Embedded gambling promotion in Australian football broadcasts: An exploratory study

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Abstract
Governments, researchers and the public have raised concerns about extensive gambling promotions during televised sport, particularly in Australia. This study aims to quantify gambling promotions during selected football broadcasts and conduct a content and semiotic analysis of their components. Analysis reveals that gambling promotions constituted 2.5% of observed broadcast time. Embedded gambling promotions included logos, sponsored segments, displayed betting odds and extended betting commentary. Extensive plot placement potentially optimises promotions’ effectiveness, while their personal relevance, empathy, information and congruence align well with young male target audiences for football and sports betting. Implications for public health and sport management are noted.

Keywords: gambling, sponsorship, sport, embedded promotion, football, plot placement, content analysis

Introduction
Sponsorship of sport by commercial gambling operators is a growing phenomenon in many countries, increasing exposure of sports audiences to the associated promotion of gambling (Lamont, Hing & Gainsbury 2011). Researchers have argued that vulnerable groups, including children, young people and problem gamblers, may be adversely affected by this ‘gamblification’ of sport (McMullan 2011) which may normalise and encourage gambling and soften gambling products to sports viewers (Lamont et al. 2011; Thomas, Lewis, McLeod & Haycock 2012a). Others have criticised the utilisation of fan support and team loyalty to market sports betting products (McMullen 2011) and endorsement of gambling products by sporting celebrities and role models (Maher, Wilson, Signal & Thomson 2006). Concerns have been voiced about the disjuncture between gambling and sports that are promoted as family-friendly and healthy (Lamont et al. 2011), longer-term impacts of this promotion on risky and problematic gambling behaviours (Derevensky, Sklar, Gupta & Messerlian 2010) and how this gambling promotion is fuelling the growth of sports betting and incentives for match fixing (Australian Crime Commission [ACC] 2013). Extensive media criticism of the promotion of gambling during sports (e.g. Dowling 2011; Farr 2011; Featherstone 2011; Packham 2011) further indicates that this practice is highly contentious.

Most promotions during televised sport are for online sports betting operators. Sports betting participation has demonstrated exponential growth since the mid-1990s (Productivity Commission 2010), with sports betting expenditure in Australia totalling AU$303.5 million in 2009–10; this represents a 37% increase over the
previous year, although totals less than 2% of all gambling expenditure in Australia, which remains dominated by gaming machines (55%), casino gambling (19%) and race wagering (14%) (Queensland Government 2012). However, between September 2010 and September 2011, sports betting expenditure further doubled from AU$400 million to AU$800 million (Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform [JSCGR] 2011), with continued growth of over 13% per annum predicted (Deloitte 2012). Growth of sports betting in Australia has been driven by increased commercialisation of many sports codes, rapid increase in matches and events and more sports coverage on pay TV (JSCGR 2011). A key driver of this growth has been the rise of internet gambling, facilitated by faster and more widespread internet access, uptake of mobile devices and deregulation in many markets. Globally, online sports betting now accounts for 53% of the online gambling market (H2 Gambling Capital 2013) and is an area of significant growth in Australia (Australasian Gaming Council 2012).

The National Rugby League (NRL) and Australian Football League (AFL) are the two largest Australian wagering sports, representing approximately 50% of all sports wagering (Deloitte 2012). Further, NRL/AFL wagering turnover is estimated to double in five years, from AU$750 million to AU$1.5 billion on NRL and from AU$900 million to AU$1.8 billion for AFL (Deloitte 2012). In 2011, Australian wagering operators attracted betting expenditure of AU$36.5 million from NRL and AU$45 million from AFL wagering (Deloitte 2012). Product fees of 5% of gross wagering win are paid to the NRL and AFL, while wagering operators also contribute approximately AU$45 million per year to NRL and AFL related products through sponsorship and advertising expenditure (Deloitte 2012). TomWaterhouse.com, a prominent bookmaker, reportedly purchased television advertising rights with the NRL for AU$50 million, overshadowing expenditure of the previous sponsor, Tabcorp. Thus,

… sports wagering is a clear “two-sided” market, where it is in the interests of both the Australian licensed wagering operators and the sporting codes to maintain a competitive, innovative wagering product that will maximise returns to both sides.

(Deloitte 2012, p. 6)

A landmark Australian High Court decision in 2008 deemed it unconstitutional to prohibit sports betting operators operating in one state from advertising in another, resulting in intense competition and ‘a blizzard of advertising’ (Horn 2011). At the political level, two Australian inquiries (JSCGR 2011, 2013) highlighted significant growth in sports betting, community concern about proliferation of sports betting advertising, and its contribution to development of gambling problems, particularly among young men. Extensive gambling promotion has also been found to hinder recovery from problem gambling among sports watchers (JSCGR 2011). The Interim Report of the Review of the Interactive Gambling Act 2001 cited many concerns about the ‘frequency and aggressiveness’ of gambling advertising during sporting events (Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy [DBCDE] 2012, p. 88). The Australian Government subsequently yielded to pressure to curtail the promotion of live betting odds during televised sport.
Broadcast advertising codes were amended accordingly, effective 1 August 2013 (Nettleton 2013) and in-match commentary and on-screen displays of live betting odds have since been curtailed, although other promotional practices continue, including the promotion of live betting odds before match commencement.

