



The Impact of Tobacco Advertising, Promotion, and Sponsorship

“From the 1950s to the present, different defendants, at different times and using different methods, have intentionally marketed to young people under the age of twenty-one in order to recruit ‘replacement smokers’ to ensure the economic future of the tobacco industry.”

—U.S. District Court Judge Gladys Kessler¹

The magnitude of the human and economic damage caused by tobacco is no longer in question. According to the World Health Organization, tobacco is the leading cause of preventable deaths in the world. It is currently responsible for one in ten adult deaths worldwide (about 5 million deaths each year). If current patterns continue, it will cause ten million deaths per year by 2020. Eventually, about half of those who smoke today, approximately 650 million people worldwide, will be killed by tobacco.²

The contribution of advertising and promotion to the tobacco problem is enormous and multi-faceted. The reality underlying tobacco marketing is that millions of the tobacco industry’s customers die from tobacco-related disease or quit each year, and the industry must replace them in order to survive. The industry spends billions of dollars each year on advertising, promotion, and sponsorship, and their own internal documents reveal that they have studied the tastes and desires of these young potential customers and targeted their marketing campaigns to them.³

The Truth about Tobacco Advertising & Promotion

- The vast majority of smokers begin using tobacco before the age of 18; therefore the economics of the tobacco industry dictates that it must target young people.⁴
- The tobacco industry targets young people in their advertising—young people are aware of, remember, and are receptive to tobacco advertising.^{5, 6}
- Tobacco advertising and promotion are successful in reaching children and adolescents, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will begin smoking.⁷
- Advertising increases overall tobacco consumption, and, in contrast, comprehensive national bans on advertising and promotion reduce consumption.⁸
- Women have been extensively targeted in tobacco marketing, and tobacco companies have designed brands specifically for women.⁹
- Advertising and promotion can enhance the social acceptability of both tobacco companies and smoking, and this is a serious public health problem because it promotes tobacco use and undercuts the effectiveness of public health campaigns.

Researchers have suggested a number of ways in which tobacco advertising and promotion increases consumption and exacerbates the negative public health impact of tobacco use. Targeted advertising encourages children and young adults to try tobacco and initiate regular use. It can reduce current smokers’ willingness to quit smoking, increase their daily consumption, and draw former smokers back to cigarettes.¹⁰

Furthermore, advertising, promotion and sponsorship can increase the social acceptability of tobacco and the tobacco industry among both adults and young people. In turn, tobacco advertising and promotion discourage adequate discussion of the health consequences of tobacco use in the media.

Children and Youth

- Children are almost universally exposed to tobacco advertising and promotion before the age of 11.⁴
- Tobacco advertising targets nonsmoking adolescents, a problem made worse by the distribution of promotional items such as shirts, hats and backpacks bearing tobacco brand logos.⁴
- Tobacco advertising and promotion foster positive attitudes among young people regarding tobacco use, and children exposed to tobacco promotion are at greater risk of later starting to use tobacco.¹¹
- Greater exposure to tobacco promotion results in a higher risk of starting.⁴
- Children and young people are highly aware of the most heavily promoted tobacco brands and logos. The most notorious example of youth-targeted advertising and promotion was the introduction in 1988 of the Joe Camel cartoon character promoting Camel cigarettes.⁵ Before being terminated by RJ Reynolds, Joe Camel became a pervasive presence internationally. Between 75 percent and 81 percent of six-year-olds in the United States were familiar with the Camel cartoon, and they could identify Joe Camel as often as Mickey Mouse.⁴
- A 2002 monograph by the United States' National Cancer Institute, which reviewed the research on tobacco advertising and promotion and its impact on youth smoking, found that tobacco advertising and promotional activities are important catalysts in the smoking initiation process. The NCI report found, based on a review of the extant research, that "the conclusion that there is a causal relationship between tobacco marketing and smoking initiation seems unassailable."¹²

The Social Acceptability of Tobacco

Social norms have a profound effect on the attitudes and behavior of children and adults alike. The pervasiveness of tobacco advertising may influence youth initiation of smoking by creating the belief that smoking is normal behavior.¹¹ It is also unrealistic to expect young people to believe that governments really consider tobacco to be a serious health risk, on the one hand, while permitting widespread tobacco advertising and promotion on the other.⁹

Specific Types of Tobacco Advertising, Promotion, and Sponsorship, and Special Public Health Risks Posed by Each

ADVERTISING

- **Television and Radio**, including broadcast, cable, satellite, and audiovisual content delivered by internet, mobile phone or other means. In general, advertising is effective at reaching youth, and the most heavily advertised brands have both the highest levels of recognition and the largest market shares.⁵

