



SUPPORTER VIEWS ON ALCOHOL SPONSORSHIP IN SCOTTISH FOOTBALL

Prepared for SHAAP/ Supporters Direct Scotland

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BACKGROUND

Four focus groups were held with the following supporter groups:

- Premiership Supporters – Older (Aged 45 and over)
- Premiership Supporters – Younger (Aged under 45)
- Non-Premiership Supporters
- General Supporters

The sessions were held online on the 20th and 21st May 2024.

Across the four focus groups we were able to obtain representation from all levels within Scottish football including supporters of Premiership, Championship, League One, League Two and Non-League clubs. We were also to obtain representation from both male and female fans, with the latter accounting for around 10% of participants.

Anonymised verbatim quotes have been used throughout this document to illustrate findings and these have been labelled by which club the participant supported and, for Premiership supporters, their respective age grouping.

CHALLENGES FACING SCOTTISH FOOTBALL

Participants were asked at the start of each group to identify the main challenges facing Scottish football. The most identified challenges were:

- How Scottish football projects and markets itself
- Poor TV deals which sell Scottish football short
- A perception of inequity between clubs
- Financial pressures and issues around sustainability of football clubs
- The presence of English football and attraction of the English Premier League
- Poor leadership at the top of Scottish football

A range of secondary issues were also mentioned, including the following:

- How media represents the game
- Unquestionable or bad ownership
- The need for community or fan ownership
- The precarious nature of success and failure
- UEFA favouring the bigger nations in European competition
- Fan experience (including how fans are treated)
- A perception of increasing fan disorder and anti-social behaviour
- A perceived reliance of gambling and alcohol sponsorship
- Sectarianism

There was a strong sense that Scottish football projects and markets itself poorly, with a frustration that it can often resort to imitating English football.

'I think our football is too Anglicised, particularly the way we market ourselves. The minute England moved to a Premiership, Championship, League One, League Two, we did the same. I would prefer that we marketed ourselves as being distinctive and unique. We don't sell what is unique and special about the Scottish game and the core of that is the fans and the genuineness of the fans.'
(Championship Supporter)

'I don't think we hail our successes very well. I think if we market our game better the product might look more attractive for TV companies or sponsors.'
(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

Poor leadership at the top of the game and at individual clubs was believed to be a barrier to innovation or more creative approaches to promoting the game in Scotland.

'I think there is also a degree of questionable ownership for a lot of Scottish clubs. Clubs can really ride roughshod over their fanbase.'

(Championship Supporter)

'I despair about the leadership in the game. I don't think we have the right people there and the way we select them or elect them doesn't seem to change things very much.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'I think we need to be bold enough to stand out and lead rather than follow the crowd.'

(League One Supporter)

There was a belief that the current TV and media coverage sold Scottish football short in terms of both revenue and coverage.

'The deals that are being done on our behalf by the member's club that is the SPFL are poor. The TV deals frustrate me.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'I think Scottish football is very Old Firm centric, particularly in relation to television coverage. I accept they are larger audiences and all that, but we are more than two teams.'

(League One Supporter)

'Even this weekend we had Ross County and St Johnstone. Massive games in terms of impact of who ended up in the relegation spot. If you were in England, you could guarantee that Sky would be maximising that and you could pick which game to watch. Ours wasn't even on TV.'

(Premiership Supporter -Younger)

'Next season we have got Edinburgh derbies, we have got the Old Firm, we have Dundee derbies back in the league. There are good fixtures there. We should be pushing our case more.'

(Premiership Supporter -Younger)

These factors all create an environment where there is perceived to be severe financial pressures on clubs and the wider Scottish game.

'There are not many clubs in Scotland that make a profit. There isn't any super money in Scottish football.'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

'I am concerned about funding of the game from top to bottom. I don't think we get value for our product and we seem to just snap at the first TV deal or sponsorship deal that comes along.'

(Premiership Supporter -Younger)

'There is a precarious nature and there is not much between success and failure. It doesn't take a lot of time for clubs to go from the top to then being at risk.'

(Championship Supporter)

This creates challenges around attracting sponsorship.

