

The Implications of Smoking Hazards on Cigarette Advertising

By Jessica Savage

The Public Realization of Smoking Hazards

In the early 1900's, even though there were some studies that had noticed a correspondence between smoking and specific health problems, the general populous was not concerned that cigarettes were detrimental to their health. Cigarette advertising actually seemed to encourage the opposite. With slogans such as "For Digestion's Sake - Smoke Camel's" and with Lucky Strike's claims that physicians endorsed their products, it is obvious that the side effects of smoking were not widely understood or accepted. Smoking did not have a negative image and during wartime, soldiers were even given cigarettes as part of their rations. Even as late as 1964, at least 42% of all men smoked in the United States.¹

Even though the public was naive to it, smoking had already begun to take its toll. In 1900, about 400 people died of lung cancer and in the next 35 years the deaths per year increased to 4,000. By 1945, the deaths numbered 11,000 people.² The increase of lung cancer and other health problems did not go unnoticed by health professionals. In 1932 the *American Journal of Cancer* published a paper about cigarettes and cancer. After that paper there was a wave of research that served to solidify the health concerns relating to cigarettes.

In 1951 the Cancer Society published an important article connecting cigarettes with cancer. Afterwards, the Sloan-Kettering Report was published which revealed that tar causes cancer in lab mice. These articles caught the attention of Surgeon General Leroy Burney who began doing some of his own research and he published a paper in 1959 in *The Journal of the*

¹ Brandt, Allan, p156.

American Medical Association. Finally in 1957, the new information about cigarettes hit a wider audience when *Reader's Digest* published an article connecting cancer with smoking. It was this article that was frequently cited in the Marlboro Archive Collection for being the most influential article in the realization of smoking hazards.

The Implementation of Government Restrictions

The new Surgeon General after Burney continued to combat cigarette smoking. In 1964 Surgeon General Luther Terry published *Smoking and Health*, in which he wrote "cigarette smoking is a health hazard of sufficient importance in the United States to warrant immediate action".³ A Committee was started to conduct more extensive research on the side effects of smoking. By 1966, the Federal Trade Commission required that all cigarette packaging had a warning. The warning was to read : "CAUTION: Cigarette Smoking May be Hazardous to Your Health". The FTC also regulated cigarette ads by eliminating the right to advertise filters as "healthy" and emphasizing that ads could not be oriented towards people under 25 years old.

Even though in the beginning, it was the Executive Branch of the government and the Surgeon General that was involved with regulating the Tobacco Industry, soon every branch of the government was pulled into the battle. In 1970 the Congress passed the Public Health Cigarette Smoking Act and the Legislative Branch began regulating tobacco advertising. The warning labels were updated and there was a ban on television advertising. The new warning labels said, "The Surgeon General Has Determined that Cigarette Smoking is Dangerous to Your Health." There were also taxes issued on cigarettes because of their "dangerous" nature.

² Brandt, Allan, p161.

³ Miles, Robert, p41.

The last branch of the government to get involved in the tobacco battle was the Judicial Branch, which was captured in the middle because of liability suits that were filed against tobacco companies. By the 1970's cigarette companies had been sued over 50 times even though they had not had any major convictions. The suits indicated there was a major change occurring in the view the country had on cigarettes.

Following the Federal Government's example, State Governments became more involved in tobacco regulations. In 1973, Arizona was the first state to restrict smoking in public areas. By 1980, there had been over 257 bills passed on state levels and 31 bills on local levels regulating cigarettes. From there, more organizations became involved in the battle and many anti-smoking groups began to form.

The last major wave of resistance to cigarette smoking occurred when C. Everett Koop, the Surgeon General in 1985 published his discoveries on the impact of second-hand smoke. In 1993, the EPA (Environmental Health Agency) officially recognized smoking's dangers to non-smokers. Since smoking was no longer an issue of personal choice, OSHA and other agencies were forced to deal with smoking and its greater implications. In 1984, the warning labels were once again changed, as four different labels appeared. They read: "Cigarette Smoke Contains Carbon Monoxide"; "Quitting Smoking Reduces Serious Risks to your Health"; "Smoking by Pregnant Women may Result in Fetal Injury, premature Birth and Low Birth Weight" and "Smoking Causes Lung Cancer, Heart Disease, Emphysema and May Complicate Pregnancy".