As well as risks to sports watchers and gamblers, integration of the gambling industry with sports and media industries poses institutional risks. Sporting codes and clubs may become over-reliant on broadcasting and sponsorship arrangements with the gambling industry, which may tarnish their image and expose them to financial risks if the accompanying gambling promotions are subject to further regulation. Consumer backlash is already evident through concerns these promotions are eroding fans’ enjoyment of sport and causing some parents to shield children from watching televised sport (JSCGR 2013). Additionally, increasing links between sports and wagering has major implications for the integrity of sports betting markets, with illegal use of performance enhancing drugs providing an unfair advantage to individuals and teams that can be exploited by people with inside information (ACC 2013). The growing nexus between sport and gambling thus threatens the integrity of sport and consumer trust in both sporting competitions and betting markets.

Despite extensive public discourse about promotion of gambling during sport, empirical research into this issue is sparse, with two earlier studies demonstrating a need for more focus on the practice (Thomas et al. 2012a; Thomas, Lewis, Duong & McLeod 2012b). This paper therefore seeks to explore the nature and extent of gambling promotion during a selection of free-to-air football broadcasts in Australia in 2012. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. measure the frequency and duration of different types of gambling promotion during a sample of televised broadcasts of selected sporting matches and associated shows; and

2. analyse the visual and aural components of commercial gambling advertising and embedded gambling promotion during these broadcasts.

Previous research in Australia has been limited to an analysis of sports betting marketing during AFL matches in Melbourne (Thomas et al. 2012b). The current study builds on that research by extending the scope of sports examined to the professional competitions of both the NRL and AFL. As such, this study is the first analysis of gambling promotion during the two most viewed sporting codes on Australian television (Oztam 2012).

Additionally, this study analyses the nature of embedded gambling promotion in these broadcasts and reflects on their impact. Embedded promotion is defined as ‘any means of inserting brands and sponsor references into entertainment vehicles’, which might include ‘product or brand placement, sponsorship and celebrity endorsement where these occur in the context of mediated entertainment’ (Hackley & Tiwsakul 2006, p. 64).

The study’s main focus on embedded promotion is significant for two main reasons. First, this type of gambling promotion has attracted widespread public and political criticism, as discussed above. Second, little is known about the impact of these more ‘subtle, pervasive and contextual’ gambling promotion strategies
(Thomas et al. 2012b, p. 151) that have been variously referred to as ‘entertainment marketing’ (Hackley & Tiwsakul 2006), ‘product placement’ (Russell 1998), ‘brand placement’ (Karrh 1998), ‘stealth marketing’ (Kaikati & Kaikati 2004) and ‘embedded marketing’ (Said 2010; Wright, Friestad & Boush 2005), although there are subtle differences between these concepts. While this study does not attempt to quantify the impact of these embedded strategies, it does pave the way for further research by documenting the nature of promotional messages relayed during sports broadcasts and, by drawing on semiotics and communication theory, reflecting on the likely impact of this embedded activity.

### Embedded promotion

Insertion of brand references into consumers’ experiences of mediated entertainment is a growing practice (Hackley & Tiwsakul 2006; Said 2010). Embedding products and sponsors in entertainment attempts to overcome problems facing traditional advertising, such as audience fragmentation, rising advertising costs and consumer cynicism towards media messages (Russell 1998), and technology that allows television viewers to skip or avoid advertisements presented during commercial breaks (Said 2010). This approach can be distinguished from traditional advertising by the brand appearing as part of the entertainment, whether a television show, film, computer game or sports event coverage, and not as an overt promotion (Hackley & Tiwsakul 2006).

Scholars have distinguished between different types of embedded promotion. For example, Said (2010, pp. 14–15) distinguishes between ‘product placements’ and ‘product integrations’, explaining that product placements comprise visual or aural references to a product or brand in an entertainment context, whereas product integrations comprise substantial integration of the product or brand into the storyline, sometimes accompanied by ‘extended riffs or entire conversations’ about the product. Russell’s (1998) Three Dimensional Framework of Product Placement distinguishes between visual or ‘screen placement’, auditory or ‘script placement’, and ‘plot placement’ where the product takes ‘a major place in the storyline or building the persona of a charcter’ (1998, p. 357). Russell proposes that plot placements relying upon both audio and visual information produce ‘higher levels of brand recall than pure screen or script placement’ (1998, p. 358), but this effect is moderated by individual differences in consumers’ cognitive processing style. Russell also proposes that ‘successful product placement ... transforms the experience of using/consuming the product to match that shown in the [sponsored entertainment]’, and that ‘the show–product linkage is processed non-consciously by the viewers’ (1998, p. 360). Further, she argues that ‘pairing of a product with an emotionally rich show ... conditions a transfer of affect from the show to the product’ so that ‘the conditioned response ... is affective rather than cognitive’ (Russell 1998, p. 360).

Plot placement is considered the most effective form of embedded marketing because its combination of auditory and visual stimuli activate both imaginal and verbal coding processes, which, in combination, increase memory more than does one coding process alone (Paivio 1971). This contention has been confirmed in empirical studies, where brand recall improved when both visual and auditory stimuli were used (Balasubramanian 1991; Karrh 1994; Steortz 1987). Further,
Karrh (1998) argues that ‘linking the audience to the story’ such as through plot placement, ‘[evokes] … a different type of information processing than that from a more reasoned argumentation’, because viewers become lost in the story, feel empathy towards its characters, and “suspend disbelief” to enter the worlds of characters”; and that they ‘are in an active processing state, scanning the program for cues about characters, their identity characteristics, and their likely actions’ (Karrh 1998, p. 43).

