Author's response to reviews

Title: Advocates, interest groups and Australian news coverage of alcohol advertising restrictions: content and framing analysis

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Wednesday 15th August 2012

Re: MS: 1472024577740280 – Advocates, interest groups and Australian news coverage of alcohol advertising restrictions: content and framing analysis

Dear Ms Audrey Reyes & editors,

We thank you for providing reviewers responses to our manuscript and the opportunity to make changes for consideration for publication in *BMC Public Health*.

Please find our response to reviewers’ suggestions attached on the next page for your consideration.

We look forward to hearing from you.
Sincerely,

(Simon Chapman)
RESPONSE TO EDITOR AND REVIEWERS' COMMENTS

Note: in this document we have indicated new material inserted into the paper by underlining new text

Directions from editor

1. Title page: It should contain, at minimum, the names, institutions, countries and email addresses of all authors, and the full postal address of the submitting author.

Response: we have made the adjustments requested and the title page reflects the required format.

2. Please include the title 'Background' before the Methods section.

Response: we have included the title ‘Background’ on page 4 of the paper

3. Please remove the visible vertical lines of the Tables.

**Tables: Please ensure that the order in which your tables are cited is the same as the order in which they are provided. Every table must be cited in the text, using Arabic numerals. Please do not use ranges when listing tables. Tables must not be subdivided, or contain tables within tables. Please note that we are unable to display vertical lines or text within tables, no display merged cells: please re-layout your table without these elements. Tables should be formatted using the Table tool in your word processor. Please ensure the table title is above the table and the legend is below the table. For more information, see the instructions for authors on the journal website.

Response: we have completed these revisions to all tables in the text.

4. Box: Unfortunately we cannot incorporate boxes. Please either change the box to a table and update any references to within the text, or include the information within the manuscript text. You can use indentation to highlight the text

Response: we have opted to include the information in the manuscript text, using indentation to highlight, as suggested. (see page 6)

Reviewer 1: Caitlin Hughes

Reviewer's report:
- Major Compulsory Revisions
The paper needs to engage with the nuances of alcohol use or alcohol advertising restrictions: in the context setting, analysis and implications. For example, compared against tobacco, the issue of alcohol consumption and alcohol advertising restrictions is considerably more complex. Tobacco is a drug for which any consumption is harmful. Alcohol in contrast is only harmful under particular circumstances and/or for particular populations, and is sometimes found to be helpful for reducing public health problems.
Response: we have noted the concern regarding the distinctions between tobacco and alcohol and have made the following revisions to the paper:

Page 5, paragraph 1, the sentence now reads as follows: “Unlike tobacco, not all use of alcohol is considered harmful, yet it has been argued that there are enough similarities that lessons from tobacco control could potentially be usefully adapted for alcohol (35)”

Response: We are not clear that alcohol is found to be helpful for reducing public health problems.

This creates a clear opportunity for divergent interest groups and reasons why alcohol advertising restrictions and/or particular forms of alcohol advertising restrictions will be supported, opposed etc. Hence, while the paper notes the differing levels of support for different types of alcohol advertising restrictions, it does not interrogate this. The paper should note the differences between alcohol use and harmful use and why there is likely to be understandable opposition to blanket bans on alcohol advertising restrictions or to bans on particular forms of advertising etc, and consider the methods and findings in light of this context.

Response: we note the reviewers concern about the distinction between alcohol use and harmful use of alcohol, yet note than in alcohol-control this distinction is not the focus of policies (excepting provision of treatment for addiction). The majority of strategies for which there is a strong evidence base (e.g. pricing and taxation, restrictions on availability) and which are current Australian policy recommendations, are population wide strategies and are designed to influence alcohol use, not alcohol misuse specifically.

However, we have amended page 1, paragraph 1, to make this clear, as follows:

“A significant proportion of Australians consume alcohol at levels risky to personal and public health and safety (1, 2). Accordingly, addressing problematic consumption of alcohol has been given high priority for action, with best practice recommending universal interventions that target the whole population, rather than intervening with just high-risk drinkers(3). Such interventions aim to reduce net alcohol consumption, producing attendant reductions in alcohol-related harm, and are evaluated as cost-effective (3-5).”

