**Corona Cero and the Olympics**

Televised sporting events are popular with young people, with research showing that young people under the age of 16 are exposed to alcohol branding which occurs at the venue and is broadcast on television[[1]](#endnote-1),[[2]](#endnote-2),[[3]](#endnote-3),[[4]](#endnote-4) and there is a positive association between exposure to alcohol sports sponsorship and self-reported alcohol consumption[[5]](#endnote-5), including in secondary school-aged children[[6]](#endnote-6).

This year, [the Olympics were sponsored](https://olympics.com/ioc/partners/ab-inbev) by AB InBev to promote Corona Cero, a zero alcohol product, however, [there were concerns](https://edition.cnn.com/2024/01/31/sport/olympics-ab-inbev-beer-spt-intl/index.html) that this product was acting as a surrogate brand[[7]](#endnote-7), using key features of the brand, such as design and the Corona logo, to promote Corona.

Whilst the Olympics were being televised, we were conducting a qualitative study with students aged 18-24 from the University of Derby to explore perceptions of alcohol marketing, including a question on perceptions of Corona Cero being advertised as part of the Olympics using photo elicitation techniques. Below we present an initial thematic analysis of participants perceptions of this example of alcohol marketing.

**What did young adults think?**

Firstly, there was confusion amongst participants as to what Cero means or whether this was promoting an alcohol-free product or an alcohol product, potentially leading to confusion amongst consumers.

*‘They might just think that cero is a different taste to it or something, because it's not in English. I mean, Brits or Americans or Australians that might not know what it means.’*

This could potentially lead to consumers viewing the product as a different version of an alcohol brand, and therefore, not promote a no or low product. The convention in the UK has been to promote no and low products as 0% or ‘zero’. The use of a different language could confuse consumers and lead to sales of Corona. There were also issues around the shared branding which could confuse potential consumers, in line with initial concerns around the partnership between the Olympics and Corona Cero.

Secondly, there was a difference of opinion about whether the use of a surrogate brand would influence consumers to buy the low-alcohol product or the alcohol product.

*‘I think aiming for low alcohol and no alcohol is better than just being able to market like full alcoholic beverages’*

*‘and, but then again, you're still gonna bring people to the brand. And then people are still gonna be like well. I like the alcohol. So I think it's clever’*

There was a perception that encouraging consumers to purchase no and low-alcohol products could be a good thing in terms of harm reduction and encouraging the use of no and low product. However, some participants saw this as a clever way to market alcoholic products due to audience's perception of this promoting Corona rather than Corona Cero, especially due to the confusion around the perception of the brand and logo. Interestingly, one participant worked in a pub during Summer 2024 and stated that she saw sales of Corona increase during the Olympics but not necessarily Corona Cero.

*‘Like during the Olympics, I think I've seen more people buy Corona even though they were marketing corona cero’*

Whilst this is one comment made as part of a small-scale qualitative study, future research could explore sales data to explore whether sales of Corona or Corona Cero increased during the Summer Olympics.

Thirdly, there was also a perception that it would make more sense to market a product with some relation to the sport and that this association affected people’s perceptions of the Olympics.

*‘So I do think that it's not very good on the Olympics’ behalf, but for Corona, I mean genius marketing really’*

Instead, viewers perceived this to be a cynical marketing tactic and that the marketing space could be better served by something associated with the sport. The association of the Olympics and healthy athletes with alcohol did not make sense to participants and alternative products like *‘like protein water’* would have made the association between the sport and the brand stronger, potentially increasing the positive perception of both. Similarly, the Olympics were viewed positively and marketing for something perceived to be in the public good would have made more sense to viewers when associated with the Olympics, for example, *‘Like a charity or something’*.

**The Next Olympics**

While this was a small part of a small sample qualitative study on a young adult population, it seems that, in line with [initial concerns](https://edition.cnn.com/2024/01/31/sport/olympics-ab-inbev-beer-spt-intl/index.html), Corona Cero may have been used as a surrogate brand. Pairing the Olympics and alcohol was perceived as an odd choice and this may have led to confusion about what was being promoted, an alcohol-free product or an alcohol one. It remains to be seen whether this marketing had the same effect on UK viewers as it did on this sample of students, and if so, whether this marketing led to an uptake in Corona or Corona Cero purchasing during this year’s Olympics.

 We will continue to analyse the transcripts from our interviews to explore the wider effects of alcohol marketing with an aim of a larger scale study during the Olympics in 2028 where AB InBev [will continue](https://olympics.com/ioc/partners/ab-inbev) to sponsor the Olympics, with Michelob lined up as the product being promoted in the US in 2028.

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