This subtle and non-conscious processing based on emotional, not rational, responses has critics of embedded promotion most concerned. Because the brand is ‘part of the dramatic entertainment’ and its promotional intent is not made explicit, embedded promotion ‘inserts the brand into the consumer’s experience with an intimacy that conventional promotion cannot match’, creating ‘a symbiotic relation between promotional communication and mediated entertainment and abolish[ing] the category boundary that separates the two’ (Hackley & Tiwsakul 2006, p. 64). Embedded promotion has been criticised for disguising the persuasive intent of brand exposure because some viewers, particularly children, may not recognise it as advertising (Said 2010; Wright et al. 2005). Given concerns raised about embedded promotion in general, and proliferation and intensity of embedded gambling promotion into sports coverage through the use of screen, script and plot placements, it is timely to examine the nature and extent of this practice in two high-profile televised Australian sports. This study is particularly timely in light of the increased prevalence of gambling promotions in Australian television sport broadcasts and the concomitant social and political commentary surrounding this issue.

Methods

Procedure

Two weeks of NRL and AFL programs televised free-to-air to the north-eastern New South Wales (NSW) area in early 2012 were recorded. These comprised five football matches and two associated entertainment programs (hereafter referred to as ‘footy shows’). To capture all promotional activities likely to be seen by viewers, five minutes of programming before and after each broadcast were also included. Institutional constraints precluded recording subscription television broadcasts. Nevertheless, analysis of free-to-air telecasts is considered acceptable because of their accessibility to most socio-economic groups and because both free-to-air and subscription television match telecasts adopt a similar model and sequence with respect to gambling promotion. Additionally, while limited to a short timeframe and a limited number of matches/programs, the sample was adequate to measure the proportion of broadcasts devoted to these promotions and to capture the most common types of embedded gambling promotions. Table 1 summarises the NRL and AFL programs included in this analysis.
Table 1: Programs analysed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Program</th>
<th>Type of Program</th>
<th>Broadcast Channel</th>
<th>Broadcast Date (2012)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St George Dragons vs. Wests Tigers</td>
<td>NRL game</td>
<td>Nine NBN</td>
<td>16 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle Knights vs. Brisbane Broncos</td>
<td>NRL game</td>
<td>Nine NBN</td>
<td>16 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Sydney Rabbitohs vs. Penrith Panthers</td>
<td>NRL game</td>
<td>Nine NBN</td>
<td>18 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collingwood Magpies vs. Hawthorn Hawks</td>
<td>AFL game</td>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>30 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geelong Cats vs. Freemantle Dockers</td>
<td>AFL game</td>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>31 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRL Footy Show</td>
<td>sports entertainment</td>
<td>Nine NBN</td>
<td>15 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFL Footy Show</td>
<td>sports entertainment</td>
<td>Nine NBN</td>
<td>15 March</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After recording the broadcasts, a research assistant viewed the recordings and recorded and ‘time stamped’ all gambling promotions to facilitate ease of retrieval in further analysis. Each time-stamped occurrence was then reviewed by the lead researcher, who categorised each occurrence into one of five groups identified below.

Quantitative measures

To measure the frequency and duration of different types of gambling promotion during the televised broadcasts, an adapted schema employed by Thomas et al. (2012b) was used to enable comparisons of promotional techniques. Specifically, we initially attempted to group observed instances of gambling promotion into the five categories used by these researchers:

1. Fixed advertising signage, comprising gambling company sponsored stadium tier boards, perimeter fence signs, on-field A-Frame signs, bolster signs and interview backdrops;

2. Dynamic advertising, comprising gambling company sponsored advertising on revolving or electronic banners within the stadium;

3. Commercial break advertising, appearing during commercial breaks during or in the five minutes immediately before or after the televised match;
4. Integrated advertising, comprising live betting odds announcements, on-screen displays and pull-through banners, and broadcast gambling sponsorship announcements;

5. Team sponsorship, comprising gambling sponsored logos on players’ uniforms, within locker rooms and on team banners.

However, it was unfeasible to accurately count each promotion, particularly gambling-sponsored team logos on player uniforms, because they appeared extremely frequently but very briefly. Measuring the occurrence of fixed advertising during match broadcasts was challenging for the same reasons, although this could be accurately measured during the footy shows. Consequently, frequency and duration of gambling promotion was calculated only for the first three categories of advertising for the football matches, and for the first four categories during footy shows.

**Qualitative content analysis**

The second component of the study comprised a content and semiotic analysis of visual and aural components of the broadcast gambling promotions. Media content analysis involves analysing ‘who says what, through which channel, to whom, and with what effect’ (Shoemaker & Reese 1995, p. 12). Content analysis counts occurrence of specified words, phrases and concepts (Powell 1997, pp. 59–68), and analyses relationships between these dimensions, to enable ‘a systematic reading of a body of texts’ (Krippendorff 2004, p. 3). To interpret the meaning of the messages, we turned to semiotic analysis, where meaning is ascribed to the signs, symbols and imagery of the messages (Mick 1986). Semiotics has been defined as the science of signs and their meanings (Ogilvie & Mizerski 2011) and is where, based on a Saussurean approach, the researcher analyses the signs and their meanings to obtain an interpretation of the messages (Mick & Oswald 2006).

The importance of content analysis as a qualitative tool is emphasised by Bogdan and Biklen (2006), who explain how content can be analysed in terms of categories, emerging patterns and meanings conveyed by text. Content analysis therefore enables consideration of perspectives of both the producer of the text and the intended audience, and creates a picture of how author and subject view the activity being studied (Berg 2009). Content and semiotic analyses are traditional mass communication research methods used to assess a wide range of media content features, and are particularly useful to interrogate how social issues and trends are represented. This study analysed broadcasts according to production techniques used, and visual and aural components of segments, which were coded according to recurring patterns in themes, words, images, sound, colour and symbolism. We included different communication methods used such as in-game commentaries, on-screen displays, pull-through banners, and non-game discussions that included gambling issues.