Example: Although television advertising is technically banned in China, the transnational tobacco companies have circumvented the ban through, among other things, televised coverage of sponsored sports events and individual athletes. These include Marlboro logos appearing on Formula 1 race cars, sponsorship of professional basketball, and sponsorship of an Olympic gold medalist. As a result, a recent study found that Chinese high school girls were both familiar with the advertised brands and have positive attitudes about tobacco and smoking.¹³

Example: Although television and radio advertising may be banned in a country, tobacco companies may continue to run corporate public relations campaigns. Recent research

conducted in the United States found that a television image advertising campaign by Philip Morris was designed to counter negative images and increase brand recognition.¹⁴

- **Print**, including newspapers, magazines, and other publications. In addition to the problems associated with all forms of tobacco advertising, such as targeting youth, paid print advertisements cause publications to censor their own coverage of tobacco-related health issues. A study of 99 magazines over a 25 year period found that magazines accepting cigarette ads were far less likely to cover the risks of smoking than publications refusing tobacco ads.¹⁵
- **Billboards** and other outdoor advertising. Historically, outdoor advertising has been used heavily by the tobacco industry. It has also been the subject of voluntary restrictions, for example limiting tobacco billboards near schools. However, like other voluntary tobacco industry policies, these have proven ineffective.⁶
- **Point-of-sale (POS)**, also known as point-of-purchase (POP). Typically, tobacco companies pay incentives to retailers to post point-of-sale advertising and signage. Point-of-sale advertising and promotion has become one of the most important tools that tobacco companies have for promoting tobacco products.¹⁶
- **Internet/new media**. The internet and other new media such as mobile phones have the potential to be powerful tools to glamorize smoking, target young people, and increase the social acceptability of tobacco use. The tobacco industry has also begun to rely on global satellite, cable and internet advertising to circumvent national ad bans.¹⁷

Example: BAT has covertly operated a youth-oriented, magazine-style website featuring entertainment listings in Poland and Belgium.¹⁸

- **Direct mail**. Targeted direct mail marketing has become popular among major tobacco companies as other advertising channels have been restricted. Tobacco industry mailings have included free tobacco product samples, corporate magazines, and branded merchandise catalogues. Bar promotions have also been used as opportunities to gather names for direct mail marketing.¹⁹

PROMOTION

- **Merchandise**, such as tobacco-branded shirts, backpacks, and hats. The distribution of branded merchandise has been successfully used to promote tobacco products to young people. Nonsmoking children and young people who own (or want to own) promotional merchandise are more susceptible to smoking.⁴
- **Point-of-sale (POS) promotions**. Tobacco companies pay promotional allowances to retail stores for favorable POS product displays or to provide free gifts or discounts to customers. Other point-of-sale promotions include awards for retailers who achieve target sales volumes.

In response to advertising restrictions or in anticipation of future restrictions, tobacco companies have moved from overt television advertising to point-of-sale promotion and other more subtle forms of advertising and promotion.¹⁶ Research conducted in 2007 suggests that point-of-sale *advertising* is associated with encouraging youth to initiate smoking, while POS *promotional* activities may influence those who have already started to become regular smokers.¹¹

- **Paid product placement** in films and television. Before 1989, it was common for the tobacco industry to pay to place their products in films.²⁰ In that year, the industry adopted a voluntary ban on product placement. However, like other voluntary commitments of the industry, it was not effective in eliminating product placement. Product placement is often difficult to distinguish from genuine artistic use of tobacco products in films and television, and remains a concern both in Hollywood and among emerging film industries internationally.

- **Free sampling.** In many countries, tobacco companies give away free samples of tobacco products in places where young people gather, such as shopping malls, rock concerts and discos.²¹
- **Distribution of promotional merchandise** at hospitality, sports, entertainment, music, dance, or school venues or events.

Examples: In Sri Lanka, British American Tobacco (BAT) has sponsored discos in which branded key rings, shirts, and caps are given away to the young crowd. In Hong Kong, Philip Morris has distributed backpacks, lighters, and other Marlboro-branded merchandise in exchange for empty cigarette packs.²¹

- **Indirect advertising or brand stretching**, in which tobacco brand names or brand elements are used on non-tobacco products or attached to non-tobacco activities or events, is designed to continue promoting tobacco products even after advertising is banned.²¹

Examples: Marlboro Classics clothing; Salem Power Station music shops; Benson and Hedges coffee shops; Camel boots, watches, and expeditions; and Winston lighters.²²

Examples: In 2005, mini-motorcycles (also known as pocket bikes or mini-bikes) with Camel and Lucky Strike branding were sold in New Zealand. The bikes appeared to target 12-13 year-olds boys, and were manufactured in China. As is often the case with brand stretching, it was unclear what, if any, direct hand the tobacco companies had in the use of their trademarks.²³

SPONSORSHIP

- **Provision of financial or other support** by the tobacco industry to organizations, events, or individuals involved in sports, art, or entertainment, including sports or music events, athletes, sports teams, or artists, whether or not in exchange for publicity.

