

Learning from commercial marketing: Novel use of cigarette packaging to communicate health messages

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The evolution of packaging

- Health warnings on tobacco packaging are a cost-effective way to inform consumers about the associated risks
- While on-pack warnings have increased in size and often include images, pack design has also evolved and often in ways which can undermine the warning
- Whereas tobacco companies exploit the entire pack as a communications tool, including the cigarette, regulators typically only require warnings on the front and back



Methods

- Interviews (N=10) with marketing and packaging experts in London and Glasgow in 2014 to explore novel ways to use packaging to communicate health messages

No	Company	Position within company	Location
1	Graphic design	Founder	Glasgow
2 *	Creative design and communication consultancy	1) Creative director 2) Client services director	London
3	Packaging magazine	Journalist	London
4 *	Packaging consultancy, Global brand agency	1) Founder 2) Production director	London
5	Design agency	Managing director	London
6	Brand consultancy	Founder	London
7	Design consultancy	Founder	Glasgow
8	University	Professor	London
9	University	Research fellow	London
10	Brand consultancy	Founder	London

Methods

- In each interview, participants discussed the role of packaging for consumer goods and also plain cigarette packaging
- Participants were shown pack inserts featuring gain-framed and loss-framed messages, cigarettes displaying a health warning, and a pack playing an audio health message when opened





Finest Virginia Tobacco

GB

CLASSIC

Full Flavour

Inserts

- A simple, inexpensive way to capture attention and engage with consumers - a door that a smoker would have to go through to reach a cigarette. Despite some reservations, as inserts could be ignored or discarded, the general view was that they would be read

“It is another reminder. Every single step of opening that pack to find another message to say have you thought about it, have another think, is it better to stop now?” (Interview 2)

Message framing

- Inserts with loss-framed messages thought to reduce message engagement, particularly as on-pack warnings are typically loss-framed. Inserts with gain-framed or positive messages (“help cards”) were viewed as offering something perceived to have a benefit

“If it was a positive message on the inside, like, we are your friends, we are here to help you, then that could be a good thing” (Interview 1)

Inserts

Target audience

- Most relevant for smokers wanting to quit

“There must be a percentage of people who do want to quit and the fact that you do put a guide in, a card in, which says here is how you can go about it, that is going to hit some people and they are going to pick it up and do it, they must do” (4)

“This would be excellent for the sub-group who wants to give up... I think that doing that would really be helpful because it’s opening the packet and bringing something out that is like a little gift, someone is trying to help me do what I want to do, so it would be effective” (Interview 9)

On-pack warnings and inserts

- Thought to be less effective than the on-pack warnings, but would help reinforce them

Cigarette warning

- Anything that could deter a consumer from putting a cigarette in their mouth was considered strong, with the on-cigarette warning described as “*fantastic*” (1), “*powerful*” (6) and “*brilliant*” (4)

“I think that is a great idea and I can’t believe it still hasn’t become regulatory. I can’t believe it’s taken this long to seriously talk about it” (Interview 3)

“Strong, good idea, I think it’s disruptive, it communicates a sort of negative, it starts to break that desirable connection between holding a cigarette in your hand and smoking something that is almost pristine” (Interview 5)

Feasibility

- Could be achieved via the use of inexpensive, non-toxic, vegetable-based inks, and that ‘taint’ would not be an issue

Cigarette warning

Increased exposure

- More difficult to avoid than the on-pack warning, exposure to which may be short-lived. It would extend communication by prolonging the message and delivering more of the message

“You are keeping that message going for as long as possible, so it’s good” (Interview 1)

- Smokers using a cigarette case could not avoid the on-cigarette messages

“People can throw that (plain pack) away and they can take the cigarettes out and put them in a container that someone else has made look quite nice and feel quite cool again, but they can’t get away from the cigarette” (Interview 6)

Cigarette warning

Potential impact

- A constant reminder for smokers. While unsure about how they would respond, the general view was that for some it could have a powerful impact

“You are now putting ‘Smoking kills’ near my lungs. I’ve now got that message in my body and I think, psychologically, that is quite powerful” (Interview 5)

- The visibility to others would ruin the image of smoking for young people

“I don’t know how cool it is for youngsters to be smoking and their mates sat next to them looking at them smoking away while it says ‘Smoking kills’ on the cigarette” (Interview 3)

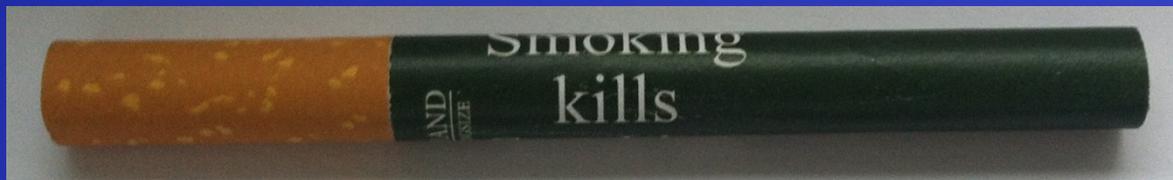
“Great message for children because they are going to see adults with something in their mouth saying it’s going to kill them, so I would imagine that they are going to say, ‘So why are you doing that’?” (Interview 1)

