

TOBACCO ADVERTISING, PROMOTION AND SPONSORSHIP

Countering Industry Arguments

Industry claim: A ban on tobacco advertising won't decrease tobacco use.

Today, we have compelling evidence that comprehensive bans on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship can significantly reduce cigarette and other tobacco use.^{2,3} Research conducted between 1970 and 1992 in 22 countries found that comprehensive bans can reduce tobacco consumption by 6.3%.⁴ A study involving 30 developing countries between 1990 and 2005 showed that comprehensive bans resulted in a 23.5% reduction in per capita consumption.⁵

“A key defense strategy employed by tobacco companies appears to be to “throw a lot of mud at the wall, hoping that some of it will stick.”¹

Industry claim: Tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship targets only adult smokers.

Internal tobacco industry marketing plans reveal careful targeting of young people. Documents from R.J. Reynolds (RJR), released in 1998, show that the company sought to reverse its declining sales by targeting 14 to 24 year olds. RJR memos describe the success of the Joe Camel cartoon in France and state that the campaign was “about as young as you can get, and aims right at the young adult smoker Camel needs to attract.”⁶

Tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship target non-smokers and youth especially in developing countries where regulations on advertising and promotion are weak and knowledge of the danger of tobacco is limited. Tobacco industry advertising tactics include concert ticket giveaways, prizes after buying a certain number of packs, and free samples of cigarettes, which cater specifically to low-income groups such as youth and the poor.^{7,8}

Evidence from recent years shows that youth smoking rates in many developing countries are on the rise. Increasing tobacco use rates negatively affect educational opportunities, financial stability of families, and increase healthcare costs to households.^{9,10,11,12} For example, homeless children in India spend a significant portion of their income purchasing tobacco, often prioritizing tobacco over food.¹³ In Niger, students spend 40% of their income on cigarettes.¹⁴

Industry claim: Advertising and promotion just encourage tobacco brand loyalty or entice current smokers to switch brands.

This claim was answered best by David Abbott, chairman of British advertising agency Abbott Mead Vickers, in 1988: “I think arguments like shifting brands are just insulting in their shallowness... I think advertising has certainly helped to introduce new smokers, be they women or be they in the Third World.”¹⁵

A growing body of research confirms that tobacco advertising and promotional activities increase smoking initiation. A 2008 review of nine longitudinal studies involving more than 12,000 youth concluded that “tobacco advertising and promotion increases the likelihood that adolescents will start to smoke.”¹⁶ A study in the United Kingdom conducted between 1999 and 2004 found that for each form of tobacco marketing that youth recognized, the likelihood of smoking initiation increased by seven percent.¹⁷ In a 2004 study, familiarity with local tobacco billboards increased the likelihood of smoking initiation among 13 to 14 year olds in Spain.¹⁸

Industry claim: The right to free speech includes the right to advertise a legal product.

Around the world, national courts have ruled in favor of public health and against the deadly interests of the tobacco companies on the issue of tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship. In France, the Constitutional Council declared that the French ban on tobacco advertising is constitutional because it is based on public health protection and does not interfere with free trade.¹⁹ In the United Kingdom, a ruling noted that promotion of a legal product does not automatically give the manufacturer unlimited freedoms. Instead, the exercise of such freedoms is subject to formalities, conditions, restrictions and penalties which may be prescribed by law and are necessary in the interests of the protection of health and for the protection of rights of others.²⁰

Industry claim: There is no need to ban tobacco logos on non-tobacco products because they are not intended to promote tobacco sales.

Brand-stretching is the use of tobacco brand names, logos, or visual brand identities on non-tobacco products, activities, or events. Internal tobacco industry documents confirm that brand-stretching is used to promote the use of a tobacco product and to circumvent advertising bans.²¹ In response to the French ban on tobacco advertising, R.J. Reynolds (RJR) France noted, “Compared to most competitors, RJR France seems better prepared to successfully confront the new legal restrictions thanks to a larger number of available logo licensing activities, allowing a satisfactory communication continuity behind [the] Camel and Winston [brands].”²² Research has found that indirect advertising is a powerful tool for maintaining brand identity.²³

Industry claim: A tobacco advertising ban will harm the advertising industry and the economy.

Tobacco advertising represents only a small fraction of the total advertising industry. In France, tobacco advertising represented 0.5 % of the total advertising budget in 1990, 0.7 % in the United Kingdom in 1994, and 1.8 % in Belgium in 1995.²⁴ The growth in total advertising will generally compensate for the loss of tobacco advertising revenue. Based on the experience in a number of European Union countries that have banned advertising, tobacco expenditures were replaced by publicity from other sectors without revenue or net job loss.²⁵

Industry claim: A ban on tobacco advertising will lead to other advertising bans.

Tobacco, unlike ordinary consumer products, is highly addictive, carcinogenic, and inherently deadly. There is no safe level of tobacco use. Tobacco is unique in its harm to individuals, society and the economy, and banning its promotion does not establish a precedent for other products.²⁶

Industry claim: If tobacco itself isn't banned, why should its advertising be?

There is little doubt that if tobacco were introduced today, its sale would be illegal.²⁷ However, there are many precedents for banning or restricting the advertising of dangerous or potentially dangerous products even if these products themselves remain on the market. Examples include firearms, fireworks or pharmaceutical products.

References

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