research findings that highlight how food and alcohol brands are using social media marketing strategies to target consumers, particularly young adults, through Instagram.<sup>14</sup> Researchers have identified young adults as particularly at risk from these newer marketing channels because of their strong online presence and stage of identity development.<sup>29</sup> A recent review argued that one of the key differences from older marketing channels is that social media co-opts peer networks and fosters peer endorsement to enhance marketing impact.<sup>30</sup> This indirect style of marketing

evades regulations as it may be viewed as entertainment rather than advertising.<sup>16,19</sup> As such, it provides companies with increasing opportunities to expose users to unhealthy food and products and utilised in the social media setting, can be a powerful way for brands to connect with consumers out of the bounds of advertising regulations.<sup>13</sup> These social media techniques are of particular concern as they can “blur the line between entertainment and advertising”.<sup>19</sup> Accumulating evidence of this indirect activity strengthens the call for clear regulation on branded activity through social media channels.

Given the effectiveness of social media-sport nexus for the marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages, there is an opportunity for health promoters to engage with consumers through sport-linked social media messages that promote healthier products that more appropriately align with active lifestyles. Learning how to engage effectively using social media may be drawn from industry, as there is evidence that food industry brands have been able to reach and engage social media users more effectively than health promoters.<sup>31</sup> For example, Instagram posts that do not induce any emotion/hedonic sensation or are presented in a negative tone are associated with low engagement amongst users.<sup>31</sup> While public health organisations explore the opportunities to engage consumers in health-enhancing products and activities on these platforms, the need for regulation in this space is evident. The success of removing tobacco from sports sponsorship may help inform future advocacy measures in relation to alcohol and unhealthy food sponsorship of sport.<sup>11</sup> Of note, a Private Member’s Bill that provides for an end to alcohol sponsorship of sport has been introduced in New Zealand.<sup>32</sup> Such reform has the backing of the World Health Organization, which has recommended bans or comprehensive restrictions on alcohol advertising, including sponsorship as part of an evidence based, cost-effective initiative to reduce morbidity and mortality associated with alcohol use.<sup>33</sup> The World Health Organization has also recommended governments take action to address food and non-alcoholic beverage marketing to children,<sup>33-35</sup> however, recent evidence indicates food marketing continues to be prevalent and persuasive and predominately promotes foods that contribute to unhealthy diets.<sup>34</sup>

### Study strengths & limitations

To the best of our knowledge this is the first study to capture branded sport-linked social media posts on Instagram across a national, world-renowned sporting event. One strength of our study is that posts were captured across the entire duration of the AO. Furthermore, our study was a real world natural experiment with the inclusion of the Melbourne COVID-19 lockdown, making the results translatable and relevant to policymakers.<sup>36</sup> We used well established methods for conducting a content analysis. Our study does have some limitations. Only companies listed as AO partners on the AO website were included and we did not include the Instagram account of the broadcasting partner. Players may have had sponsorship arrangements with other companies not captured on Instagram in the study period, however, these were beyond the scope of the study. It is likely there were other brands that had partnerships with and/or advertised during the AO and these brands may have differed in their marketing approaches. In particular, the only food brand that was an official partner of the AO was Uber Eats, which is an online food delivery platform for a range of fast food (and other) restaurants rather than food products per se. However, the prominence of these brands as official sponsors means that we have focused on those most strongly linked to the AO and therefore may be most amenable to change through advocacy with the event. Instagram stories (short videos or photos that capture users experiences but disappear from the account after 24 hours) and sponsored posts (brand advertising that appears in individual users’ feeds) as well as user-generated content (posts that referenced, or shared a brand’s content) were not collected. This extra content may have helped to assess the extent of food and beverage marketing on this social media platform and allow further insight into how brands use multiple tools on Instagram to market their products. It was, however, impractical to include and analyse this volume of content. Finally, expanding the analysis to include other social media platforms commonly used by brands, such as Facebook, Twitter or TikTok would provide further insights and allowed for conclusions to be drawn more broadly across the social media platform spectrum and any differences be identified.

### Conclusions

Alcohol and food brands use the powerful combination of sport sponsorship and social media to directly interact with spectators, relating and engaging with consumers outside the online environment by inviting them to consume products at the AO or associated sites, going beyond traditional marketing methods that focus on product attributes. Products associated with iconic sporting events such as the AO are predominately those that impede, rather than support public health, comprising highly-processed, energy-dense foods high in added sugar, fat and salt as well as alcohol. Public health organisations need to counter these new and persuasive marketing channels to reorient sport sponsorship away from products that harm and towards products that promote health ultimately contribute to decreasing the burden of chronic disease. To help achieve these health promotion efforts, there is a clear need for regulatory efforts to remove unhealthy food and alcohol sponsors from sport sponsorship in order to reduce the impact on population health. While appreciating the difficulties in regulating online platforms, policy and regulatory efforts need to monitor and address the (predominately indirect) ways in which brands are utilising social media to engage with consumers and promote their products.

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## Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article:

**Supplementary Table 1:** Instagram account details retrieved 15th March, 2021.

**Supplementary Table 2:** Marketing strategies used by brands in Instagram posts (n=77).

**Supplementary Figure 1:** Flow chart of included Instagram posts.

**Supplementary Figure 2:** Old El Paso example of imagepost with tennis player – Nick Kyrgios.

**Supplementary Figure 3:** Uber Eats example of imagepost with tennis player – Ash Barty.