**Results: Frequency and duration of gambling promotion**

Tables 2 and 3 show frequency and duration of each type of gambling promotion observed during the football matches and two footy shows, to address the first research aim.
Table 2: Frequency and duration of gambling promotions during match broadcasts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Match</th>
<th>Frequency &amp; Duration</th>
<th>Dynamic advertising</th>
<th>Commercial advertising</th>
<th>Integrated advertising</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NRL St George Dragons vs. Wests Tigers</td>
<td>Frequency (%) 0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (19%)</td>
<td>13 (81%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duration (min) 0 (0%)</td>
<td>1.03 (25%)</td>
<td>3.02 (75%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRL Newcastle Knights vs. Brisbane Broncos</td>
<td>Frequency (%) 0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (9%)</td>
<td>9 (81%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duration (min) 0 (0%)</td>
<td>0.50 (31%)</td>
<td>1.51 (69%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRL South Sydney Rabbitohs vs. Penrith Panthers</td>
<td>Frequency (%) 0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (50%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duration (min) 0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0.20 (43%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFL Collingwood Magpies vs. Hawthorn Hawks</td>
<td>Frequency (%) 0 (0%)</td>
<td>5 (36%)</td>
<td>9 (64%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duration (min) 0 (0%)</td>
<td>1.45 (35%)</td>
<td>3.18 (65%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFL Geelong Cats vs. Fremantle Dockers</td>
<td>Frequency (%) 0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (25%)</td>
<td>9 (75%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duration (min) 0 (0%)</td>
<td>1.05 (43%)</td>
<td>1.28 (57%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Frequency (%) 0 (0%)</td>
<td>13 (24%)</td>
<td>42 (76%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duration (min) 0 (0%)</td>
<td>4.03 (30%)</td>
<td>9.19 (70%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>13.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Frequency and duration of gambling promotions during the footy shows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Match</th>
<th>Frequency &amp; Duration</th>
<th>Fixed advertising</th>
<th>Dynamic advertising</th>
<th>Commercial advertising</th>
<th>Integrated advertising</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NRL Footy Show</td>
<td>Frequency (%) 3 (20%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (13%)</td>
<td>10 (67%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duration (min) 3.50 (45%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0.55 (12%)</td>
<td>3.40 (43%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the 17 hours and 40 minutes of broadcasts analysed, 25 minutes and 42 seconds contained gambling promotions (72 occurrences). Over two-thirds of messages were integrated into the program. Dynamic advertising was noteworthy for its absence. These findings differ from those of Thomas et al. (2012b) who found that in a sample of AFL programs the largest proportion of promotion was dynamic advertising, and that integrated advertising was negligible.

In our study, commercial advertisements were more prevalent during game broadcasts than in the sports entertainment programs. Under the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice (Australian Communication and Media Authority 2013), in any hour a broadcaster may schedule up to 16 minutes of non-program material except between 6pm and midnight when it is limited to 15 minutes. Average commercial advertising time devoted to paid gambling advertisements across the sports matches analysed equated to about one-eighth of allowable limits.

Four sports betting companies, two lottery companies, a keno operator and a tipping competition company were represented as sponsors and advertisers during broadcasts. These were Centrebet (sports betting operator and official sponsor of the North Queensland Toyota Cowboys NRL team), Tom Waterhouse Betting (sports betting operator, and sponsor of many of the broadcasts and the Sydney Swans AFL team), Sportingbet Australia (sports betting operator and sponsor of the Broncos NRL team), and TAB Sportsbet ([then] official sponsor of the NRL and State of Origin series and approved sports betting operator of the NRL). Also represented were Lotto and NSW Lotteries (owned by the Tatts Group) and Keno (owned by Tabcorp and an official partner of the NRL and rugby league State of Origin series). Additionally, AAMI Oztips (an online tipping site owned by Yahoo!7, itself 50% owned by Seven West media group) was represented.

**Visual and aural components of gambling promotion**

Addressing the second research aim entailed analysis of the content and semiotics of commercial gambling advertising and embedded gambling promotions during broadcasts.

**Commercials**

Advertisements during commercial breaks accounted for a substantial proportion of gambling messages during programs. Ten of the 15 commercials were a single 25-second advertisement for Tom Waterhouse Online Betting. This advertisement,
conveying a tone of professionalism, and mostly black-and-white apart from a green colour when Waterhouse uses his tablet device to bet online, was a distinctive component of all the match broadcasts and one footy show. The monochrome and green design is also a feature of this operator’s website and other media products. This design was also integrated into a pre-game ‘this broadcast is sponsored by …’ segment replicated in four of the five match broadcasts analysed.

The tone of the Waterhouse commercial suggests that even potential punters who are not specialists in the intricacies of the game can participate in and enjoy betting. Waterhouse presents as a young, well-groomed man in a dark suit, rejecting the traditional ‘ocker’ image of a football fan. The voice-over, by Waterhouse himself in the first person, acknowledges that—like many members of the advertisement’s potential broadcast audience—he is not a sportsperson himself, but despite this he can, and does, excel in the betting world. The advertisement refers to the association between the Waterhouse family name (well known in Australian horseracing circles) and four generations of bookmakers: ‘I’ll bet on any sport, because I’m a Waterhouse’. Titled ‘In the Blood’ in its online version, the advertisement features heavily leveraged use of the Waterhouse family name, and conveys a message that by betting with Tom Waterhouse, viewers are assured of having access to his and his family’s expertise. Through this focus of the advertisement, a sense of authority and confidence is expressed, with a winning narrative outcome of the viewer’s betting experience, no matter what sport is the target of the bet.