We also note that while all tobacco use is harmful, as the reviewer states, there was still opposition to blanket bans on tobacco advertising. We contend that opposition to alcohol advertising bans is not contingent on a distinction between use and misuse of alcohol.

In particular the authors should consider to what extent the dichotomous framing of coverage on alcohol advertising restrictions as ‘supportive’ versus ‘unsupportive’ may itself miss nuances in the policy debate.

Response: We note the reviewer’s concern and point out that the frames emerged from the data, they were not imposed by the authors. We agree with the reviewer that the policy debate itself is nuanced. However, our results show that the news media coverage of the policy debate is not as nuanced and the framing that emerged in the coverage (as noted on page 12, paragraph 4 of the results) had 5 supportive frames, four unsupportive frames and one set of neutral frames that neither supported nor opposed advertising restrictions, but discussed them in light of other related proposals. Some articles covered both supportive and unsupportive arguments in the one piece, hence our focus on the number of statements per frame, across all of the coverage.
Indeed, there would appear scope, using the current methods of analysis to draw out some of the differences within the sub-frames e.g. the number of statements mentioning that restrictions are necessary ‘for protection for children’ versus ‘because of a disingenuous drinks industry’.

Response: Here, we point out that the “number of statements mentioning that restrictions are necessary ‘for protection for children’ versus ‘because of a disingenuous drinks industry’” is already reported in Table 2, page 27 and 28 of the paper.

This could enhance understandings of the different ways this issue is being considered. It thus appears unfortunate that the analysis of news-actor support was undertaken at the higher level – supportive versus unsupportive – rather than at the sub-frame. I wonder if there might be scope to re-do this?

Response: We thank the reviewer for this suggestion and have redone the analysis of news actor support as suggested. We replaced Table 3 on page 29 and added the following to the results section:

Paragraph 4, page 16: “Public health actors were most likely to frame arguments supporting advertising restrictions as sensible public health (29.5%) or a necessary response to the disingenuous drinks and advertising industries (20.5%), while government representatives were more likely to frame their support around concern about alcohol advertising in sport (31.7%). Although members of the public supported restrictions on the whole, the most frequently deployed news-frame was an argument that policies to restrict advertising are ‘nannyist’ (25.3%). News-actors in the drinks industry emphasised their already responsible industry (93.9%), as did sporting organisations (77.1%), while representatives of the advertising industry most frequently emphasised their commercial activities (51.0%) as legitimate enterprises.”

We emphasised in the discussion that the sub frames most frequently used by public health in the news coverage does not correspond with policy recommendations and suggested this as a place for future advocacy to consider, as follows:

Paragraph 1, page 19: “There was some agreement that children and young people were a high priority, yet news reports were not clear that the sector was in agreement over where to start. Indeed, though the NPHT report makes clear recommendations about focusing initial reform on underage audiences and advertising in sport, together these news frames only accounted for only 32% of all statements made by public health representatives. While universal agreement among health experts is not a pre-requisite, we suggest this is a clear opportunity for future advocacy regarding agreed policy recommendations.”

We also emphasised in the discussion that the drinks industry used one particular frame almost all of the time, while news actors from advertising employed another frame about commercial activity and that these frames are to be anticipated in the future as follows:

Page 19/20: “Should the issue gain greater levels of political traction though, those opposing restrictions could be expected to increase their profile, and to focus on specific proposals as well as locating their critiques within general negative framings about the economy and the “nanny state” as was the case with tobacco control and the ‘alcopops’ tax (57), and demonstrated in this paper. In the second year of coverage in our data, we noted a greater proportion of negative statements made by those in the advertising industry, as well drinks industry representatives continually emphasising they were already responsible”
The authors should revisit the interpretations of the core findings: particularly the interpretation that the lack of specificity reflects ‘the rudimentary stages of advocacy’. Indeed, it could be well argued that this (and the low newsworthiness) may exemplify the challenge of responding to alcohol use and misuse in an environ where 98% of the population consume this commodity.