The Battle Was Not Simple

Even though, in a matter of decades, the public view of smoking had changed and the tobacco industry had gone from no regulation to tight regulation, the changes did not come

easily. Tobacco was and is a major economic force in the United States. In 1963, smokers spent \$7 billion on cigarettes. Even in 1992, there was over \$20 billion in taxes on cigarettes alone.⁴ Tobacco companies have a \$312 million advertising industry and cigarette companies in 1992 employed about 700,000 people including suppliers.⁵ With such a large economic investment, it is obvious that even the government would be cautious about creating restrictions.

When the first information appeared about cigarette smoking's detrimental effect, there was no immediate regulation by Congress because of the power of the "Six Tobacco States". These states were North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia and Maryland. From 1962-64, there were 15 bills rejected that requested cigarette regulations. It was not until Senators, such as Neuberger, became involved in the issue that action began to be taken. Another factor in the involvement of the government has been attributed to the news report where President Kennedy was asked about how the government planned on dealing with regulating the Tobacco Industry. The President said that he did not have a response and would have to study the issue more. It was that year that the Surgeon General first made the Committee to study the implication of cigarette smoke.

The Smoking Industries Response to Health Concerns

John Landry, the Brand Advertising Manager for Philip Morris, said that the *Reader's Digest* article had a powerful impact on the Cigarette Industry and sales "took a dip" in 1957.⁶ The drastic changes in the societal view on smoking and government involvement in the Tobacco Industry, forced cigarette companies to discover new ways to protect their business and succeed in selling a "dangerous" product. Robert Miles in his book, *Coffin Nails and Corporate*

⁴ Fritschler, A. Lee, p23.

⁵ McGowan, Richard, p6.

Strategies determines that there were three major strategic responses that the cigarette companies instituted in order to survive the major changes in the industry. The three lines of response were domain defense, domain offense and domain creation.

Domain defense involved lobbying and the control of and opposition to medical information on smoking. In 1953 Philip Morris, in its annual reported,

"At one time or another within the past 350 years practically every known disease of the human body has been ascribed to the use of tobacco, one by one these charges have been abandoned with realization that they were not tenable"⁷

With this comment, the company hoped to dismiss the current accusations that cigarette smoking was dangerous. The tobacco companies' initial response to accusations that their products were dangerous was to deny the validity of the research on smoking. There was a great deal of debate on whether, the correlation between smoking and cancer could be proven as a causal relationship or if there were other factors involved. Lobbying served to fight the claims on cigarette smoking. The tobacco companies created the Tobacco Institute, which organized the major lobbying efforts and dealt directly with the government and political arena.⁸ In addition, in order to stay in the forefront of the research on smoking, the tobacco companies actually created the Tobacco Industry Research Committee in 1954, which gave grants to tobacco research. Their financial support of the research not only improved their public image but gave the access to the information about smoking hazards first.⁹

The second strategy cigarette companies used to combat the changes was domain offense. This line of offense was mostly concerned with product innovation and market segmentation in order to improve marketing techniques. One example of this is that after 1964, there was an

⁶ John Landry, Interviewee Files.

⁷ Miles, Robert, p60.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

increase in the number of low tar and low nicotine cigarettes. These new products peaked in the 1970's as the cigarette companies attempted to keep up sales with these "safer" products. Phillip Morris was actually at the forefront of this arena of offense. Philip Morris was known for its innovations from the filter, to the flip-top box to the first "light" cigarette. Gradually, segmentation began to occur and Virginia Slims were marketed as a women's cigarette. These offensive strategies helped to undermine the negative impacts the health concerns had created. By creatively discovering new strategies for selling cigarettes, the companies could keep their sales up despite their public image.¹⁰

The last strategy Miles discusses is domain creation, which relates to diversification and overseas expansion. Philip Morris was once again in the forefront of the offense as it was the first to market overseas in 1954. By 1961, Philip Morris cigarettes were sold in 104 countries and by 1971 they had increased their influence to 162 countries. Philip Morris was also the first to diversify their products through merging with other companies. Philip Morris merged with Miller Brewing Company, Kraft, General Foods and many more companies. Interestingly, even though Philip Morris was the first to implement these changes it is one of the few companies that still relies mostly on tobacco sales.