'In Scottish football, we are relying on the SPFL and the commercial side of that to bring in sponsorship. I believe they appointed a new commercial manager either last year or the year before and I am not seeing anything different going on.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'The sponsors Scottish football tends to get is the B-tier. It isn't the big players. It is smaller companies looking to try and make a statement in the market.'

(Premiership Supporter -Younger)

'When we (St Johnstone) won the Scottish Cup in 2021, the cup was without a sponsor. A massive tournament, the oldest national trophy in the world and we didn't have a sponsor for it. Crazy.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'I feel like when we get sponsorship into Scotland, it never feels like it is particularly ground-breaking or imaginative or that interesting. I would love to see more of something that is genuinely interesting, feels like a progression and is unique and different.'

(Premiership Supporter -Younger)

Many felt that the challenges around attracting sponsorship can often lead a default to 'traditional' sponsors of football. These included alcohol companies and gambling companies.

'We are still beholden to the bookmakers than I would necessarily like. We have William Hill coming in to be our flagship sponsors for the league. It raises questions.'

(Championship Supporter)

'When it comes to the top-flight of Scottish football, it is usually either alcohol or betting companies.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'There is a continual reliance on gambling and alcohol sponsorship to prop up our finances when the rest of the world is trending away from that.'

(Non-League Supporter)

'In terms of Scottish football, there is not a queue out the door waiting to throw money at us. The bookmakers are probably one of the only ones who are.'

(Championship Supporter)

'When it comes to mental health and well-being, I don't think we do anyone justice at by entertaining these companies, but they seem to be the only companies with money, which is why clubs are still going for them.'

(Premiership Supporter -Younger)

'When you think back on the sponsors we have had over the years, it does seem that we are over reliant on the alcohol and gambling industries. Does that come from under-selling the product and under-selling the value or just assuming football fans enjoy a drink or enjoy a wee accumulator at the game? I think things have moved on and when you look at crowds at stadiums there are a lot more families now.'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

TYPES OF SPONSORSHIP

Fans do naturally differentiate between types of sponsors and whether they were comfortable with them or not. Opinion varied from fan to fan, but companies and industries that created discomfort included:

- Gambling
- Alcohol
- Cigarettes/Vaping
- Money lending/financial
- Human rights abuse (Qatar/Saudi Arabia)

'I think specific countries like Saudi or Qatar with their human rights record. I wouldn't want that on the front of my club's shirt.'
(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'Would we accept Saudi Arabian money here in Scotland? Some would, but many, including me, would say, "Well what kind of regime is it? What is behind that money?"'
(League One Supporter)

'My son' favourite shirt had Wonga on it and that (money lending) was something that I personally didn't want to be associated with.'
(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'In the past we had a hedge fund on the front of our shirt, that made me feel uncomfortable.'
(Championship Supporter)

'I am uneasy about any gambling, tobacco, or alcohol having any heavy involvement in football. We need to be thinking more about the health of the game.'
(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'The one that springs to mind that hasn't come to Scotland yet is vapes and stuff like that. I wouldn't want to be associated with vaping.'
(Championship Supporter)

'Players are not allowed to bet on football matches, but what do we do? We jump into bed with a betting company as we have just done with William Hill for the new season. Betting is one source of income that is slightly uncomfortable for me.'
(League One Supporter)

'Put it this way, I wouldn't promote to any of my grandchildren smoking, drinking, or gambling. It is pandering to people's addictions. It is not something that should be our main sponsor.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

Some felt there was an onus on clubs to act responsibly around sponsorship choices.

'I think clubs do have a degree of responsibility in terms of money and where it comes from. On an individual level, I would like to think that each individual club is a beacon in terms of their community and would try and focus on companies that aren't going to be too divisive.'

(Championship Supporter)

'If a club thinks of itself as a community organisation or at the heart of the community then it should have a responsibility to think about what sponsors they accept and the good of the community rather than its' bottom line. The fact that a lot of the larger clubs don't shows that they are not community clubs but simply businesses.'

(League Two Supporter)

'I think clubs have a social responsibility. If they want to engage with the community and get families and people to engage with the club then they need to be aware of their moral and social responsibility.'

(Championship Supporter)

'We see and read regularly about the problems that addictions to these things can cause.'

(League One Supporter)

'My club is an integral part of our community and area and I think that comes with a responsibility to do things the right. That includes things like choosing the right sponsors and being a living wage employer.'