Response: We thank the reviewer for this suggestion and have attempted to incorporate it in the following places:

We deleted the phrase concerning “rudimentary stages of advocacy”

Introduction, page 7, paragraph 2: “Given the unpopularity of some alcohol-control policies as well as the high proportion of the population that consumes alcohol, news reports of such policies are bound to be highly contested”

Discussion, page 17, last paragraph: “We had hypothesised that examining coverage before and after the release of the NPHT’s policy recommendations for alcohol would demonstrate greater debate concerning restrictions on alcohol advertising. Yet in the 12 months after the report, we did not see any increased reporting about alcohol advertising after the release of the policy and thus, unlikely to impact on the public’s awareness of the issue. In the absence of news-production studies, we cannot be certain why it did not attract greater news coverage, but suspect that a focus on other recommendations from the report, in combination with the government’s failure to support change may have contributed.”

Discussion, page 18, paragraph 2: “Our second main finding is that there is a general lack of specificity in the coverage about what alcohol advertising encompasses and exactly what policy reform advocates would like to see changed in the future. While alcohol experts and advocates may be clear on these distinctions and priorities, the detailed nuances are yet to be reflected clearly in newspaper coverage that discusses the issue.”

Discussion, page 19, paragraph 1: “While the present low level of news coverage mostly features voices supportive of advertising restrictions, the lack of specificity in these reports suggests that advocacy experts have not always expressed the same vision, or been reported by journalists as in agreement.”

Advice on what can be usefully done within this context would thus be of considerable merit for the field.

Response: We thank the reviewer for this suggestion and have incorporated this by making more suggestions for future advocacy as follows:

Discussion, page 18, last paragraph: “Neither the NPHT recommendations, nor the newspaper coverage reported here showed any great focus on the issue, an important omission when online marketing opportunities and viral marketing are likely prove significant barriers to reducing people’s exposure to advertising (67). Future advocacy might expand the discussion of the different avenues used for alcohol promotion, usefully highlighting the limitations of television curfews when underage audience members are likely to be exposed elsewhere, regardless.”

Discussion, page 19, paragraph 2: “There was some agreement that children and young people were a high priority, yet news reports were not clear that the sector was in agreement over where to start. Indeed, though the NPHT report makes clear recommendations about focusing initial reform
on underage audiences and advertising in sport, together these news frames only accounted for only
32% of all statements made by public health representatives. While universal agreement among
health experts is not a pre-requisite, we suggest this is a clear opportunity for future advocacy
regarding agreed policy recommendations.”

Discussion, page 20, paragraph 2: “We suggest that given this complexity, and the present lack
of governmental support for legislative changes, future advocacy could further emphasise the failure
of existing structures to regulate alcohol advertisements. The systems of alcohol advertising self-
regulation through voluntary codes of ethics .... Our suggestion for future advocacy is ongoing
promotion of the awareness of the codes, how to make complaints, the need to make complaints
and the two boards (ASB and AARB) that provide avenues of complaint. While we acknowledge this
process functions in a space where exposure to alcohol advertising has already occurred, it
nevertheless represents opportunity for advocacy in the absence of legislated changes to self-
regulation.

- Minor Essential Revisions
There is a need to better explicate the industry self-regulations within Australia (for example the
current restrictio...43). In most of these regards, similarities have been noted
between the alcohol industry and the tobacco industry (35).

There are a number of editorial/typographical errors, particularly in the introduction. Particular
attention is needed to paragraph two of the Introduction. References to “early research”, “recent
studies”, and “a systematic review....echoing an earlier review” are confusing and detract from the
background to the study. The systematic review I believe also pertains to youth – this should be made clearer.

Response: we thank the reviewer for these suggestions on making the language clearer. We have rewritten paragraph two on page 1 as follows:

“Thus, attention has focused on the need for policy reform of alcohol advertising and promotional activities (6–8), with emphasis on young people (9) and sport-related sponsorships and branding (10, 11). While there is considerable research estimating children’s and adolescents’ exposure to alcohol advertising in movies (12), television programming (13, 14), magazines (15) and even student publications (16), there is still debate over the evidence regarding alcohol advertising’s relationship with consumption (17, 18). Research conducted in the 90s suggested no strong link between advertising expenditure and consumption patterns at a general population level (19, 20). However, among young people, increased exposure to alcohol advertising is positively associated with later consumption patterns (21–24), which can vary according to regional differences in advertising budgets (25). A 2009 review of longitudinal studies found “consistent evidence to link alcohol advertising with the uptake of drinking among non-drinking young people, and increased consumption among their drinking peers” (p 242; 26).”

