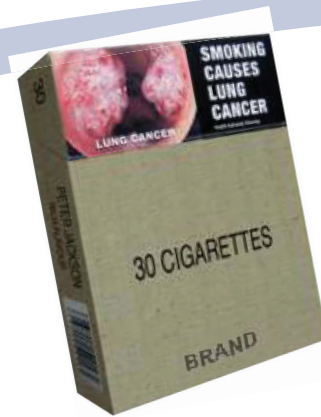


# PLAIN PACKAGING OF TOBACCO PRODUCTS



Tobacco packs are designed by tobacco manufacturers to promote tobacco products and undermine the effectiveness of tobacco packaging laws, including laws mandating the display of health warnings and bans on misleading or deceptive information.

Tobacco packs are not simply containers for tobacco products. They should be regulated as the major promotional devices that they are. Tobacco products should be required to be sold in 'plain packaging'.

Plain packaging means the standardization of packaging, with the removal of all colours, brand imagery, logos and trademarks, with only brand name, product name, manufacturer's name and contact details, quantity of product and government-mandated information or markings (such as health warnings and tax markings) allowed, in prescribed font and size, on or inside packaging, and packaging of prescribed shape, size and materials.

Plain packaging would curb the use of the pack as a promotional vehicle, increase the effectiveness of health warnings and reduce the tobacco industry's ability to create misleading and deceptive packaging.

## TOBACCO PACKAGING AS PROMOTION

Product packaging is an essential element of product marketing. Packaging allows brands 'to develop [their] message to the consumer and to act as a valuable form of promotion of the brand name and values'.<sup>1</sup> Packaging is also the marketing tool with the most direct links to the consumer.<sup>2</sup> Its power is enhanced for tobacco products, which are commonly recognized as 'badge products', inviting their users to identify with the personality and character of the product and its brand image.<sup>3</sup> Tobacco packs 'remain with the user once opened and are repeatedly displayed in social situations, thereby serving as a direct form of mobile advertising for the brand'.<sup>4</sup> The tobacco industry is well aware of the pack's promotional value. For example, in 1995 a Brown and Williamson employee stated:

*"... if you smoke, a cigarette pack is one of the few things you use regularly that makes a statement about you. A cigarette pack is the only thing you take out of your pocket 20 times a day and lay out for everyone to see. That's a lot different than buying your soap powder in generic packaging".<sup>5</sup>*

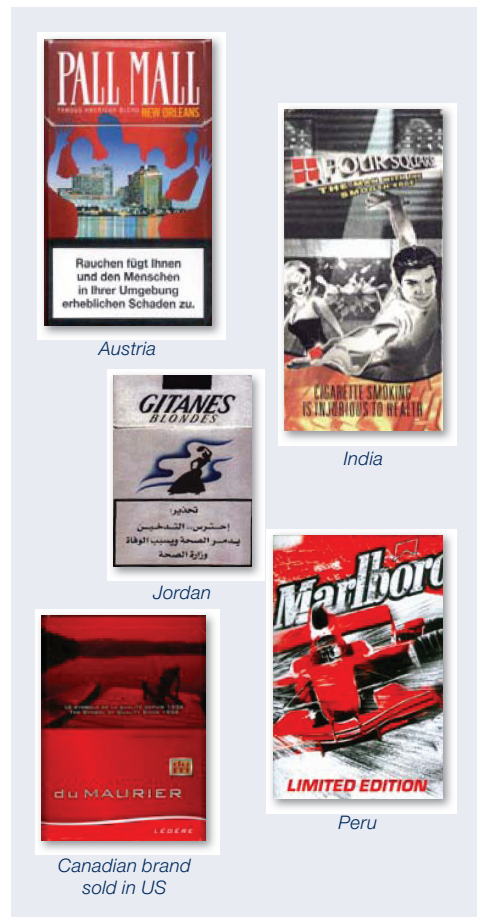
As other forms of tobacco advertising and promotion are banned, the tobacco pack assumes even greater importance as a promotional vehicle, particularly among adolescents.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, British American Tobacco and Philip Morris have predicted that pack design alone will drive brand imagery.<sup>7</sup> Tobacco packaging has been used for many years to generate evocative images such as luxury, freedom, glamour, status, and masculinity or femininity.<sup>8</sup> Tobacco packaging conveys brand identity through brand logos, colours, fonts, pictures, packaging materials and pack shapes. Advances in printing technology have enabled printing of on-pack imagery on the inner frame card, outer film and tear tape, and the incorporation of holograms, collectable art, metallic finishes, multi-fold stickers photographs and images in pack design.<sup>9</sup> Bereft of brand image, tobacco products would lose much of their appeal.<sup>10</sup>