(Championship Supporter)

'Hearts don't charge for shirt sponsorship and they have MND Scotland, because it is more beneficial from a social point of view. I think you do have a responsibility for the society in which you are operating.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

There was an acceptance that in football financial reality and the demands of fans can sometimes outweigh the need to act responsibly.

'In an ideal world, you would take the sponsorship that brings the most benefit to society. That is what you want, to be associated with something that is positive, but it is a balance when there are wages to pay and maybe you went out of the cup a few round before you expected to.'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

'Morally, clubs should be thinking about the harms that come from things like alcohol, but the reality is that majority of owners are now businessmen, and it is numbers on a spreadsheet, pushing budgets or making profits. The financial aspect outweighs the moral obligations.'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

'If you are at Rangers and you have just been pipped to a title and you are desperate to win it next season. Are you going to leave £200,000 behind to get a nicer sponsor if that £200,000 is coming straight out the gaffer's budget for players? There might be where cold, hard capitalism comes into it.'

(Championship Supporter)

'Fans do have power and we have seen them put pressure on clubs on some issues. If fans thought that a sponsor was particularly immoral or undesirable then they could put pressure on their club, but I don't think generally fans really care. It is not important compared to the team on the park.'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

ALCOHOL SPONSORSHIP

Alcohol sponsorship was viewed as something that had been around a long time in Scottish football, although many felt that it was less prominent than in previous years.

'At one point alcohol companies were on the jerseys, but they have stepped back.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'In terms of betting and alcohol, am I right in saying that kid's shirts aren't allowed to be sold with those on the front now? That is the case I think.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'I am not aware of too many clubs that have sponsors to do with alcohol anymore. We have had more in the past, but it seems to have dropped off quite a bit. I can't really think of any.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

Alcohol sponsorship brought initial discomfort for many.

'It is contentious. We have problems in society like drink or gambling, yet they are allowed to sponsor football with no questions.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'I don't particularly welcome the role of alcohol and gambling sponsorship in football mainly from a children point of view. Children are very impressionable and these are their heroes and the role models that they are watching.'

(Championship Supporter)

'My team went back to alcohol sponsorship. I was never too comfortable with it. I just felt we had gone a step backwards with it. I would like to see us move away from that completely.'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

'I think we probably all enjoy a drink and, while I don't bet myself, some people will enjoy a flutter. That is fine. I think it is the promotion of it to young people that I am uncomfortable about and the image it portrays as something that is healthy. It is promotion of habits that can take some young people down the wrong road.'

(League One Supporter)

'As a society there is a cost of alcohol. It damages families. There is a cost to the NHS and a lot of that cost is being met indirectly by us the taxpayers.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'I don't think it is a good thing. Players come from cultural backgrounds who don't drink alcohol or it goes against what they believe in. It goes against the grain.'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

There was a belief that there was a wider political desire to restrict alcohol sponsorship and advertising.

'There is a consultation out from the Scottish Government on alcohol advertising or the banning of it. I don't know if it is still open.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'We still have beer and gambling sponsors around but long term I don't know how long that is going to last as regulation comes into play.'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

'The Government in Scotland don't want alcohol advertising. They want to negate the effects of alcohol in our society and how it is sold to people and how it is advertised to people.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'They (Scottish Government) have already moved on availability and price. The next thing is marketing. That is where they are heading. I think the Government might take the decision out of our hands on this.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

Some spontaneously mentioned that a move away from alcohol advertising and sponsorship was desirable.

'It is a healthy lifestyle. Sport, football and all the rest of it. We must be able to find a more acceptable sponsor.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'I would love to see the SPFL going down the route of working companies that are more on the sports side of things or encouraging healthy living.'

(Championship Supporter)

'If we want to push diversification in football, there will be certain groups, and I am thinking of minority religious groups who are traditionally underrepresented in football, who will not be comfortable playing for clubs who are sponsored by alcohol. I think we need to be more neutral.'
(League One Supporter)

'The gambling and alcohol sponsorship is a problem and it is something I would like to see taken out of the game, but it is not going to happen unless the blazers at Hampden decide to change. Gambling companies are always going to offer the most money and until someone says no then it is going to hang on in there.'
(League Two Supporter)

Several saw this as a 'natural' progression.