One of the more controversial aspects of the expansion in the cigarette markets has been the belief that cigarette companies have also expanded their concentration to the youth market. In studies of popular magazines' advertisements, changes in the ads for youth magazines were more drastic than in general magazines. Many have argued that cigarette companies want to appeal to a younger audience because of youth's lower concern with smoking hazards and higher interest in being rebellious.¹¹

¹⁰ Miles, Robert.

¹¹ Altman, David, Michael Slater, Cheryl Albright and Nathan Maccoby. p 102.

Another important argument to consider in regards to changes that tobacco companies instituted in the last several decades is the importance of combating a negative image. There have been implications that the reason for the companies' mergers was not merely to secure financial concerns but to improve the companies' public image. By connecting themselves with other products such as foods, the cigarette companies would be viewed as selling more than just "dangerous" products. It is also important to consider the issue of public image when considering that after the health scare most tobacco companies changed their names to exclude the word "tobacco". For example, "Philip Morris Tobacco" became "Philip Morris Industries".¹² In addition, companies masked new products by using different names for their company. For example, Philip Morris marketed a cigarette called "Dave" and used the name "Dave's Tobacco Co." for themselves. All of these small adjustments and plays on words imply that after health issues became a concern to the general public, the tobacco companies had to be careful to preserve their image and financial security.

"A Healthy Cigarette" - Fighting Health Concerns

Marlboro and other companies had to adjusted to the governmental restrictions not only on a corporate level but also in their advertising in general. When there was the TV ban, there was a change to a concentration on print advertisements. This change impacted companies to varying degrees. John Landry, Brand Advertising Manager for Philip Morris believed that TV was the "most effective medium" for advertising.¹³ For brands such as Winston, the transition to paper was difficult and Landry stated that Winston had four ad campaigns in three years.¹⁴ In

¹² Davidson, Kirk D, p13.

¹³ John Landry, Interviewee Files.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

1969-70, the amount of printed cigarette ads increased 277%.¹⁵ On the other hand, through sponsoring events such as races and sports, the companies could still find airtime. They also used alternative marketing strategies such as creating specific brand products. Many new techniques were created to keep the companies in the public's mind

The first changes observed in advertisements were responses to the accusations that cigarettes are dangerous. Initially ads directly commented on health issues and questioned the validity of the studies. In 1951 when the American Cancer Society published a paper, the percent of cigarette ads in *Time* relating to health issues was 44%. Then in response to another article published in 1953, the percent was up to 87%. During the year in between, 1952, there were no cigarette ads that dealt with health issues in *Time*.¹⁶

This initial reaction led way to one of the major strategies that tobacco companies have used in marketing their products in the light of health concerns. This method involves the search for the "healthy" cigarette. Originally, this battle between cigarette companies took place with the adoption of filters. In 1952 only 1.3% of all cigarettes had filters and by 1956, over 25% of them had filters.¹⁷ Some companies also took filters to another level as they advertised for "better" filters or "recessed tips," which supposedly were "healthier". Philip Morris did this with several of its brands as it advertised its special filters including its "Selectrate Filter" used in Marlboro cigarettes.

The next wave in finding a "healthy" cigarette was what is often referred to as the "Tar Wars." This occurred in the 1970's when companies battled for the lowest tar cigarette.

¹⁵ Miles, Robert, p81.

¹⁶ Warner, Kenneth, p120.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p120.

Marlboro took place in this battle with its "Marlboro Lights" in the 1970's. In 1979, 82% of ads in 8 popular magazines were for low tar, low nicotine cigarettes.¹⁸

The "Tar Wars" were called to an end as results began to show that just as filters did not make cigarettes "healthy", low nicotine, low tar cigarettes were still detrimental to a smoker's health. It was observed that there was not much difference between lighter and regular cigarettes for several reasons. The carbon monoxide levels are not decreased in light cigarettes and people who smoke lights tend to smoke more of them in order to get the same fix. Studies have also showed that light cigarettes do not reduce the occurrence of heart attacks caused by smoking.¹⁹

A Change in Emphasis in Advertising

Besides the initial and the subsequent backlash in the "Tar Wars", cigarette companies have also changed many of their general advertising techniques. One of Marlboro's initial responses to raised health concerns was the creation of the "Settleback" campaign which differed from earlier tobacco companies' oppositional advertising, by choosing to deal with health issues through drawing the concentration elsewhere. Since there was a drop in Marlboro sales in 1957 and 1958, Marlboro realized the need to find a more adequate response to the health concerns. Landry mentioned that he believed the "Settleback" campaign was created as a response to the health scare²⁰ as it concentrated on releasing anxiety and relaxing. John Benson who worked for the Leo Burnett on the Marlboro campaign stated that the campaign "offered reassurance" to smokers.²¹ The campaign displayed men leaning back and enjoying cigarettes.