There are numerous international examples of pack innovations involving changing the size and shape of the pack,<sup>11</sup> limited edition designs,<sup>12</sup> and images appealing to target groups such as women and young people.<sup>13</sup> Internal tobacco industry documents demonstrate how carefully pack design is developed to appeal to certain market segments.<sup>14</sup>

Studies demonstrate the power of tobacco packaging to evoke positive images. Scheffels has demonstrated how 'cigarette brands and cigarette package designs are given meaning in relation to personal characteristics, to social identity and to positions in hierarchies of status...'.<sup>15</sup> Roper and Shah have shown the symbolic importance of the brand among pre-adolescents, allowing them to feel part of their reference group, and, in the case of less well off children, helping them disguise their disadvantage.<sup>16</sup> Rootman and Flay have shown how young people use branded cigarettes to appear fashionable, popular and smart.<sup>17</sup>

Studies have also shown that plainer tobacco packaging can make a product appear "dull and boring" and reduce the perceived stylishness and attractiveness of its perceived user.<sup>19</sup> A recent study by Wakefield et al showed that cigarette packs that display progressively fewer branding elements, and are presented in a generic brown colour, 'are perceived increasingly unfavourably by smokers'.<sup>20</sup> The 'removal of additional design elements produced measurable decrements in smokers' appraisals of the packs, the smokers who might smoke such packs, and the inferred experience of smoking a cigarette from these packs'.<sup>21</sup>

*"Some women admit that they buy Virginia Slims, Benson and Hedges etc when they go out at night to complement a desire to look more feminine and stylish. ...more fashionable feminine packaging can enhance the relevance of some of our brands" (Philip Morris 1992).<sup>18</sup>*



## DESIGNING THE TOBACCO PACK TO UNDERMINE PACKAGING REGULATION

In addition to its promotional effects, packaging is manipulated by the tobacco industry to undermine health warnings and encourage the false belief that some brands are less hazardous than others.

Branding imagery and colour are used by the industry to distract attention from health warnings. Some brands incorporate the colours of health warnings into the design of the pack, causing the warnings to blend in to the overall pack design and become less salient.<sup>22</sup> Studies have demonstrated that removing colour and brand imagery from packs can increase the credibility and recall of health warnings, as well as overall perceptions of risk from tobacco use.<sup>23</sup>

Plain packaging reduces the false belief that some brands are less hazardous than others. Consumers routinely use colours and elements of brand design to make judgments about whether some brands are less harmful than others. For example, Hammond et al have shown that almost half of adult smokers in a recent UK survey reported that cigarettes in a light grey package would deliver less tar and lower health risk compared to cigarettes in an otherwise identical red pack.<sup>24</sup> Smokers were significantly less likely to report differences in tar delivery, health risk, and ease of quitting when shown versions of the same brands in plain packaging, without colours and

brand imagery. These findings are consistent with tobacco industry research on consumer perceptions of colours<sup>25</sup>, as well as a recent study by Hammond, which found that more than three-quarters of adults rated packages with lighter colours as of lower risk to health.<sup>26</sup>

Without brand imagery, packs would become nothing more than "functional containers for cigarettes", rather than a medium for advertising.<sup>27</sup>



The colour of the health warning blends into the colour of the pack (Dunhill brand from Australia)



The use of colour to suggest relative harmfulness (Player's brand from Canada)



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