'That (harm) is essentially why tobacco was banned from advertising in sports so there may be a natural progression that alcohol follows suit.'
(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'Embassy World Snooker stopped being Embassy World Snooker because they banned tobacco advertising. If you are going down that street then gambling products and alcohol products would naturally follow suit.'
(Premiership Supporter - Older)

Others felt that alcohol was simply part of life in Scotland and more relaxed about its involvement in football.

'Alcohol is more prevalent in everyday life, so I feel there is a different dynamic there. I don't think it is screaming for attention. If my club was to receive sponsorship from an alcohol company, I don't think on the surface I would have an issue with that.'
(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'Would I be offended if an alcohol or gambling company sponsored my club? Probably not. I wouldn't have a problem with alcohol sponsoring the main stand at my club or something like that.'
(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'Tennent's is viewed as a marquee brand in Scotland so the fact that the Scotland national team is associated with it isn't necessarily a bad thing.'
(Non-League Supporter)

'You can take the view that you shouldn't be having anything to do with things that harm your local community, but I wouldn't go that far. The actions of the club around issues like alcoholism, like debt, like gambling that speak louder than just saying, "We are not taking money off these firms." I think it is a bit more nuanced than that.'

(Championship Supporter)

Alcohol was also mentioned around football in terms of disorder or anti-social behaviour. Whilst it was accepted that most supporters did drink responsibly, many had experience of alcohol contributing to incidents at and around games.

'The main problems I see in grounds in Scotland is with alcohol.'

(Championship Supporter)

'I was up at Pittodrie a couple of weeks ago and two men in their early twenties were refused entry because they were so drunk. They could have been a danger to themselves or a danger to other people.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'I don't like alcohol when it was involved with football, particularly when the Old Firm come to town. There are quite a lot of season ticket holders here who won't go to either game.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'You only have to look at what happened in Glasgow on Saturday (Celtic's title celebrations) to see the damage that alcohol can bring to towns and communities.'

(League Two Supporter)

Some questioned whether a move to turn down alcohol sponsorship would make any material change and whether a replacement advertiser or sponsor would necessarily be better.

'You can turn around and, "We are not going to be involved with alcohol" and that is great, but that is not going to change anything.'

(Championship Supporter)

'If you replace it with a kebab sponsor is that any healthier? Or MacDonalds or another junk food. Is that any better?' I am not sure'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'I think you would get to a point where you question everything. Obesity is a problem for some people, so should we be advertising pies at football? If

you look at a lot of the oil and gas companies in the northeast of Scotland and what they do environmentally. It is going to be different to each person what is tolerable to them.'

(Non-League Supporter)

The decision by women's football not to accept alcohol sponsorship was generally welcomed, but most felt this was not directly comparable to the men's game.

'It has never been in women's football and the culture is different so I think it is easier to not take alcohol sponsoring there. It is a different starting point.'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

'We have had it for years, so it is a cultural thing. In the women's games they have never had it, so it easier for them to say straight away, "Not happening" and fling them out.'

(Championship Supporter)

Some felt that removing sponsorship from alcohol companies brought a degree of financial loss or risk.

'On a personal level, I would rather we didn't have to go near alcohol as a source of finance, but the reality is we have too financially.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'I think we are in danger of cutting off a very strong source of finance. I think it is wrong to cut out one, two, three industries just because we don't like them. The reality is they are there. They have a lot of money to throw at us and maybe we should get more of it.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'With the wider marketing of the league, there is some inevitability that are you are going to need to get big companies involved and some of the times that will be industries that you don't personally agree with.'

(Championship Supporter)

'I just don't get this view of "Just turn them off." You don't turn these things (sponsorship) away if you are trying to do other things. We are in danger of putting our personal beliefs ahead of common sense.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

There was a desire from most to tie any money received from alcohol (and gambling) sponsorship to positive, responsible, social programmes and action.

'If we could somehow have these funding commitments tied into some more responsible things.'

(Premiership Supporter – Older)

'Maybe we need to negotiate these contracts and sponsorships much better. Instead of them just appearing to get what they want, they should be made to go about it in a responsible way.'