Sports, music, and cultural sponsorship provide numerous benefits to the tobacco industry. Sponsorship of sports events and athletes associates tobacco use with vitality and health, much as Marlboro or Virginia Slims ads have in the past. Sponsorship of rock concerts or other cultural events that attract young people make tobacco hip and sexy while countering public health efforts to educate the public about tobacco addiction and disease.

Both sports and arts sponsorship can increase the overall social acceptability of the tobacco industry and tobacco use. This, in turn, reduces fear of the health risks of tobacco use and undercuts efforts to prevent smoking or promote smoking cessation. Finally, sports or arts organizations receiving money from the tobacco industry can be enlisted as the industry's political allies in resisting effective public health measures.

Example: British American Tobacco's Pall Mall brand has sponsored the Czech Republic's international Febiofest film festival for both 2006 and 2007. BAT has simultaneously advertised Pall Mall brand clothing on billboards in Prague.²⁴

Example: British American Tobacco sponsored the Rave & Soul Street Jam in Kampala, Uganda in 2002. The event was organized by Kampala's popular Club Silk, and featured advertising and merchandise for BAT's Benson and Hedges cigarette brand. In spite of an 18-or-older policy, the club was crowded with youth as young as 13.²⁵

- **Provision of financial or other support** by the tobacco industry to venue operators such as pubs, bars, or clubs. As restrictions are imposed on the most blatant forms of advertising and promotion, tobacco companies continually innovate and invest in less visible promotions. Sponsorship of bars

and clubs has proved highly popular among tobacco companies, possibly because of the preponderance of young people in these venues.

Example: BAT has sponsored a disco in Beijing to promote its 555 brand of cigarettes. Free cigarettes and advertising featuring the 555 logo are prominently featured.

Advertising Bans Reduce Tobacco Use

- Strong, comprehensive laws that eliminate all forms of tobacco advertising and promotion reduce tobacco consumption and therefore prevent tobacco-related disease and death.²⁶
- A recent analysis of tobacco consumption and advertising bans in 102 countries found that a comprehensive set of tobacco advertising bans can reduce tobacco consumption, whereas a partial ban will have little or no effect.²⁷
- Research on 22 countries published in 2000 indicated that a comprehensive advertising and promotion ban can reduce cigarette smoking by 7.4 percent and overall tobacco consumption by 5.4 percent.²⁷
- Four countries with tobacco advertising bans as part of a comprehensive tobacco control policy experienced *per capita* reductions in cigarette consumption of between 14 percent and 37 percent.³

¹ U.S. V. Philip Morris USA, Inc., et al., No. 99-CV-02496GK (U.S. Dist. Ct., D.C.), Final Opinion, August 17, 2006. Available from: <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/reports/doj/FinalOpinion.pdf>.

² World Health Organization (WHO) Tobacco Free Initiative [page on the Internet]. Geneva: World Health Organization; c2007. Why is tobacco a public health priority? Available from: http://www.who.int/tobacco/health_priority/en/index.html.

³ Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. Advertising and Promotion [monograph on the Internet]. Washington, DC: Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids; c2007. Available from: http://tobaccofreecenter.org/advertising_and_promotion.

⁴ DiFranza JR, Wellman RJ, Sargent JD Weitzman M, Hipple BJ, Winickoff JP. Tobacco Promotion and the Initiation of Tobacco Use: Assessing the Evidence for Causality. Pediatrics. 2006; 117:e1237-e1248.

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⁶ UICC Tobacco Control Factsheets [page on the Internet]. Geneva: UICC; c2007. Tobacco Advertising. Available from: <http://factsheets.globalink.org/en/advertising.shtml>.

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¹² National Cancer Institute, Changing Adolescent Smoking Prevalence, Smoking and Tobacco Control Monograph No.14, NIH Pub. No. 02-5086, November 2001. Available from: <http://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/tcrb/monographs/14/index.html>.

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¹⁴ Szczypka G, Wakefield M, Emery S, Terry-McElrath Y, Flay B, Chaloupka F. Working to make an image: an analysis of three Philip Morris corporate image media campaigns. Tobacco Control. 2007;16:344-350.

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¹⁷ Hammond R. Addicted to Profit: Big Tobacco's Expanding Global Reach [monograph of the Internet]. Washington: Essential Action, SF Tobacco Free Coalition; 1998. Available from: <http://www.essentialaction.org/addicted/>.

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