Title
Annotated Bibliography to Accompany Anderson, Pollay, & Ling, "Taking Ad-Vantage of Lax Advertising Regulations: Reassuring and Distracting Health-Concerned Smokers" (Social Science & Medicine, 2006)

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6nx5j6x5

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Publication Date
2006-05-01

Peer reviewed
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Research article in press in: *Social Science & Medicine*

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May 2006

Sponsored by California Tobacco Related Disease Research Program Grant number 14FT-0013, National Cancer Institute Grant number CA-87472, and a grant from the American Legacy Foundation
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ABSTRACT (reprinted from the article)

We explored the evolution from cigarette product attributes to psychosocial needs in advertising campaigns for low-tar cigarettes. Analysis of previously secret tobacco industry documents and print advertising images indicated that low-tar brands targeted smokers who were concerned about their health with advertising images intended to distract them from the health hazards of smoking. Advertising first emphasized product characteristics (filtration, low tar) that implied health benefits. Over time, advertising emphasis shifted to salient psychosocial needs of the target markets. A case study of Vantage in the USA and Canada showed that advertising presented images of intelligent, upward-striving people who had achieved personal success and intentionally excluded the act of smoking from the imagery, while minimal product information was provided.

This illustrates one strategy to appeal to concerned smokers by not describing the product itself (which may remind smokers of the problems associated with smoking) but instead using evocative imagery to distract smokers from these problems. Current advertising for potential reduced-exposure products (PREPs) emphasizes product characteristics, but these products have not delivered on the promise of a healthier alternative cigarette. Our results suggest that the tobacco control community should be on the alert for a shift in advertising focus for PREPs to the image of the user rather than the cigarette. Framework Convention on Tobacco Control-style advertising bans that prohibit all user imagery in tobacco advertising could preempt a psychosocial needs-based advertising strategy for PREPs and maintain public attention on the health hazards of smoking.

OVERVIEW

The failure of low-tar cigarettes to deliver on the expressed and implied health claims made in low-tar advertising is well-documented (Bates, McNeill, Jarvis, & Gray, 1999; Benowitz, Hall, Herning, Jacob, Jones, et al., 1983; Djordjevic, Fan, Ferguson, & Hoffman, 1995; Djordjevic, Hoffman, & Hoffman, 1997; Djordjevic, Stellman, & Zang, 2000; Herning, Jones, Benowitz, & Mines, 1983; Hoffman & Hoffman, 1997; Jarvis, Boreham, Primatesa, Feyerabend, & Bryant, 2001). Many smokers nevertheless continue to believe that low-tar cigarettes are a healthier alternative to “regular” cigarettes and are an adequate safeguard for health to make quitting unnecessary (Kozlowski, Mehta, Sweeney, Schwartz, Vogler, Jarvis et al., 1998; Etter, Kozlowski, & Perneger, 2003; Shiffman, Pillitteri, Burton, Rohay, & Gitchell, 2001). Advertising for low-tar cigarettes has been intentionally misleading (Leavell, 1999), reassuring health-concerned smokers who are considering quitting that smoking low-tar cigarettes is a proactive measure to take for one’s health (Pollay & Dewhirst, 2002). Instead of providing substantive information about the product or about the smoking-related health risks
that health-concerned smokers seek, advertising for “healthier” cigarettes has provided ultimately meaningless imagery and verbiage that merely appears authoritative (Pollay & Dewhirst, 2003) or offers consumers a fantasy of satisfaction of psychosocial needs that are unrelated to smoking (Anderson & Dunn, in press).

Tobacco companies identify psychosocial needs salient to different segments of the market and position brands of cigarettes as capable of satisfying those needs. Women (Anderson, Glantz, & Ling, 2005), African American adults (Balbach, Gasior, & Barbeau, 2003), the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community (Smith & Malone, 2003), Asian Americans (Muggli, Pollay, Lew, & Joseph, 2002), youth (Pollay, 2000), and young adults of both sexes (Ling & Glantz, 2002) have all been targeted with psychosocial appeals in tobacco advertising. This targeting is facilitated by a marketing technique called psychographic market segmentation, which seeks to identify similar clusters of target consumers along lines of lifestyle preferences, political and social value systems, life goals, self-concept, social group membership, and so forth. Tobacco marketers use psychographic information about target consumers to ascertain the effectiveness of different advertising messages and the extent to which advertising campaigns can suggest satisfaction of a psychosocial need that is salient to specific market segments. The psychosocial needs of low-tar smokers have been extensively researched by the tobacco industry for the purpose of creating more psychosocially persuasive advertising (Pollay & Dewhirst, 2002; Carter, 2003; Anderson & Dunn, in press).