¹⁸ Altman, David, Michael Slater, Cheryl Albright and Nathan Maccoby, p104.

¹⁹ Meyer, John, p79.

²⁰ John Landry, Interviewee Files.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Though the "Settleback" campaign was temporary, the idea of concentrating on the positive aspects of cigarettes continued to be prominent. As Hall Adams, Jr. who worked for the Media department of the Leo Burnett Co. said after the health scare "everybody kinda backed off... to take the bit in one's teeth and sell the product, for what it was, a good, robust tasting, masculine thing".²² Luckily, Marlboro had already established a campaign based on taste. Especially with the slogan "Come to where the flavor is", it is obvious that Marlboro wanted to concentrate on the cigarettes' satisfaction.

On the other hand, it is obvious that it is not just "flavor" that is being sold by Marlboro cigarettes. This is where the real ingenuity of the Marlboro campaign comes in. Marlboro ads do not need to sell a product because they sell an "image". Many cigarette companies have changed their techniques to appeal to consumers through a sense of adventure, risk or danger. In 1960 no ads in *Time* magazine were related to adventure but by 1983-5 about 30-40% of the ads related to adventure.²³ Interestingly, these characteristics were already present in many Marlboro ads because of Marlboro's efforts to masculinize their filters. If the whole appeal of the product is the "rebellious" and "free" nature of the cowboy, then it does not seem that far of a jump to sell a "dangerous" product. The idea of smoking becomes linked with the idea of "freedom" and personal choice. Therefore, any attacks made on smoking become an issue of losing freedom and the government interfering in the personal choices of the people.

Since "image" and "flavor" have become more prominent in ads, simultaneously there had been a de-emphasis of other characteristics of ads. Kenny Carter stated that he did not believe it was necessary for a product to appear in a Marlboro ad because it was the "image" that

²² Hall Adams, Jr. Interviewee Files.

²³ Altman, David, Michael Slater, Cheryl Albright and Nathan Maccoby. p102.

sold the product.²⁴ As a result, the cigarette itself has lost emphasis in ads and there has been a reduction in the prominence of the cigarette box in ads. In the 1960's and 1970's the cigarette packs in Marlboro ads were large. In the 1960's the cigarette boxes were separated from the picture as they were positioned under the image on a white background. Gradually, the cigarette packs became more integrated into the picture in the 1970's. Then by the 1990's the cigarette box had either disappeared or been reduced to a mere representational picture which functioned more as a logo than a demonstration of the product.

Interestingly, the shift away from the product has corresponded with a shift away from emphasizing what people were worried about, the actual act of smoking. Gradually over the decade, there has not only been the disappearance of cigarette smoke in ads, but the disappearance of the cigarette itself. Cigarettes changed from the main object of concentration, to an accessory (usually just to hold and not smoke), to being nonexistent in most modern cigarette ads. The product was no longer required in the ads. This progression away from the use of smoke in ads is especially seen in the Marlboro Man Campaign.

Both Ken Krom and Earl Glass who worked for the Leo Burnett Ad Agency for Philip Morris, did not believe that the elimination of the smoke in cigarette ads was intentional. Ken Krom believed that it was "incidental" and often when filming outside, smoke could not be captured on film.²⁵ Earl Glass actually believed it was for aesthetic reasons that the smoke was removed from the ads as it often appeared fake in pictures.²⁶ Yet, even if the change is not intentional it definitely serves to draw concentration of the ads away from the product to the "image." On the years where there were major releases by the Surgeon General, 1984-5 and

²⁴ Kenny Carter, Interviewee Files.

²⁵ Ken Krom, Interviewee Files.

²⁶ Earl Glass, Interviewee Files.

1965-7, in eight popular magazines surveyed, cigarette ads never had any smoke in them.²⁷ The loss of smoke also shows that even though smoke was an important characteristic of cigarettes in the past, there has definitely been a shift away from a desire to emphasize it.

