

The Importance of Cigarette Pack as Brand Image

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Abstract: Packaging in the most of the industries means more than a simple container of the product. In tobacco industry as an outcome of tight advertising and marketing prohibitions, companies look differently to the pack; they view it as a strong component in displaying brand imagery and a creating significant in-store presence at the point of purchase. Market testing shows the influence of this dimension in shifting the consumer's choice when the same product displays in an alternative package. Studies also show how companies have manipulated a variety of elements in packs designs to communicate the impression of lower in tar or milder cigarettes whereas the components were the same. In between, the previous neglect of tobacco control on considering cigarette packs has been gradually changed into investigation about packs importance on appealing smokers. The aim of this study is investigating around cigarette packs role in tobacco industry with focus on its brand image aspect. In addition, it explores around possible influential tobacco control actions while specifically targeting youth. This study may lead to a better understanding of increasing role and importance of packing in tobacco industry.

Key words: Tobacco industry, brand image, packaging, dark market, public health, prohibition

INTRODUCTION

Packaging for most of the consumer products has become a key element in marketing strategy. Whereas the traditional role of packaging previously was protecting and maintaining the product (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002), now-a-days as a matter of increased competition, this aspect has gain more dimensions: a marketing tool that acts as an advertising at the point of purchase also acts as a brand differentiator and even as an inseparable part of product (Appadu, 2001). Indeed cigarettes packaging is not an exception however in this case package is somehow more critical. First, unlike other products which packs are mainly discarded after opening, cigarettes packs retain until the cigarettes are used. This adds an additional advertising role to the package (especially in the face of advertising restrictions): public display during the use (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002). Second, apart from mere exceptions such as Australia (Carter, 2003a), cigarette brands have the highest brand loyalty among all consumer products with <10% of smokers changing brands annually with considering the fact that smokers brand choices are usually made during their youth (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002; Carter, 2003a). Package also covers brand imagery. The concept brand image as first was focused in the 1950 and 1960s is generally defined as association with or perceptions of the brand in the customers' mind (Carter, 2003b). As a matter of tobacco restriction, cigarette pack plays a more important role in establishing and conveying brand image (Wakefield *et al.*,

2002). Indeed, tobacco companies have used the brand imagery components colors, symbols and graphics to influence the perception of the risk of the smokers (Hammond and Parkinson, 2009).

Despite the importance of this subject as a public health concern, there has been a relatively small amount of public health research around cigarettes' packs; there have been only 11 English articles published since 1990 in PubMed around smoking and product packaging whereas >298 and 157 articles have been published, respectively about smoking and advertising and smoking and price (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002).

In contrast to the small amount of attention of public studies, tobacco industry has found out the importance of package design as early as 1950s and conducted a vast number of researches concerning consumers and package design (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002). The aim of this study is to focus upon specific research problems:

- The importance of cigarettes packages as brand image under current tobacco industry restrictions
- Mislead of information intentionally caused by tobacco companies pack designs
- What tobacco control actions can be more successful while especially targeting young people

Dark market

Current situation of tobacco industry: There are 2 types of marketing strategies available for promoting each product: Above the Line ATL; consists of mass media

(television, radio, posters, billboards and cinema) and Below the Line (BTL) consists of methods other than mass media (Carter, 2003b). Since 1950s when the first concerns about the smoking hazards aired (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002) a large amount of public effort have been involved by different countries to inform people about smoking dangers. For instance Federal Australian law 1992 titled Tobacco Advertising Prohibition (TAP) has made most types of tobacco marketing illegal including all of the above the line types (Carter, 2003b). In addition, a lot of European Union (EU) countries such as Ireland, Norway and Italy have banned smoking in work places (Desire and Pattarawan, 2007). Besides, South Africa passed national laws in 2000 making public smoking prohibited except for bars and restaurants (Howard *et al.*, 2007). Figure 1 on the next page shows the countries, states and provinces which have banned smoking in indoor workplaces and other indoor public places (Howard *et al.*, 2007). According to the fact that the health concerns are the primary motivation to quit (Hammond and Parkinson, 2009) as early as 1950s tobacco companies embarked to provide reassurance and a series of appealing alternatives to quitting for smokers; the first step was introducing filter cigars in 1950s which later on persisted by prompting the introduction of cigarettes that were claimed to be lighter in tar or milder (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002).