The creation of low-tar cigarettes was the tobacco industry’s response to the public’s growing awareness of the health risks of smoking and smokers’ need to be reassured that smoking can be done rationally and intelligently without placing the smoker at undue risk. PREPs represent the latest attempt by the tobacco industry to continue this heritage of reassuring smokers about smoking-related health risks and downplaying the risks both to the smoker and to secondhand smokers. PREPs have not, however, delivered on the promise of a “safer cigarette” (Labstat International Inc., 2000; Slade, Connolly, & Lymperis, 2002), though marketing efforts such as RJ Reynolds’ Eclipse website (http://www.eclipse.rjrt.com) attempt to convince viewers of important reductions in the threat of disease for smokers using these products.

The following annotated bibliography is both indicative (listing the significant topics included in the source material) and interpretive (briefly presenting the author’s analysis of the material). The bibliography is grouped by topic with a brief discussion of the significance of the topic within the context of the development and advertising of purportedly “reduced-harm” cigarettes. The documents included are accessible on the Legacy Tobacco Documents Library (http://www.legacy.library.ucsf.edu). This bibliography represents the compilation of materials analyzed and reported in Anderson, Pollay, and Ling.

References


EXTENDED TOBACCO DOCUMENTS BIBLIOGRAPHY

References from Anderson, Pollay, & Ling

This collection is a list of tobacco industry documents referenced in a longer draft version of the published paper. There is considerable overlap between this set of documents and the following sections of this bibliography. This set documents various low-tar advertising and marketing strategies of the major US tobacco companies, with a small subset documenting the activities of RJ Reynolds-MacDonald of Canada. The emphasis in this set is on RJ Reynolds’ Vantage brand in the US from 1970 to 1990.

2. American Tobacco (author inferred). Author s Notes On Volume Four, 1953 To 1964: Start Of Filter Age;Battle For Filter Kings;Start Of King Size Filter Menthol;Introduction Of Hi Fi Filtration, Charcoal And Multi Filters;Demise Of Short, Plain Cigarettes;Proliferation Of Brands, Splits And Extensions. 1964. Bates No. 966068737/8739. http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/dac70a00.
This set contains plans for and market research on Vantage advertising campaigns during this time period. Vantage cycled through more than nine distinct campaigns in this time period. Early campaigns comprised text-intensive treatments of the health concerns of smokers after widespread publicity about smoking-related diseases. Later campaigns incorporated images of the kinds of people that target consumers identified with or aspired to emulate. Issues of smoking-related health risks were excluded from these user image campaigns. Also included in this document set is a small sampling of plans for other low-tar competitive brands.


Merit 1970s

Merit, introduced to the US market in 1976, was Philip Morris’ major low-tar competitor against RJ Reynolds’ Vantage. Merit’s introduction to market led to near-immediate dominance over Vantage, experiencing a share of market growth rate several times higher than Vantage through the late 1970s. Merit’s introductory campaign superficially resembled Vantage’s campaigns in the mid 1970s, but with an important difference: Merit campaigns emphasized a “technological breakthrough” that gave Merit, a low-tar brand, flavor that matched that of brands with much higher machine-measured tar content. Vantage had emphasized the fears smokers had about what their habit was doing to their health, with the intention of presenting Vantage as the answer to those fears. This difference may have led low-tar smokers to equate Merit with worry-free pleasure and Vantage with pleasure-free worry.


Merit 1980s

Merit was Philip Morris’ major low-tar competitor against RJR’s Vantage. Merit advertising campaigns evolved through the 1980s in an attempt to include more
psychographically-relevant user imagery. Once a brand has established its place in the market as a low-tar brand, consumers will continue to make the association between the brand and low-tar, which translates as “healthier”. Advertisers are then free to build advertising campaigns for their brands that emphasize user imagery, fantasy creation, and psychosocial needs satisfaction.