Success or Failure: The Results of the Government Restrictions

There has been some recent debate on whether the government tobacco restrictions have truly been successful on all levels. There has definitely been a change in the public's view on cigarettes but some of that may be attributed to other anti-smoking groups. Interestingly enough, even the health scare helped companies like Marlboro who already had filters. Landry noticed that the health concerns actually boosted sales of filter cigarettes by several billion.²⁸ As a result, it is obvious that the Tobacco Industry's reaction to specific changes can be unpredictable.

The first major government restriction, the requiring of warning labels, has caused mixed reactions among critiques. Most of the Philip Morris employees who were interviewed for the Marlboro Archive, were not concerned with the addition of the labels to ads. The warning labels merely caused a change in layout. Earl Glass said that he tried to put the warning label "always at the bottom and always away from the pack".²⁹ He said that he did not want the label at the top where people would see it first or near the cigarette boxes. He also discussed how in one ad, the label was on the top but the white snow drew attention away from the label. Though he did admit they were careful where they placed label he said it was not to "hide" the label but in order to preserve the ad layout.³⁰

²⁷ Altman, David, Michael Slater, Cheryl Albright and Nathan Maccoby, p99.

²⁸ John Landry, Interviewee Files.

²⁹ Earl Glass, Interviewee Files

³⁰ *Ibid.*

The largest debate of government regulation lies in the Smoking Act and TV ban. Landry stated in the interviews that he felt Marlboro "never missed a beat" as they converted to paper ads.³¹ The reactions of most of the Philip Morris's employees were pretty ambivalent in regards to the ban. Hall Adams, Jr. 's only complaint was that "flatwork isn't as much fun".³² The question of whether a loss in TV advertising capabilities actually impacted cigarette sales is an important issue to consider.

Interestingly, the Big Six (the major cigarette companies) all withdrew ads from TV before the actual regulations required it. With the change to written ads, the financial expenses of advertising were drastically reduced and the companies were able to concentrate on other types of marketing. On top of saving money, statistics actually show that cigarette sales were better after the ban. The main reason for this observation was the loss of the Fairness Doctrine. In 1969, the Fairness Doctrine required air time be given to anti-smoking ads but after cigarettes were not allowed to advertise on TV, anti-smoking ads also decreased. During the two years of the Fairness Doctrine, 2.7 billion packs less were sold a year but for the five years following the ban only 1.7 billion packs less were sold a year.³³ The decrease of sales of cigarettes was more drastic when there was competition between cigarette ads and anti-smoking ads on TV.

Conclusion

When the dangers of cigarette smoking became more widely known, the tobacco industry was faced with a difficult challenge. Though the actual impact of the government restrictions can be debated, there was definitely a change in image associated with cigarettes. As a result, cigarette companies needed to learn how to sell a "dangerous" product. Marlboro

³¹ John Landry, Interviewee Files.

³² Hall Adams, Jr. Interviewee Files.

³³ Miles, Robert, p85.

cigarettes were able to adjust very well to the changes on many levels. As many other cigarette companies did, they lobbied, sponsored research, exported, segmented and extended their markets, trying to deal with the health issues on a corporate level. Marlboro was actually at the forefront of most of the changes and always coming through with new innovations such as the "light" cigarette. Yet, the most important aspect of the Marlboro campaign was the image of the Marlboro Man and the changes in the actual strategies of advertising. As Allan Brand stated in his article, "The Cigarette, Risk, and American Culture" while commenting on the Marlboro campaign, "Such advertising pointed away from the product toward the moral and psychological value of the patron."³⁴ A cowboy who not only envelops ideals of autonomy and nostalgia but also entices a bit of rebellion. In such a situation, it is not difficult for Philip Morris to shift their emphasis from the actual act of smoking to an "image" of rebellion.

Norman Muse from Philip Morris, stopped smoking himself because of health reasons but said that he believed people had the "right to smoke."³⁵ The autonomy associated with the Marlboro Man and cigarette smoking interrelates on a deep level. Since cigarettes have been restricted, many people have reacted with the belief that their personal choices are being infringed upon. If this is the case, then by marketing a product that encourages freedom and choice, the Marlboro campaigns seek to encourage appropriation by emphasizing the aspect of personal choice. As a result, a "dangerous" product actually gains its popularity because of the risk involved in using it. The question that arises is whether, it is truly just an issue of personal choice since second hand smoke can hurt non-smokers. It is this issue that is now the central debate especially among anti-smoking groups.

³⁴Brandt, Alan, p157.

³⁵ Norman Muse, Interviewee Files.

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