AD WATCH

Big Tobacco is trying on the "Russian style"

As tobacco control measures tighten in the developed western countries, the eastern European and Russian markets are becoming increasingly important for the transnational tobacco corporations (TTCs). The eastern European region, including the Russian Federation, represents the second largest tobacco market in the world after the Asian region. At present, the TTCs own the vast majority of the tobacco manufacturing facilities that produce both western and domestic brands of tobacco products in the Russian Federation. Three tobacco giants—Philip Morris, Japan Tobacco, and British American Tobacco—are the largest outdoor advertisers in the Russian market. According to the Gallup organisation, in May 2000 the three tobacco giants spent a total of US\$1 072 250 on outdoor tobacco advertising, and a further \$827 713 on advertising in the printed media (http://www.gallup.ru/eng/news/reklama_may.htm).

In recent years, the face of the Russian tobacco market has undergone considerable changes, most visibly in advertising and promotion patterns. In the early 1990s, the winds of political change brought hopes for democracy and long awaited wealth to Russians. Western consumer goods, including tobacco, signifying the country's integration into the "civilised" world, became highly desirable commodities. The TTCs promptly reacted to this trend by aggressively promoting their products with images depicting western lifestyles. Western brands made up a significant share of imported tobacco products and became highly popular, especially among younger smokers, thanks to aggressive marketing campaigns.

As attempts to build a wealthy society over a short period of time foundered, the situation has dramatically changed. After the economic collapse on 17 August 1998, the Russian government and people realised that there is no quick and easy transition from communism to capitalism. The western world, having originally been seen in the role of saviour, is now being increasingly portrayed in the

Russian mass media as the "evil" responsible for the never ending economic crises in the country. Traditionally, the older generation who suffered most as a result of the failed economic reforms was against the western "invasion", but now increasing numbers of young Russians have joined them in expressing anti-western sentiments. As a result, western images such as the Marlboro man on tobacco ads, although still popular among many Russians, appear to no longer appeal to the majority of users.

The examples of tobacco advertising seen now in Moscow streets and in some Russian periodicals reflect new advertising strategies that entertain patriotic themes. For example, the RJR (now Japan Tobacco) brand *Russkii Stil* (Russian Style) is promoted by a happy looking young couple with one of the Stalin era Moscow skyscrapers in the background (left). The pack design uses rich colours with golden ornamentation characteristic of traditional Russian decor. Another example of a clearly "domestic" theme in recent tobacco advertising is Peter the First (Czar Peter the Great) cigarette ad for the brand named after the former Czar featuring a happy looking man sailing down the Neva river in St Petersburg (centre). He wears a shirt bearing the Russian flag and two-headed eagle, and the message underneath says "Always the First!" Apparently this advertisement is meant to boost potential consumers' Russian pride and push sales of this purportedly "domestic" brand, which in reality is manufactured by Japan Tobacco.

Another pseudo-patriotic motif in cigarette advertising is seen in ads for the *1812* brand. This is manufactured by the independent, Russian-owned tobacco company Balkanskaya Zvezda, which seems to have learned a few marketing tricks from its western competitors. The advertisement commemorates Napoleon's defeat by the Russian army at Borodino in 1812 (as immortalised musically in Tchaikovsky's 1812 overture) and, in a complete reversal of earlier practice by the TTCs, is

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apparently supposed to promote the superiority of Russian tobacco products over their western rivals. This ad is noteworthy not only because of its unarguably bad taste, but also because it grossly ridicules the health warning mandated by the existing legislation. This is shown in relatively small print at the bottom of each advertisement, and reads "The Ministry of Health warns: Smoking is dangerous to your health." The message over the French emperor says "The Ministry of Health had warned",

implying that Napoleon neglected the health warning and now suffers the consequences (a bruised eye is visible, symbolic, it seems, of a defeated army).

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Not even a Smokefree Olympics in Sydney could finally douse the cravings of some. Here the Olympic torch is put to a less than sporting use.