Cigarette warning

Moving beyond just a message

- An unpleasant colour for the cigarette paper suggested, rather than white, which is “pure” and “clean”. An off-putting colour together with a message also considered an option

“That type of anti-design approach (referring to the plain pack) should also be applied to the cigarette itself. Why is the paper white, could it be dark green? The whole thing could look horrible and have messaging on it” (Interview 5)



Pack with audio health message

- Could deter a newer smoker or badger a smoker to the point of quitting. For some it was gimmicky, humorous, and useless in noisy environments

“If I’ m a seasoned smoker I think it could go two ways, either you just get very annoyed having to listen to that bloody thing every time you open it, or it badgers you and badgers you to a point where you possibly look to give up” (3)

Feasibility

- Clearly feasible, with cosmetic products using audio messaging in production. The unit cost per pack would be nominal

“Going back to what we were saying at the beginning, the cost of producing a packet of cigarettes and the price that it retails at are so vastly incomparable that cigarette companies could easily invest in that kind of technology” (5)

Pack with audio health message

Annoyance could lead to decanting cigarettes

- Would cause a high degree of irritation, which in turn may drive smokers to disable the device or use a different carrier. While this may indicate discomfort, discarding the pack to use an alternative carrier would mean “throwing away all the other messages” (2)

“My concern is that it would be so annoying to have it, that people would just immediately decant their cigarettes into another package” (9)

“I think it would have an impact first time they ever hear it and then it would be very irritating” (6)

Pack with audio health message

Message

- Impact dependent on tone and what was being communicated

“It depends what the message is. If that is a message from a very seductive woman saying she is not going to fancy me because I stink, I might take heed of it. If it’s somebody lecturing at me, I might not” (6)

“Unless the talking message is so unbelievably horrible that it stops you and chills you in your tracks, I think it would be seen as some ridiculous gimmick” (5)

Other ways to use the pack

Exploiting the full pack

- Options for using all of the pack to communicate with consumers were suggested. These included an additional warning printed on the tear-tape

“The other thought was the cellophane strip... you print the warning on that and you are actually having to take the warning off, you are actually having to disobey the warning in that act” (Interview 6)

- Within the pack additional opportunities were identified, such as replacing the silver inner foil with less attractive yellow paper carrying a message, or having a message on the inner frame, e.g. “It’s not too late to stop now” (Interview 5). One participant commented that “It’s having the story to tell at every single part of the journey” (Interview 6)

Other ways to use the pack

Going beyond the visual

- Despite suggestions for exploiting the entire pack to communicate additional messages, the general feeling was that something which makes the smoking experience more uncomfortable would be preferable. Several participants recommended the use of a lacquer, coating or texture to create an unpleasant tactile sensation, eliciting a physical reaction that would make a consumer less likely to want to engage with the pack.

“You could put a printed texture, so imagine this cancer (*referring to a cancerous image on pack*) had a different texture on it, that would make it very vivid, you could feel the cancerous growth” (Interview 8)

- Another common suggestion concerned smell, considered the most powerful sense with respect to our emotions. One example was ‘scratch and sniff’ technology, for instance a seal placed over the lid of the pack which would deliver an unpleasant aroma when broken.

“If you had a seal over the pack and once you’ve removed the film, for example, like a label which you have to break, let’s say you have to peel or break it in some way, and when it’s broken it delivers something pretty distinct” (Interview 4)

Other ways to use the pack

Intelligent inks

- Several mentioned the use of speciality inks, e.g. thermochromic inks, which change colour with temperature, to attract attention to the pictorial warning. So when a pack is in the hands of the consumer all or part of the warning could change, light up or fade in response to the heat. An example offered was of a warning about lung damage which could, when held, show a healthy lung turn bad. It was cautioned however that there was a potential that these inks may be seen as gimmicky or quite cool and attractive.

“We talked about inks that change colour with temperature. You could hold it in your hand and if you’re holding the pack, as we talked about, bits of the image could vanish or reappear or change with the heat of your hand” (Interview 4)

Other ways to use the pack

Moving on-pack images

- The possibility of a cigarette pack displaying moving images was mentioned, which could even include a short TV style message. One suggestion to do this was via the use of inks able to conduct electricity, which could be light reactive or powered by a nano-sized battery within the pack. It was explained that this technology exists and is being progressed, although it is not yet commercialised

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“The idea of, in the future, having a pack with a moving image on it, which communicates a kind of TV message, is more than possible” (Interview 5)

Conclusions

- Supplementing plain packaging with inserts with gain-framed messages and cigarettes with warnings would be consistent with how tobacco companies use the pack and extend communication from the outside to the inside of the pack