Nevertheless, health concerning organizations realized this effect and firstly in the USA and later in 42 other countries banned usage of the terms as low tar, light and mild on the cigarette packs, recent research conducted in Canada, UK and Australia suggests that prohibiting these terms may be insufficient to significantly reduce the mislead perception caused by wrong image (Hammond and Parkinson, 2009). Meanwhile, on the lack of ATL and as advertising restrictions increase, the marketing and advertising role of cigarette packages has become more significant than ever.

The importance of packaging in tobacco industry: As early as 1950s tobacco companies began to realize the role of packaging in tobacco marketing. For instance \$150,000 was spent on packaging research by Philip Morris, equivalent to \$1 million in today's terms to change the image of Marlboro cigarette package from feminine to more masculine (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002; Appadu, 2001). This magnificent project included >120 different renders and designs and each of them where tested for eye movement for emotional impact and for every other attribute related to the case (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002) from which a flip-up top and a rugged box were eventually chosen and changed the Marlboro brand image from its previous women targeted brand to a more masculine image (Appadu, 2001). The fact that smokers carry the

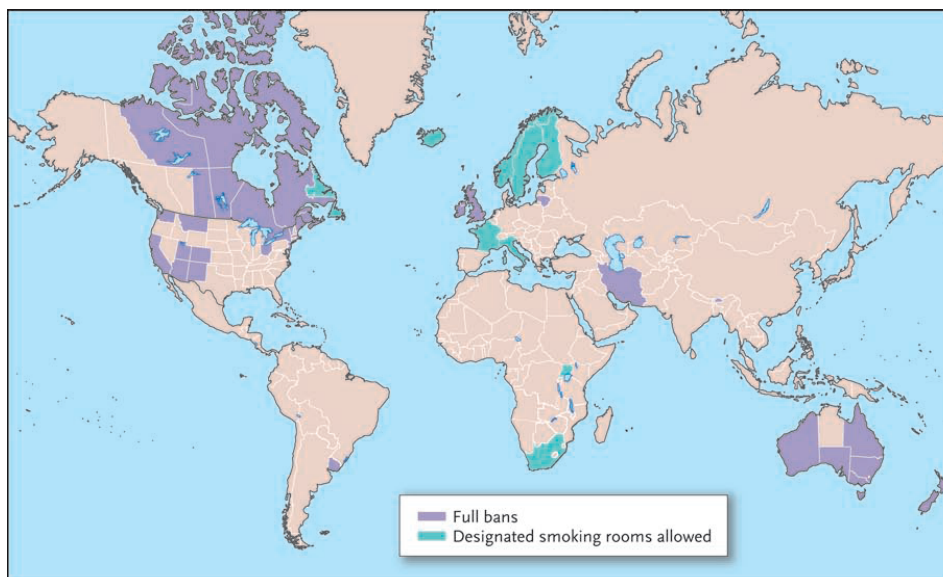


Fig. 1: Legislation in some countries and regions (shown in green) allows for the possibility of a designated, enclosed, ventilated smoking room. Full bans are also in force in Rhode Island, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Washington, DC, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, Bhutan and the Australian Capital Territory; legislation allowing for designated smoking rooms is in force in Malta. Full bans have gone into effect in Quebec from 2008 and in Montana, Utah and Hong Kong in 2009

packs around and take them out several times daily to light a new cigarette gives an extra advertising and imagery role to the pack. This also shifts some of the brand image to the smoker which has made tobacco companies able to manipulate packs to target especial markets. For instance, young people are mainly concerned about a new design and something that draws attention (jealousy) while women are attracted by slim long packages with a toned down color, to expose femininity. There's also some evidence related to a report on packaging conducted by opinion research corporation in 1961 that package designs preference is sex-linked (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002).

A good example of this is introducing a new pack targeting young women titled Camel no. 9 by Camel cigarette in 2007. The company used open source marketing techniques collaboration between manufacturer and consumers in designing product through voting samples, polls, etc., and the new pack was voted by thousands of consumers on the Camel website. The final pack was a sleek hot pink and black box that had obvious appeal to young fashion-conscious women (Freeman and Chapman, 2009). On the other hand, an example of designs which demonstrates young masculinity is proposition of an oval pack by Philip Morris in 1990. The new design had a distinctive young masculine appearance which later on was confirmed by a study testing that: the pack has tremendous appeal among young smokers (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002).