Further, the advertisement seeks to engender betting as a business; professional and serious. Scenes are depicted of Waterhouse behind the scenes at a number of sporting venues—a large stadium, a golf course, and at the trophy room of a cricket club—all of which are empty of other people, perhaps hinting at his ‘backstage’ access to such spaces. However, the next sequence shows Waterhouse at a racetrack, in the midst of the action, and with his mother Gai Waterhouse at work. Gai gives Tom a knowing look, as if acknowledging his gambling prowess and expertise. Fast-paced music plays behind Waterhouse’s voice-over, where he invites viewers to ‘join me’ online, whether it is to place a bet on football, cricket, golf, racing, or ‘any sport, any bet type, any time’—he assures the viewer. When he opens his traditional bookmakers bag he extracts not a handful of betting slips, as might be expected, but a modern tablet device displaying his online betting site on the screen, associating his business with modern technology and ease of access.

The remaining five commercial gambling advertisements included three for NSW lottery products, and two for a tipping competition. This last advertisement opens with a station identification, then cuts to images of the website the advertisement describes. The voice-over invites viewers to ‘tip against the Channel 7 AFL commentary team, and you could win $10,000’, with a link to the appropriate website. There are images of the commentary team, all arguably with celebrity status as well-known commentators, former football players or media identities, laughing and passing a football around.

**Embedded promotion within football match broadcasts**

Several types of gambling promotions were integrated into the broadcasts. These included logos and graphics, sponsored segments, sponsored on-screen displays of odds, use of celebrities, team sponsorship and fixed advertising.
Logos and graphics
Additional to gambling logos associated with team sponsorship and fixed advertising at stadiums, consistent and widespread use of logos and graphics at other points in matches was the most common technique among those measured. Strategic use of colours and wording consistent with the logos’ use in other media (e.g. online, print media) and locations (e.g. newsagents) is important, linking their use in these football broadcasts with their other uses, and framing them naturally in broader cultural spaces.

The naturalised association of the colourful Keno logo superimposed on the replay of critical incidents throughout matches was very common, and was the most prominent integrated saturation promotion technique observed. Match commentators’ voice-overs of ‘the Keno replay’ generally accompanied the logo and reinforced viewer awareness of the sponsored segment. However, Keno is distinct from other gambling brands promoted that sought to encourage viewers to place bets on football matches underway, or to be played, in that Keno has no direct connection to football.

Online bookmaker Centrebet frequently had its logo displayed in dynamic stadium signage as well as integrated into on-screen displays of betting odds. The Centrebet logo was also seen at the beginning of games when the line-up of players was announced in an on-screen display, together with the telephone number for contacting Centrebet.

The TAB Sportsbet logo very commonly accompanied on-screen displays of betting odds, as did logos of Centrebet and AAMI Oztips. The TAB Sportsbet logo was also embedded in a naturalised way with betting odds, and was superimposed on the (televisual) displays of players’ dressing rooms. The words ‘TAB Sportsbet’ and current odds also appeared on pull-through banners at the bottom of the screen in some match broadcasts, where it was integrated with other football ‘news’ such as quotes from commentators (particularly to do with movement of odds), scores, and upcoming game broadcasts.

Sponsored segments
Two game broadcasts concluded with a brief gambling-company-sponsored ‘man of the match’ segment. The segments followed an established pattern where a well-known commentator stands on the field with the winner, who is awarded a cash prize from the sponsor. In these segments, ‘Man of the Game’ appears on the screen, followed by another box with the sponsor’s logo and then a third with the sponsor’s message: ‘Clean up with Keno!’. In the segments we analysed there were multiple visual and aural mentions of the ‘Keno Man of the Game’ and discussion of winning plays. The segments ended with three different graphics that included the sponsor’s logo.

Sponsored on-screen displays of odds
Centrebet and TAB Sportsbet are the two wagering companies whose logos and names were displayed on-screen during match broadcasts, often accompanied by the commentator noting ‘the Centrebet/TAB Sportsbet odds’.
Use of celebrities
The match broadcasts analysed were commentated by well-known media personalities, usually current or former players, and their mention or discussion of betting was embedded into the broadcast script. One match contained a live cross to TAB Sportsbet representative Glenn Munsie to ‘have a look at the betting on TAB Sportsbet’. Munsie, NSW Media Manager for TAB Sportsbet was, at the time, a regular appearance on NSW radio and television, and was promoted as a sports betting expert or ‘brand ambassador’. Similarly, the sports entertainment programs incorporated hosts and guests who are well known to football-loving Australian audiences and who have large followings. The matches and programs were punctuated by promotional advertisements featuring gambling personality and rugby commentator Tom Waterhouse, also well known on Australian television and, as explained earlier, whose family connections with the nation’s horseracing plutocracy have kept him in the limelight as a household name and a controversial celebrity.

Use of personalities with media profiles to promote betting odds and positively comment on wagering companies helps to smoothly integrate gambling with sport, and to promote gambling as a natural and socially accepted activity.

Team sponsorship
Gambling sponsors’ logos on players’ uniforms, within locker rooms, and on team banners were almost constantly visible in broadcasts. For instance, players of NRL team the Brisbane Broncos prominently displayed the Sportingbet.com logo on the back of their shirts throughout match broadcasts.

