



Fast-food ads 'brainwash' kids

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Power of advertising: Children are subconsciously absorbing multimillion-dollar sports sponsorship messages. Picture: Michael O'Brien

Experts say WA children as young as five are being brainwashed by alcohol and fast-food sponsorship of sport after a study found more than half linked the Eagles with the club's former fast-food sponsor Hungry Jack's.

A University of WA study of 164 children aged five to 12 found for the first time that children were subconsciously absorbing multimillion-dollar sports sponsorship messages, despite industry claims that advertising was not aimed at children.

Children were recruited at the Perth Royal Show in October 2011 and given a whiteboard with magnets with the logos of sporting clubs and asked to arrange magnets of sponsors wherever they wanted.

They were also asked to put gold stars next to the sports or sponsors they liked the best.

More than three-quarters correctly linked at least one sponsor with the right sport, with 54 per cent linking the Eagles with Hungry Jack's. The burger chain was a sponsor of the club since its inception before being dumped last year as a major sponsor in favour of Bankwest. It later withdrew as an official partner.

Hungry Jack's, McDonald's and KFC received significantly more gold stars compared with other sponsors, with 25 per cent of "likes" going to Hungry Jack's compared with Smarter than Smoking's 7.3 per cent.

Researcher Simone Pettigrew said the study was designed to capture the conscious and subconscious associations between sporting teams and a range of sponsors.

"Given the unstructured nature of the task, the results provide support for the argument that sports sponsorship effectively reaches child audiences," she said.

"While sponsors may argue that they are not intentionally targeting children, it is clear their efforts are producing this unintended consequence."

Rosanna Capolingua, chair-woman of Healthway, which funded the study, said the results debunked the notion children were immune from the effects of sponsorship.

"Hungry Jack's has been almost synonymous with football in some kids' minds, and even though it's no longer the major sponsor it lingers long after," she said. "There has been this denial, that we can have adult sport sponsored by whoever and it doesn't affect kids, but that's not how it works and now we've got clear local evidence."

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