Other sections that need addressing:
• Introduction – paragraph three – first sentence – meaning unclear

Response: we have taken the reviewer’s suggestion and re-wrote this sentence, which now reads as follows, on page 4 last paragraph:

“Young people like alcohol advertisements, with likeability positively related to their intentions to purchase the advertised product (26). While watching alcohol advertisements, young Australians report perceived messages “that alcohol consumption leads to social and other success, increases confidence and attractiveness...” (pg 350 (27))”

• Introduction – paragraph four – first sentence - re-write or delete “there are”
Response: we have taken the reviewer’s suggestion and deleted ‘there are’

• Introduction – paragraph four – second sentence – ‘evidence suggests that partial bans or restrictions would be cost-effective in reducing alcohol consumption’ – please check whether this should read alcohol consumption or alcohol misuse

Response: we have checked and the referenced publication, which says the following:

“If countries with no alcohol advertising restrictions implemented partial bans, they could reduce alcohol consumption by 16 per cent and motor vehicle fatality rates by ten per cent. If countries with partial advertising restrictions implemented full bans, they could reduce alcohol consumption by a further 11 per cent and motor vehicle fatality rates by a further 23 per cent.”

We contend that in alcohol, when discussing partial or complete bans of alcohol advertising, the target is reducing consumption, not just misuse.

• Introduction – paragraph seven – first sentence – re-write section “with opposition from while licenses oppose the policies’
Response: we have taken the reviewer’s suggestion and have deleted the phrase “with opposition from”.


• Results - paragraph three – it would be useful to briefly explain the meaning of an ‘alcopops tax’ for an international audience

Response: we have taken the reviewer’s suggestion and adjusted the sentence as follows on page 10, last paragraph:

“At the time, the ‘alcopops tax’ (57), which aimed to increase the tax rate on pre-mixed alcoholic drinks, was being debated in parliament and one…”

- Discretionary Revisions

It would be useful if this or future analysis examined the coverage of ‘alcohol advertising restriction targeted at particular high risk groups e.g. young people’ rather than ‘alcohol advertising restriction per se’.

Response: we note the reviewer’s suggestion yet reiterate that the majority of news paper coverage of alcohol advertising restrictions is non-specific. In 2 years of data, advertising restrictions were referred to as advertising restrictions and rarely specified whether they were defined, broad, targeted at the population as a whole, or at a sub-sample of the population. In the 1322 statements we recorded, only 96 referred to young people, which would not be enough to analyse.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests

Reviewer 2: Anders Hansen

Reviewer’s report:

This is a well written and well organised report of a study that makes a useful contribution to the field. The study is soundly anchored in relevant theory and policy frameworks, and it is soundly designed and executed. The following will, however, need addressing:

There is reference to the pre- and post-periods of coverage, and the tables report the findings broken down by these periods. There does not, however, seem to be any reference to or use of this distinction in the discussion or conclusion sections. Either do something with these distinctions, or, if they are not seen as relevant to the objectives of the study, leave them out altogether.

We note the reviewer’s suggestion and have emphasised the failure to find any difference in results between the pre- and post-periods of coverage in the discussion as follows:

Discussion, page 18, paragraph 1: “We had hypothesised that examining coverage before and after the release of the NPHI’s policy recommendations for alcohol would demonstrate greater debate concerning restrictions on alcohol advertising. Yet in the 12 months after the report, we did not see any increased reporting about alcohol advertising after the release of the policy and thus, unlikely to impact on the public’s awareness of the issue.
The conclusions drawn from the study are, it seems, unnecessarily low-key and bland. It is surprising, for example, that there is little or no attempt at linking ‘frames’ with ‘actors/sources’, and consequently little emerges with regard to how advocacy efforts during the period observed might have impinged on the relative prominence and ‘success’ of arguments. Overall, it would appear that the data/analysis is not used to its full capacity in relation to some of the more interesting conclusions that might/could be drawn from the study, and in this respect the manuscript would benefit from further elaboration.

Response: we note the reviewer’s concerned. As noted in the response to reviewer 1’s report, we have now linked frames and actors/sources and further discussed future advocacy suggestions based on these links.

Without studies examining audience reception of these stories, we are not able to draw conclusions about how ‘successful’ the arguments identified in the text were.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
I declare that I have no competing interests