(Premiership Supporter – Younger)

'If you are taking their money, there is an onus to be a bit more responsible in terms of education, including player education. People, especially kids are vulnerable and need some protection. So, if we are going to take money from areas that are a bit more murky, let's make sure there is a strong, social, community benefit.'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

'I would be a lot more comfortable with it if these companies are taking responsibility and showing what they actually do in communities and what they are actually doing to try and help some of the problems they create.'

(Championship Supporter)

Many made the direct comparison with gambling advertising, which was felt to be more prevalent, more aggressive, and ultimately more damaging.

'In terms of sponsorship, I am probably more relaxed in terms of alcohol than I would be to gambling sponsorship. I have no real reasoning for that. I just feel less strongly about alcohol advertising.'

(Championship Supporter)

'Gambling adverts are a lot more aggressive. I just think of Ray Winston from a few years ago, up on screen with his big gruff voice ordering you to put bets on.'

(Championship Supporter)

'You have got betting companies slapping you in the face every two minutes and that is getting slapped across the strips as well. The gambling adverts feels like a bit of a barrage at time.'

(Championship Supporter)

'I think with alcohol, it is a lot more visible in terms of the signs of addiction. Gambling is absolutely silent. You can sit with an App on your

phone and just watch your bank balance dwindle away. That is why I would place gambling on a higher tier of potential threat compared to alcohol.'

(Championship Supporter)

'Alcohol advertising is now effectively just brand awareness. There is not an awful lot of "This is brilliant. Go and buy this. Drink this." Whereas gambling advertising is still "Bet on this. This is good. Go now and put money on this." I think that maybe explains the difference between the feel of the two. With alcohol sponsorship I don't have the same intake of breath that I do with gambling sponsorship.'

(Championship Supporter)

ALCOHOL ADVERTISING

After the initial discussion of alcohol sponsorship in football, participants were shown a range of alcohol advertising from companies such as Heineken (Champions League), Budweiser (FIFA World Cup), Tennent's (Scotland National Team) and Glen's Vodka (SPFL).

Many felt that it was more prominent on television than at football matches.

'Just me going to a game on a Saturday. I don't feel that I am bombarded by alcohol or betting adverts. I don't think I probably see any, but if I turn on the television then you can't avoid it. 'When you are watching it on the TV it is every second advert. "You can go and buy this drink or next goal scorer." It is literally in your face all the time.'

(Championship Supporter)

Some questioned whether advertising, sponsorship or wider marketing made any discernible difference to behaviour.

'Alcohol being advertised at a football match would not encourage me to drink.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'I was talking to someone recently and between the two of us we couldn't name all 12 sponsors of the Premiership. So how much does advertising on the front of a shirt even work?'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'I don't notice shirts or other sponsorships very much. I treat it much like adverts on STV and largely ignore it.'

(League Two Supporter)

'In terms of me as someone who enjoys alcohol, I don't think it influences my behaviour in any way. Glen's Vodka sponsor the SPFL. I am never drinking Glen's Vodka. It is fine. No problem. I like what I like and no level of sponsorship can alter that.'

(Championship Supporter)

Although some felt the fact that companies continued to advertise meant that there had to be some benefit for them.

'You have got to credit the drinks industry with knowing its market. I don't think they would throw as much money at sport as they do if it wasn't doing them any good.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'These alcohol companies know exactly what they are doing and they know the target market they are trying to attract.'

(Championship Supporter)

'Tennent's are going to get massive exposure from Scotland being on the European stage next month and that is going to be fantastic for them.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'Glen's get exposure and column inches. We must be good for them if they are continuing to sponsor us. They must be looking something in the sponsorship whether it's sales or brand awareness. It is not for nothing.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

Different approaches in different countries were mentioned by some.

'Other countries have rules about alcohol advertising where it is not allowed on the jersey. They get round it by subliminal marketing though.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

There was mixed awareness of Glen's Vodka as a primary sponsor of the Scottish Professional Football League.

'McInnes just won the Glen's Manager of the Year. That is part of their sponsorship as well.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'Until this evening I was not aware that Glen's Vodka was a sponsor of the SPFL. It is not something I pay attention to.'