In a highly competitive market where most of the types of advertising are banned, the importance of cigarette packages has become more significant than ever. In 1980, the senior vice president of marketing at BAT noted that in a future where increasingly the product may have to sell itself through the pack, a fuller understanding of the way in which perception of such packs affects perception of their contents is desirable (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002). Tobacco companies spend months to several years and enormous budgets to prepare designs conveying their messages the best (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002; Appadu, 2001). To be precise, under current situation this is significantly important that consumer can identify the brand among different choices in a store shelf (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002).

The effect of cigarette packs on the perception of risk: From the beginning of advertising bans, tobacco companies manipulated cigarette packs to deliver their marketing strategies. The emergence of mild cigarettes in the 1960 and 1970s is a good example (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002). Since then, health-concerned smokers have been chosen these so-called mild or lower in tar cigarettes

rather than quit to reduce the nicotine absorbed nevertheless, they deliver much higher levels during consumption (Hammond and Parkinson, 2009). Many researchers have concerned about emergence of such elements and their influence on consumers as in 2009 Hammond and Parkinson conducted a study participating adult smokers and non-smokers in Canada. The findings showed that the respondents were dramatically more likely to choose light, mild, smooth and silver terms as having less harshly effects however, smokers were significantly more likely to rate packages titled with such terms as smoother in taste and lower in risk which demonstrates the smokers' readiness to persuade themselves by such terms and elements.

After prohibiting of use of such terms first in the USA in the year 2006 and later in other 43 countries worldwide (Hammond and Parkinson, 2009), companies attempted to supersede other elements to deliver the message. Tobacco industry documents show that aside from names and descriptors, other design elements such as color and shape were purposefully used to expose the lower tar or milder cigarettes perception. A series of researches were conducted to determine other influential elements.

Companies discovered that down tone and lighter colors on the pack appeared to promote perceptions of mild or low tar (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002). In addition, other descriptors replaced the old ones such as smooth and color descriptors like silver or blue as well as tar numbers like Marlboro one were used (Hammond and Parkinson, 2009). For example in 1979 RJ Reynolds, one of the most innovative cigarette package designers changed the whole image of Camel cigarette by replacing the old package with a new design. RJ Reynolds introduced a new pack with more white spaces and lightened the brown tones which gave a healthier image to the product; this is because white is generally held to convey a clean healthy association (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002; Hammond and Parkinson, 2009).

Alpine that is mostly known as a female brand is another example of using white and light tones to demonstrate mildness. In 1994, company focused on redesigning the pack in order to revitalize and strengthen the quality appeal of the Alpine brand in 1990s (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002). The new design prepared by Philip Morris was a complexion of white tipping and a green and white pack that became a success and pleased company as well as consumers. Now-a-days, Alpine is perceived milder, cleaner, less harmful and more healing. In addition, the brand's image has also strengthened by carrying brand as person elements. Alpine is feminine, up market and sophisticated and the new pack looks

attractive and gives the smoker control and confidence (Carter, 2003a). The effect of manipulating white color in perception of risk has been showed upon various researches, one specifically was a survey conducted by Hammond and Parkinson (2009) which showed that participants rated packs with lighter color and those carrying white symbols lower health risk, smoother in taste and lower in tar, nonetheless the cigarettes in the packs were identical.

One of the other colors mostly used in pack designs to illustrate milder taste is light blue. Lower delivery products tend to be featured in light blue, one possible reason is closeness of the tone to white, a color which impresses a healthy message (Hammond and Parkinson, 2009). A small survey on Marlboro ultra light cigarettes launched in two colors red and blue showed that however, the compositions were identical, smokers perceived the blue one too mild, lower in tar and burn too fast. On the same survey, the smokers rated red packs too harsh and stronger (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002).

Rather than design, tobacco companies realized that material also affects consumers perception about the product. Survey findings substantiated this claim by demonstrating that soft packs gave a stronger feel to the smoker than hard packs as evidenced in Philip Morris memo: the absolute ratings of both cigarettes in term of mildness may be higher (that is the cigarette may be perceived as less intense) when the cigarettes are presented in the box (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002).

