



Event and Influencer Sponsorships by the Alcohol Industry

INITIATIVES IN AND OUTSIDE QUEBEC

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Sponsorship as an advertising strategy

From sports and festivals to cultural events and partnerships with influencers, the use of sponsorships is a common marketing strategy used by the alcohol industry.

Unlike donations, which can be made anonymously and disinterestedly, sponsorship is a form of advertising¹ that involves the promotion of a brand, event, product or service in exchange for financial or material considerations offered to a person or an organization^{2, 3}. Companies often use sponsorships to stimulate purchases, improve their image, and reinforce social norms by associating themselves with the lifestyle represented by the sponsored event or person^{4, 5, 6, 7}.

This strategy can exert a strong influence on public perceptions, attitudes, and drinking habits. Certain events and public personalities elicit strong emotions, and benefit from an affective, often identity-based link with a public who relates to them. In this context, exposure to alcohol-related advertising increases alcohol consumption while fostering an attachment to the brand or product marketed^{7, 8, 9, 10}. Young people are particularly vulnerable to alcohol marketing: advertising exposure is associated with early initiation and an increased risk of excessive consumption (binge drinking)¹¹.

In addition to international initiatives to regulate such marketing strategies, the ban on tobacco-related sponsorships introduced in Quebec's *Tobacco Control Act* can also serve as inspiration¹².

Regulating sponsorships: Can we draw inspiration from Quebec's Tobacco Control Act?

Context of legislation

The regulation of tobacco marketing in Quebec began with the adoption of the *Act Respecting the Protection of Non-smokers in Certain Public Places* in 1986¹³. Despite this legislative measure, it was estimated that close to 40% of the Quebec population still smoked tobacco in 1990⁹. In June 1998, the *Tobacco Act*¹⁴ was introduced in an effort to reduce smoking as well as exposure to second-hand smoke. This new legislation added various measures, notably: a ban on smoking in public establishments and certain workplaces, the creation of “non-smoking” sections in certain public establishments, and a ban on advertising aimed at the public, including event sponsorships by the tobacco industry. A 2015 amendment to the *Tobacco Control Act*¹⁵ further extended the measures by restricting the sale and prohibiting the use of tobacco in or near public places.

The announcement of the end of tobacco-related sponsorships at the end of the 1990s provoked strong resistance from both the tobacco industry and the private sector, in particular from

the events and arts and culture sectors, which feared that these legislative changes would harm to their funding, then largely dependent on the tobacco industry. In response, the government created a temporary public fund to compensate for this loss of funding for certain private events^{16,17}.

Impacts

These measures' cumulative impact is significant: in 2020, it is estimated that 20% of the population still uses tobacco, which is a significant drop compared to 1990. The adoption of public policies has thus contributed to reducing exposure to marketing, including association with famous events, athletes and personalities, and denormalizing tobacco consumption¹⁸.

This law also served as an example for the regulation of cannabis when it was legalized in 2018 in Canada and Quebec¹⁹. Similar restrictions on the promotion and advertising of cannabis, including a ban on sponsorships, were introduced in *Canada's Cannabis Act*²⁰ and *Quebec's Cannabis Regulation Act*²¹.



TOBACCO: CURRENT LEGAL FRAMEWORK REGULATING SPONSORSHIPS

According to Chapter IV, Promotion, advertising and sponsorship, of the *Tobacco Control Act*⁶:

- Any sponsorship associated with the promotion of tobacco (e.g., tobacco products, commercial brands related to tobacco) is prohibited.
- Donations from the tobacco industry are still permitted, provided there is no promotional association.
- No name, logo, distinguishing guise, design, image or slogan, except a colour, that is associated with tobacco, a tobacco product, a brand of tobacco product or a manufacturer of tobacco products, may be associated with a sport, cultural or social facility, a health and social services institution or a research centre attached to a health and social services institution. This clause also applies to sports, cultural and social events.

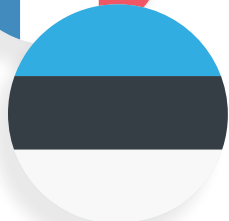
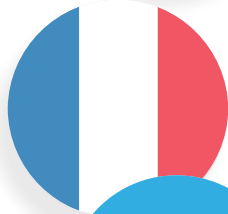


Overview of initiatives outside Quebec

Many jurisdictions regulate the advertising and promotion of sponsorships by the alcohol industry, particularly due to their influence in sports and among young people.

For example:

- In 2018, **Ireland** introduced a new law banning the sponsorship²² of events aimed at children or involving the racing of mechanically propelled vehicles, including the advertising or promotion of alcohol products and brands.
- **France**²³ strictly prohibits all sponsorships and sponsorship activities having the objective or direct or indirect effect of promoting or advertising alcoholic beverages (Loi Évin).
- **Estonia**²⁴ only allows informational and neutral advertising of alcoholic beverages. In order to restrict advertising displays associated with sponsorships, such advertisements may not be associated with dates, events, activities or seasons deemed important. In addition to having to declare sponsors, authorized alcohol advertisements cannot be displayed, among other places, in sports facilities, educational establishments, at children's events, and on social networks, with the exception of a manufacturer or liquor licensee's pages and social media.
- **Switzerland**²⁵ prohibits alcohol advertising, in a general sense, at sporting events and in sports facilities.
- **Poland**²⁶ restricts the advertising of event sponsorships from alcohol manufacturers or sellers of products whose alcohol content is between 8% and 18%.
- **Scotland** is studying the possibility of restricting or banning sports sponsorship by the alcohol industry^{27, 28}.
- In Canada, the **Northwest Territories** has adopted restrictions on alcohol sponsorships, in particular for activities that involve minors, if the value of the sponsorship is more than \$1,500 or if there are prizes awarded²⁹.



Influencer marketing in alcohol advertising

Influencer marketing can be defined as an association between a content creator or popular social media figure (influencers) and a company, for the purpose of promoting the latter's brand, products or services, in exchange for financial or material considerations. It is therefore an advertising strategy related to sponsorships³⁰.

The alcohol industry is increasingly using influencers to drive sales through the promotion of its brands and products, and this new form of informal advertising is having an impact on drinking habits^{7, 31, 32}.

In Canada, the *Competition Act*³³ and *Canadian Code of Advertising Standards*³⁴ (self-regulation) set out guidelines for testimonials, misleading advertising and affiliate disclosure requirements that govern influencer marketing generally. Other countries, notably European ones³⁵, also regulate this commercial trend by requiring the disclosure of commercial partnerships and of the commercial and advertising nature of the content.

In June 2023, France adopted a law³⁶ aimed at regulating the activities of influencers on social networks. This law governs, without prohibiting, influencer content promoting alcohol brands or products. It restates the fact that these publications must comply with the *Loi Évin* and European Union regulations, in addition to the obligation to disclose advertising content. In February 2023, French courts sentenced Meta (Instagram) to remove influencer posts for non-compliance with alcohol advertising bans³⁷.

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