(League Two Supporter)

'You have the boards the managers get interviewed in front of. You have Glens on there and then you have all your individual club sponsors on there as well.'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

'I don't think anybody would go out and say, "Oh, that's Glens, they sponsor the SPFL, I am going to go out and drink their Vodka on a Saturday night.'"

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

Many felt that as a primary sponsor of the Scottish Professional Football League, it reflected poorly on the league.

'It feels like a bit of desperation that this is one of our main sponsors.'
(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

'If that is the best sponsor (Neil) Doncaster can get for Scottish football then that says it all.'
(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

'If we could get into bed with bigger fish than this (Glen's Vodka) then it would probably be a good thing, but it just shows you were Scottish football is at that we can't actually attract these really big brand names.'
(League One Supporter)

Some felt that Scottish football accepting alcohol sponsorship ran contrary to the wider approach to alcohol in football grounds.

'In Scottish football, alcohol is banned yet we are promoting Glen's Vodka. What is that about?'
(Championship Supporter)

'It is saying, "You are good enough to have teams running about with alcohol brands splashed all over, but you are not good enough to have a pint before the game. We don't trust you." That just doesn't sit right with me.'
(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

There was an association with Glen's Vodka as a non-premium alcohol associated with young people, first time drinkers and 'hard' drinking. This created discomfort for most.

'Glen's Vodka. Nugget juice.'
(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'I just think of Glens Vodka as something when you were younger you used to get mad with it really cheap. I associate that with you just want to get blootered.'
(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

'Glen's Vodka is not a premium product. It is not something where you relax and drink it. The guys I know who drink Glen's Vodka are drinking the cheapest drink they can get and are trying to maximise the amount of alcohol they are putting down. I am a little bit concerned about that.'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

'That to me says, "Strong alcohol at the lowest cost" and that for me is crossing a line of acceptability. It is not the message we are trying to portray. That message is, "We will get you drunk."'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

This association was not seen to be of benefit to the Scottish game.

'I associate Glen's Vodka with teenage drinking when you are 14. So, it is not quite the right fit for our football.'

(Championship Supporter)

'That is actually the first time I have seen this advert and it does sit a bit uncomfortably with me. For me, Glen's isn't a premium product. It is a drink to get drunk.'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

'You'll likely find a half bottle of vodka in a stand at the end of the game. Maybe that is what they mean by the spirit of football.'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

'It (Glen's Vodka) is a cheap drink that is probably associated with hard drinking. What type of image do we want for the Scottish game? How do we want Scottish football to be seen?'

(Championship Supporter)

OPPOSING STATEMENTS

A range of statements by those opposing a ban on alcohol sports sponsorship were presented to participants (These are included at the end of this report). The statement that resonated most strongly was that alcohol was a part of Scottish life and something that most people could enjoy in moderation.

'I think that is broadly true. Alcohol is a big part of life.'
(Championship Supporter)

'I am not quite as strident with the alcohol advertising and sponsorship as I am with betting and the tobacco. Maybe it is because I drink myself.'
(League One Supporter)

'The drinking of alcohol is not unique to sports fans. It is a society thing.'
(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'I think your view on alcohol advertising comes down to your own opinion and what you do. I like a pint. Maybe that is part of it.'
(Non-League Supporter)

While there was some concern that clubs could suffer, the claim that the impact would be 'grave' felt like an over-stretch.

'Clubs may suffer, but somebody else would fill that void.'
(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'That is overstated. Scottish football clubs will cut their cloth. There would be disadvantages in the short term, but they would get on with it.'
(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

'There would be a drop in income. Others would come in and replace it, albeit at a slightly lower price, but I don't think it would be catastrophic.'
(League Two Supporter)

'I think they exaggerate the situation a lot. There would be an impact but extremely grave, no. You are taking alcohol adverts away and something comes in their place.'
(League Two Supporter)

Many of the statements by those opposing a ban on alcohol sports sponsorship felt exaggerated and not open to debate.

'I think with a lot of these statements, they are not open to a discourse about it. It isn't a statement that comes from a collaborative place.'
(Non-League Supporter)

TO BAN OR NOT?

At the end of the focus groups, participants were asked whether they would vote to ban alcohol sponsorship in sport.

Around a third would make the decision to ban alcohol sponsorship in sport.