Moderation and Concerned segments

RJ Reynolds grouped low-tar smokers into two psychographic market segments, called “Moderation” and “Concerned”. These documents show RJ Reynolds activity in these two segments. “Concerned” smokers tended to use brands that represented the lowest machine-measured tar yields offered, whereas “Moderation” smokers tended to use low-tar brands that nevertheless offered some additional intangible, generally psychosocial, benefit. Brands such as Now and Carlton, which were sold primarily in a comparison format (Now is lowest! Carlton is lowest!), were brands for the “Concerned” segment. Vantage and Merit competed in the “Moderation” segment.

Low tar brand plans across companies

This set contains brand plans for various low-tar and ultra low-tar products across the different companies. The content of advertising messages differed across these low-tar brands, but the strategy of pairing a brand with specific user imagery, fantasies, or psychosocial needs satisfaction, is common across brands and companies. Extensive market research was conducted not to create products and advertising that could best serve consumers but rather to ascertain the effectiveness of different kinds of persuasive messages or how well different brands could be used for such persuasion.

35. Delaura EF. Lor L. Panel Results: Gpc 100mm Lofi Menthol Number 1519-94 Gpc 100mm Low Tar Menthol Number 1518-94 Gpc 85mm Low Tar Menthol Number 1517-94. 23 Jan 1995. Bates No. 82797065/7075. http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/sap14a00.
Legislation on advertising tar

Tobacco companies closely monitored legislation and public health activities pertaining to the advertising of tar content. Machine-measured yields of a cigarette’s tar and nicotine do not adequately reflect yields when human beings smoke the same cigarette. Reporting the artificially low machine-measured tar and nicotine yields of various low-tar brands ended up being to the tobacco industry’s benefit, as it provided an air of credibility about the claimed and implied health benefits of smoking low-tar brands.


Vantage Eclipse

Eclipse was first introduced in the US in the mid-1990s under the name “Eclipse by Vantage”. Other tobacco companies monitored Eclipse’s development and introduction; most of the records in this section are from the RJ Reynolds collection, but some are drawn from the other companies’ monitoring activities. An earlier incarnation of the cigarette called Eclipse was introduced in the US in the late 1980s as Premier. Premier performed very poorly in test market and was quickly withdrawn. Line extensions of familiar brands are generally better-received by the market than stand-alone brands are; thus RJ Reynolds reconfigured and reintroduced the product with Vantage in the name in order to capitalize on name recognition and association of the name with low-tar—and thus with health. Eclipse went through multiple design changes, the development of which cost hundreds of thousands of dollars by the time the product was released to test market.

Safer cigarettes: Prism

Prism was an RJ Reynolds project to develop a “safer cigarette” that eventually manifested as Eclipse. This set documents activities on Prism I and II between the failure of Premier and the release of Eclipse to the US test market. RJ Reynolds was very concerned with its ability to substantiate the health claims the marketing department was planning to make about the product. This process parallels Imperial Tobacco’s process of introducing its purportedly harm-reduced product, Premiere (not to be confused with RJ Reynolds’ Premier) in Canada, in which advertising claiming health benefits was developed before the product itself was. The advertising claims were never realized with the product.


Project GTC

Project GTC was the new name for Prism II, the project covering the development of Eclipse. These documents relate to the planning and testing of prototypes for Eclipse. Improving the flavor of the new product over the bad-tasting Premier brand, developing more attractive but ultimately more vague health messages for advertising, and designing product tests that would document reductions in selected chemical constituents were main focal points of Project GTC.

Ariel

Ariel was the name of an early filter-tipped cigarette by Gallaher. More commonly among tobacco companies in the US, Ariel was a project name for attempts at development of a reduced-harm cigarette. Brown & Williamson’s Project Ariel in the 1960s, for example, was an attempt to develop a cigarette that “heated tobacco rather than burning it”, but the project never moved beyond laboratory development. “Heating rather than burning” tobacco is precisely what RJ Reynolds’ Eclipse brand is said to do.


Several tobacco companies had an internal project named “Project XA” for developing a reduced biological activity cigarette. Most of the records are from RJ Reynolds. “XA” may refer to eliminating (X-ing out) biological Activity in tobacco smoke. This was the goal of much of the activity documented here. Again, marketing plans were created alongside, or in advance of, finished products or even prototypes sufficiently developed to enter market testing. The volume of activity of this sort across the major tobacco companies points to the potential of a socially acceptable cigarette to maintain profits for tobacco companies.

13. Brown JP, Kimberly. In Support of Project Xa, We Are Supplying Two Types of Papers (5 Samples): One Set Is a Cigarette Paper Treated with Carboxymethyl Cellulose (Cmc) and the


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