This manipulating of design and marketing elements, contemplating that meaning of ethical differs from one region to another makes a socially irresponsible appearance for tobacco industry in general. When a company is concerned about the implication of its decisions in society as general, it can be termed social responsibility. In as situation that a company misleads its customers by not telling the truth about the serious negative or hazard outcomes of that product then it is no longer social responsible (Desire and pattarawan, 2007). However, tobacco control planned to inform the consumers in behalf of the tobacco companies by using health warnings, a picture illustrating warning messages that covering the pack area in some countries like Canada (Hammond and Parkinson, 2009) and Iran in many countries who have sought to introduce such warning messages have found that tobacco industry would oppose this plan claiming it would disrupt the brand logo. However, even in some cases warning messages are installed but on the side of the packs or cleverly incorporated into the pack design to minimize the effects of such pictures. This kind of response gives reassurance of the importance of package for the industry (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002).

Marketing alternatives on the lack of mass media (ATL):

The advertisement restrictions and the loss of mass media or Above The Line (ATL) for tobacco companies have forced them to consider alternatives. At first, companies tried to utilizes packages, redesigned them to appeal youth market, utilized symbols, colors and descriptors to display a lower risk perception in the smokers' mind and designed sex-linked packages (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002, Hammond and Parkinson, 2009; Appadu, 2001; Carter, 2003a). But later, emerging new advertisement restrictions meant that in some cases, the packs needed to be available only under the counter (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002).

On the other hand, the law of using warning messages in some countries such as Canada on which the warning have to cover 50% of the cigarette package made an anti-smoking advertisement and may lessen the power of packs brand image (Hammond and Parkinson 2009; Wakefield *et al.*, 2002). As a result, rather than new interesting packages, companies embarked to manipulate below the line advertisement channels; channels excluding mass media. To accomplish this aim, companies invented a series of new marketing and advertising ways (Carter, 2003b).

Since, the late 1990s for all types of products but particularly for those targeting youth people, BTL has included buzz, viral or guerrilla which illustrates marketing methods on which appears no advertisement but rather creates an environment parties, street graffiti, websites) on which brand coincidentally appears (Carter, 2003b). This new BTL or guerilla marketing appeared gradually in tobacco industry. For instance can mention Guerrilla event marketing in Australia (Carter, 2003a).

The prohibition of advertisements in many countries has made brand awareness difficult (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002; Hammond and Parkinson, 2009). In between, Australia has one of the highest restricted environments or dark market for tobacco industry (Carter, 2003a). Subsequently tobacco companies operating on the region have a variety of innovative marketing strategies on hand. A leading fashion show designers' after-the-show party, featured cigarette-bearing models to name but a few (Carter, 2003b).

After tap act in 1992, the environment became tough as launching new brands and brand awareness seemed impossible as RJ Reynolds complained in 1997 that. The brand awareness goals set for a new brand or line extension that Australia used to reach in 3-4 months via prints, billboards and direct marketing now take them 2-3 years to achieve. New brands have been almost impossible to launch. Also a retail industry writer noted the difficulty to promote existing old favorites without trying to launch something new and without promotional opportunities (Carter, 2003b).

Subsequently, under such situation some new marketing strategies appeared. Peter Stuyvesant, an old and previously successful brand is a great illustration of utilizing BTL methods in absence of ATL ones to re-branding and grow. The brand's company, Imperial entered Australia's market in 1999 and shortly afterwards appointed an agency to manage more than \$10 million budget in BTL marketing activities. According to the fact that sponsorship of tobacco companies considered forbidden, imperial obtained the exclusive right to sell cigarettes at popular music festivals. These festivals were held with association of Peter Group Company, a company specializing in youth marketing and headed by a local music magazine editor. Aiming illustration the brand's old slogan your passport to international smoking pleasure the cigarettes in the event have been sold by air hostesses. Such events changed the brands' market share from 11.6-13.2% and the results were observed by newspapers and critics as significant, the strength in market and Peter Stuyvesant, no uncool brand anymore (Carter, 2003b).

Another example is launching a new Kent pack in Beirut Lebanon as David Simpson in Tobacco Journal 2007 cites: an all white Zen like conceptual setting, coupled with a futuristic podium, stressed the style of Kent. Re-launch party was held in a luxurious bar restaurant included mini exclusive champagnes personalized for Kent, creative lighting and music.