Fixed advertising
Fixed advertising such as stadium signage was displayed frequently throughout matches. Stadium signage included multiple levels, from on-field bolsters, A-frame and perimeter signs through to stadium tiers and scoreboards.

A recent development in sports sponsorship has been the advent of arena advertising (Turley & Shannon 2000), where a sponsor obtains naming rights to the whole stadium. Purchasing naming rights to sports stadiums appears an attempt to integrate gambling into the language of sport by forcibly associating particular and prominent venues with gambling. Stadium signage was particularly evident in two games. The most notable example was the NRL South Sydney Rabbitohs vs. Penrith Panthers game, played at ‘Centrebet Stadium’ with Centrebet signage very visible throughout the broadcast. The Centrebet logo was highly noticeable on both sides of the stadium, on corners and pillars, and the logo was also placed on top of the scoreboard that was regularly shown.

Embedded promotion in associated sports entertainment shows
The two footy shows were analysed in a similar fashion to the broadcast games. They contained 17 gambling messages over 13 minutes within 200 minutes of broadcast. A particularly high number of messages were integrated into the NRL-focused show: 15 mentions (7 minutes 45 seconds) compared to 2 mentions (5 minutes 3 seconds) for the AFL-focused show. Promotions were particularly well scripted into shows and prominently featured sponsored on-screen displays of betting odds. These often occurred when the show’s panel members were discussing
Sponsored segments were a feature of the footy shows. One prominent instance was the ‘Centrebet Kick for Cash’, a regular segment that closes The NRL Footy Show. During the segment ‘Roy’, an audience member and ‘massive Parramatta fan’, competes for a prize of AU$5000. The setting for this segment, a square of AstroTurf and a set of mini goalposts outside the television studio, is surrounded by Centrebet sideline banners. Football and media celebrity Paul ‘Fatty’ Vautin reminds the audience, ‘of course, the money (is) put up tonight by Centrebet’. With encouragement and laughter from the show’s panel and audience members alike, Roy, momentarily escalated to national celebrity, tries for the kick, and misses. Between the goalposts is a sign: ‘Centrebet – Don’t just watch it!’. Association of the branded segment with randomly selected studio audience members, and the chance of winning substantial cash prizes, embeds Centrebet’s brand as a popular and regular part of the show.

Three extended discussions of gambling were included in the footy shows. A sponsored section in one of these features a ‘Lady Luck’ segment, with regular host Lauren Eagle. Eagle is a former Australian water ski racer, glamour girl and Miss Teen International. This attractive young woman stands in front of picturesque Sydney Harbour and, over an upbeat music soundtrack, outlines her betting suggestions through the sponsor for the week. She offers tips for two upcoming games, then finishes with her motto: ‘Take a punt, and don’t deny that Lady Luck is on your side’. The winnings go to children’s hospitals, providing legitimisation of the activity and associating gambling with a good cause.

In another segment presented as a current affairs story, the regular hosts (a sports journalist, ex-football players and sports commentators) discussed an investigation into AFL players and officials suspected of and found to be betting on games. The message conveyed during the segment was that gambling happens, though there is zero tolerance for breaches of rules for players and officials.

A third segment featuring an ‘infomercial’ style discussion between two show hosts and a current player featured details of a new product introduced by a gambling company. The segment is introduced as a ‘Centrebet exclusive Footy Show special’. The hosts explain the special bet, for which you need to be a client of the sponsor to participate in. Discussion expands to include another player, and a light-hearted ‘bet’ is placed between players. The host quickly assures his viewers that ‘of course, the money would go to charity,’ because, as panellist and Cronulla Sharks NRL team captain Paul Gallen states ironically, ‘we can’t bet on games’. Gallen’s comment is followed by cynical laughter all around (implying that this is not the case). This segment did not indicate that the discussion was a sponsored event other than the sponsor’s name being inadvertently mentioned during the session.

**Discussion**

The results can be analysed in terms of selected communication theories to reflect on the likely impact of these gambling promotions. Russell’s (1998) Three Dimensional Framework of Product Placement provides a useful framework by
which to consider the likely effectiveness of the script, screen and plot placements used.

Script placement comprises auditory components of the placement and in our study was found to include voice-overs, live match commentary, studio cross-overs to gambling operator representatives, extended discussions of gambling odds and types of bets, and infomercials on gambling products.

Potential effectiveness of script placements depends on the context in which the product is mentioned, the frequency with which it is mentioned, and the emphasis placed on the product name [as reflected through] tone of the voice, place in the dialogue [and who mentions the product].

(Russell 1998)

Various aspects of script placements in the football broadcasts appeared to optimise effectiveness. Placements occurred frequently and at critical points in the game when audiences were likely to be most attentive, such as when a try or goal was scored and when awards were presented.

Frequent exposure of audiences to the Tom Waterhouse advertisements is a notable element of the broadcasts studied. Throughout the matches, discussion of betting odds by media personalities, often current or ex-players, arguably add legitimacy to their message. Other auditory techniques were also used, such as upbeat background music to accompany sponsored segments. In such contexts, music adds to the excitement around movements on scoreboards and updates of betting odds. Words such as ‘cash,’ ‘luck,’ and ‘winning’ accompanying gambling references provide a positive portrayal of gambling.

The repeated voice-over of Tom Waterhouse in his advertisements provides reassurance and encouragement. The sense of authority and confidence in following tips, such as in the Waterhouse advertisements, provides a further positive association with the likelihood of winning when betting. Referring to bettors as ‘clients’ conveys notions of business and professionalism, and thus associates gambling with the well-to-do.