'I would be going down the road of banning it (alcohol sponsorship) or restricting it in some sort of shape or form.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'If you had a ban on alcohol advertising and changed the culture of Scottish football, you might see other companies actually attracted to Scottish football and put money into the game.'

(Championship Supporter)

'Football can be a fantastic vehicle for change in many, many things and you could argue that football should make a stand.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'If you are looking at this at a moral level, then it is the right thing to do. I would like clubs to take a moral stand and just accept that there will be a financial hit.'

(League Two Supporter)

'I think Scottish football needs to become more selective and more responsible.'

(League One Supporter)

The remaining two-thirds of participants would not currently ban alcohol sponsorship in sport.

'I think on balance we should take sponsorship from these companies, but we just need to be very wary that there are these downsides to it as well.'

(Championship Supporter)

'It is a big industry and supporters, some of them drink, some don't. I think we should be prepared to take money off them.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

The reluctance to introduce a ban was focused on the following:

- The financial pressures in football

'I don't think Scottish football can afford to be turning away sponsors at this stage, until we get the marketing of our product better.'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

- A lack of alternative funding

'I wouldn't ban it until you had alternatives.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

- A lack of information

'There needs to be a lot more background information. Are supporters more likely to have alcohol problems than the general population? You really need to have more research to understand the issue.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'With my knowledge of it as it is now, I wouldn't ban it. I would need some more facts and figures around it to be able to make an informed decision.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

- The belief that it was not an important issue or that there were 'worse' forms of sponsorship out there.

'I don't feel too strongly about alcohol sponsorship. I would rather have that than betting companies or sponsors with problems around human rights.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'I wouldn't ban it. There are worse sectors out there and alcohol probably falls just the right side of my red line.'

(Championship Supporter)

- The perception that it would not work or have little impact.

'It is putting a plaster on a jugular wound. It is not going to work.'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

'Football is a fantastic industry that helps prevent social isolation and if one of the things that people do as part of their football day out is drink, then I don't think sponsorship is going to have a massive impact on that.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'I think if they are going to ban alcohol and gambling advertising, it has to be properly across the board. There is no point depriving clubs of income, if during the ad breaks you are going to get Bet365 and Heineken and all that in your face.'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

'If it (drinking) is something that people do as part of their Saturday, then I don't think whether Hearts advertises Guinness or not is going to make any difference to that. They are there for the social side of it and to follow their team.'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

- A sense that football is being targeted or singled out.

'I think morally it is the right thing to do, but it is more of a societal issue. Football gets such a bad name for so many things.'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

'The debate is a bigger issue than just sponsorship at football. It is about us as a society and our relationship with alcohol. While I don't feel comfortable with alcohol advertising in football, I don't think just banning it is some kind of solution.'

(Championship Supporter)

'If you are treating football the same way as you are treating the rest of society then I am on board. If you are banning alcohol advertising across the board, then fair enough.'

(Premiership Supporter - Younger)

Amongst those who said that they would not currently vote to ban alcohol sponsorship in sport, there remained a desire to phase it out or at least become less reliant on this source of income.

'You can retain it for a period of time, but ultimately it needs to go.'

(League One Supporter)

'It could be that there is a compromise to be had with a diet version of a ban.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'It would be interesting to ban it for a five-year period and see what difference it made.'

(Championship Supporter)

'The answer is to transition to it over a long period of time. We are talking about net zero by 2050 or whatever, maybe we could be in this position by 2050 but not by 2025.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

Many felt that it was inevitable that legislation would eventually be introduced to ban alcohol sponsorship in sport and there was therefore an onus on Scottish football to prepare for this.

'It being banned is where it is heading is regardless.'

(Premiership Supporter - Older)

'You need to have a strategy. There should be a strategy to move out of it simply because we need to be ahead of the curve.'

(League One Supporter)

'It is very possible that there could be a ban on alcohol advertising imposed by the Government here in Scotland. they are putting up the drink prices and so on and I think the next step is to ban the advertising. That could be like a light switch going off, so we need to have a strategy to take it out of the game because it is a risk.'

(League One Supporter)

'The government in Scotland is going to become a lot more aggressive towards alcohol. It is important we get ahead of that and safeguard and protect our sponsorships and income.'

(Championship Supporter)

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