In addition, tobacco companies have also considered some ways to utilize some ATL activities as according to the law advertising in imported international magazines are allowed (Carter, 2003b). Moreover, the TAP act in Australia excludes websites, subsequently companies used internet as a new media by developing interesting websites and open source marketing (Carter, 2003a; Freeman and Chapman, 2009).

CONCLUSION

Tobacco industry is well known for creativity in marketing strategies caused by tight advertising prohibitions. Previous researches have shown the ability of the industry to shift advertising from one medium which is banned to other market activities (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002). A good illustration of this is utilizing Below the Line (BTL) marketing activities or to be precise, manipulating non-mass media to advertise and create brand identity (Carter, 2003b). In addition, the crucial role of cigarette packs in current market as brand image and marketing at the point of purchase is unavoidable (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002). From beginning of the tobacco control plans, cigarette packaging has

become more important as a component of tobacco marketing. The pack and its associated point of purchase marketing role have become more vital to transfer brand imagery as well as advertising (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002). Tobacco companies have allocated millions of dollars to researches connected to the packaging and the packs design; nevertheless, tobacco control seems not giving the same value to this subject (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002; Hammond and Parkinson, 2009).

Recently, the effects of terms such as light or low tar on packs in misleading consumers have been considered by public health. This has been resulted in prohibition of printing such terms on the pack and in some countries including Canada legislation on displaying a health warning have been implemented however, the former seems limited as other descriptors have remained in use including words such as silver, color descriptors such as silver or blue as well as tar numbers (Hammond and Parkinson, 2009) and the later seems insufficient as in some cases, the warning message has been moved to the side of the pack or smartly has been used into the pack design (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002). Given this trend, regulation of packaging should be considered by public health more than before. One obvious possible policy would be to require all brands to use a generic package.

Without brand imagery, packages would become simply a container for the cigarettes inside of them rather than a medium for advertisement (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002). Reports from Canada and Australia have commented how using so-called plain packages by removing logos and brand elements can increase the believability of health warning messages and also how it may lead to acknowledge of the consumer to not be misled by the perception of a lower risk of some packages anymore (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002; Hammond and Parkinson, 2009; Freeman and Chapman, 2009) research to date suggests that plain packages are less attractive, engaging and may reduce the brand appeal, particularly among youth (Hammond and Parkinson, 2009). However, there is still uncertainty about efficiency of this remedy as brands are likely to benefit from their historic brand identities. It may be that existing brand identities will live on until a restricted generic market can be introduced (Carter, 2003b). To date, utilizing generic plain packages have been considered in several jurisdictions but not yet have been adopted (Hammond and Parkinson, 2009). On the other hand, the efficiency of advertising bans on reducing smokers rate mostly depends on the comprehension of the methods utilized. A recent analysis of data gathered from 22 OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries from 1970-1992 concluded that comprehensive bans on advertising/promotion

dramatically reduces smoking whereas limited bans has no or little effect on the rate of smokers because of the potential of transferring from banned activities to other marketing activities (Wakefield *et al.*, 2002).

Subsequently, however many tobacco warning plans are performing at the moment, the success of them seems somehow limited. Such plans can be inspired by the creativity of tobacco industry marketing activities. The case of Imperial's Peter Stuyvesant brand creates some suggestions for a successful tobacco control plan; creating a strong tobacco control brand can be useful by considering a strong brand identity and communicating it clearly. The plan should integrate as many complementing marketing activities as possible to build a clear brand image including Below the Line (BTL) activities. Creating a world based on the consumer's needs and using humor and advertising in consumer's own environment can also be useful (Carter, 2003b). The complexity of packaging's role in tobacco industry is incredible. Whereas this study mainly focused upon particular aspects of brand imagery role of cigarette packaging, pack's role as brand image, brand as person and its influence on consumer's mind to perceive specific meanings is a great subject for further investigation.

Specifically, exploring around other package visual elements such as size, font and manipulating different colors and their influence on smoker's mind deserves further research. It's also obvious that public health have to discover more about packs and take their role more seriously. In between investigating about possible incomes of legislation on generic/plain packages and creating more appeasable cautionary plans particularly for youth might be useful.

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