Screen placement comprises visual elements of product placement and, like script placement, can have different degrees of effectiveness, depending on number of appearances and style of camera shot (Russell 1998), as well as size, position on the screen and how central it is to the action (Gupta & Lord 1998). Several aspects of screen placement of gambling references observed in our study heighten its potential effectiveness. Most dominant were the nearly continuous visuals of gambling logos on player uniforms and stadium signage. On-screen displays of betting odds were overlaid on match coverage, locker room footage and at points of high interest. These included player line-ups at game commencement and when points were scored, accompanied by a visual of the scoreboard with gambling logos. Sponsored segments were observed to be particularly action-oriented, heightening viewers’ attention to the segment. Other moving visuals included pull-through banners displaying current betting odds and gambling logos, accompanied by other football news. This technique emulates a common news presentation technique, thus providing legitimacy to the presentation of betting odds. The well-known and/or attractive presenters add to visual appeal, while involvement of studio audience
members in segments inserts excitement and unpredictability. Further, professional dress and grooming standards adopted by those promoting gambling attempts to lift the image of gambling away from being a practice engaged in by undesirables. This last aspect is particularly notable in the frequent recurrence of the Waterhouse advertisements, with the well-groomed Tom Waterhouse signifying gambling as socially acceptable.

*Plot placement* involves integration of the product into the entertainment’s storyline and is most effective when the product becomes a central part of this story (Russell 1998). The aural and visual elements of embedded gambling promotion discussed above were mostly used in tandem and integrated seamlessly into the ‘story’ unfolding during the football matches. This ‘story’ is the competition between two high profile football teams from which one emerges as the winner. Embedding live betting odds into a match heightens the story’s appeal and excitement by emphasising its present real-time setting, by heightening stakes of the competition between ‘heroes’ and ‘villains,’ by adding another plot layer to its action-packed sequence, by sharpening the suspense of conflicts that occur, and by elevating the climax to the story when the conflict is resolved through a win by one team who then basks in the associated glory. As such, embedded and continuously updated betting odds provide a parallel storyline that mirrors movement in the match scoreboard. The clear message is that interest in and excitement of watching the game may be elevated by wagering on its outcome. Promoting gambling throughout a match telecast is arguably aimed at stimulating impulse bets, which, once placed, heighten a viewer’s emotional attachment to the game. Punters are then able to experience the thrill and glory of a win, just like the winning team. Overlaid on this message is the proliferation of various sports betting operator logos and website addresses so the viewer can immediately (or impulsively) act on this message.

Several theories further attempt to explain the power of embedded promotion. Some focus on identity, with Karrh (1998) emphasising ‘the power of a placed brand to bridge a perceived gap between identity characteristics currently held and those which are desired (and displayed by a media character through brand use)’ (Karrh 1998, p. 44), ‘given the attachment audiences can have [with certain] programs and characters and the power of brands as social symbols’ (Karrh 1998, p. 45). Another theory is espoused by Hackley and Tiwsakul (2006) and draws on existential phenomenology to also focus on identity or self-concept, with ‘product placement and its variants [acting] as a powerfully suggestive device of targeting, locating particular brands within a dramatic setting in which membership of a social group is implied and portrayed’ (Hackley & Tiwsakul 2006, p. 70). Both theories acknowledge that characteristics of the viewer, brand and the placement itself help to determine the impact of brand placement.

*Personal relevance* of the gambling promotions appeared potentially optimised through targeting of young males as both viewers of football broadcasts and major users of sports betting. Because audiences view themselves metaphorically as characters in the story (Hirschman 1988), and because these characters are well-known football players whom many young men likely look to as role models, celebrity endorsement of gambling products may be particularly powerful here. Use of celebrities and well-known regular commentators and hosts for these programs elevates effectiveness of their endorsed gambling messages (Dix, Phau & Pougnet...
Appeal of gambling products was also reinforced by use of a particularly attractive young woman to promote sports gambling. This is not a new tactic: a recent survey of Australians found that when asked about sports betting advertising, both women and men agreed it was targeted specifically towards young men (Thomas et al. 2012a, p. 119). Use of modern technology to access gambling opportunities, as in the Waterhouse ads, further reinforces the broadcasts’ appeal to younger viewers.

Closely related to personal relevance is the experiential/empathy aspect of embedded promotion (Russell 1998). Viewers project themselves ‘into new worlds through dramatic entertainment [and] the presence of brands [allows consumers to connect with] these exciting and aspirational worlds’ long after the entertainment finishes (Hackley & Tiwsakul 2006, p. 68), especially if they then use the branded products. Further, this emotional identification is strongest for repeat programs, such as television serials and football series, where audiences build familiarity and identification with recurring characters (Fiske 1992). Resonance theory (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli 1980) suggests that strong connectedness with the entertainment amplifies effectiveness of product placement. Targeting of young male football fans with sports betting marketing ensures a high degree of resonance with sports betting’s target market.

The informational aspects of embedded promotion are typically indirect and implied in entertainment such as movies and television shows in that characters are typically portrayed as using a product rather than explaining its virtues (Hackley & Tiwsakul 2006; Russell 1998). However, embedding of gambling sponsored messages in football broadcasts allows numerous opportunities for direct information. As well as displays of website addresses so punters knew where to place a bet, live odds were continually updated and these odds, as well as tips and special types of bets, were discussed at length. This integration should be more powerful than product placements that lack direct brand information. Further, informational aspects of broadcasts were overwhelmingly framed in a positive light. ‘Framing,’ or ‘the presentation of semantically different, but objectively equivalent message information’ (Krishnamurthy, Carter & Blair 2001, p. 383) relates to the way a message is presented, generally in either a positive or negative light (e.g. beef containing 75% lean meat or beef containing 25% fat) (Levin & Gaeth 1988). Product advertisers favour positive messages and emphasise benefits consumers will receive (Pervan & Vocino 2008). Hence, government-mandated responsible gambling messages were commonly presented inconspicuously in broadcasts using small font text, or only in brief aural mentions such as ‘please gamble responsibly’.

Further, Kahneman and Tversky’s (1979) work on prospect theory found that people’s attitude to risk differs depending on whether a message is presented as gains or losses. Nearly all gambling promotions in the broadcasts presented betting as a positive proposition, and were a highly normalised component of the broadcast, of the game, and of the football and television culture. Gambling logos, commentator comments and on-screen messages were naturalised and smoothly inserted into broadcast segments. They were embedded within the experience of watching the game live, or of enjoying the football entertainment programs, as a footy fan. The often-restated sponsorship of broadcasts, particularly by Tom Waterhouse’s online betting business (which is a sports betting partner of Channel
Nine), conferred an authority to the connection between betting and enjoyment of football on television.

Elsewhere in the findings, use of celebrities and personalities to confirm the positive nature of wagering within enjoyment of the sport was highly endorsed. In contrast, in all programs analysed there were only a few instances of counter-messages. A TAB Sportsbet display, with current odds for the match, included a text line that advised ‘Gamble Responsibly’ with no other information. Similarly, the Centrebet graphic for the ‘Lady Luck’ segment included those two words, in very small print.

Finally, the executional aspects of integrated promotion refer to the need for a good fit of the branded product inside its host entertainment so that product characteristics are congruent with the image of the program (Russell 1998). Clearly, competitive, risk-taking and exciting qualities of a football game align well with characteristics of gambling, especially when the activity to be gambled on is the game itself.

In summary, our analysis has argued that embedded gambling promotion in the surveyed football broadcasts utilises plot placement to optimise its effectiveness and that personal relevance, empathy, information and congruence align well with the young male target audience of both football and sports betting. It is therefore not surprising that researchers, governments, the media, welfare groups and the public have expressed serious concerns about the impacts of embedding gambling messages in sporting broadcasts.

**Conclusion**

This exploratory study is the first analysis of gambling promotion utilised during broadcasts of the two most watched sporting codes and associated entertainment shows on Australian television. The study also furthers previous work examining gambling messages appearing in sports broadcasts (Thomas et al. 2012b). While limited to free-to-air broadcasts over a two-week period, the findings invite further research to better understand why and how embedded gambling messages in sporting broadcasts impact on their audiences, and implications of these effects for current and future rates of gambling and gambling problems.

While this study has explored the potential effectiveness of this type of gambling promotion, much research remains to be done to identify its impacts on brand recall, consumer attitudes, purchase intentions and gambling behaviour. A logical extension is to empirically explore sport viewers’ reactions to various modes of gambling promotion identified here. Such research may shed light on effective policy solutions for minimising harm that could arise from gambling promotion through sport telecasts, particularly for vulnerable groups, including children, young people and problem gamblers. Additionally, longitudinal research is needed to track whether gambling promotion has been increasing in extent, and to quantify the extent of the shift towards embedded promotion versus traditional forms of advertising.

While this study did not aim to investigate differences between the football codes in the way gambling promotions were presented or framed, future related research could usefully uncover strategies used by gambling companies in tailoring promotional messages to specific target audiences, and in accommodating cultural
nuances between similar sporting codes. Moreover, future research might seek to compare and contrast how gambling promotions manifest in sports other than the two football codes studied here, and/or across different jurisdictions. It could be that gambling companies frame promotional messages differently across different sports. A thorough understanding of gambling promotions across a wide spectrum of sports is needed to inform policy, as a ‘one size fits all’ regulatory approach may not prove effective across the full spectrum of televised sports.

Additionally, sports governing bodies, individual clubs and sports marketers should be aware of risks of relying on sponsorship from gambling operators, given the volatile regulatory situation in many countries and growing public concern about proliferation of gambling marketing in sport, which may tarnish an organisation’s brand image. Further, it may be prudent for sport organisations heavily dependent on sponsorship revenue from gambling companies to diversify their sponsorship revenue portfolio. Given increasing scrutiny to gambling advertising via sport and the possibility of subsequent regulation in some jurisdictions, sports organisations should look to minimise exposure to financial risk that may accompany tighter government regulation.

Further, Australian governments face increasing community backlash given evidence that this ‘avalanche of sports betting advertising’ is considered intrusive and ruining fans’ enjoyment of watching sport, with serious concerns also relating to opportunities it provides for match fixing and potential effects on children, adolescents, young men, and problem and at-risk gamblers (JSCGR 2013, p. 7). Children and adolescents are likely to be absorbing the messages promoted, thus breeding a new generation of problem gamblers. Gambling is becoming culturally embedded in sport through advertising that promotes betting to demonstrate masculinity, team loyalty and sporting knowledge (Thomas et al. 2012a) and encourages consumers to purchase the myth of gambling as a sport (McMullan 2011) that is healthy, harmless and requires skill and practice to master. Thus, proliferation of gambling promotion during sport risks changing the sporting culture in Australia from one that has focused on athleticism and fair play to one dominated by gambling.

Notes
1 The authors would like to acknowledge the assistance of Louise Persson, who time-stamped all broadcast recordings in preparation for our analysis.
2 ‘Ocker’ is Australian slang and generally refers to an unsophisticated and uncultured Australian who speaks in a broad Australian accent and consumes large quantities of beer.

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