

West goes East: the new tobacco situation in Russia

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Since the time the former Soviet Union was created, there has been no law that banned tobacco advertising in the country. In fact, there has been no need for such a law because the centralised economy, by its very nature, did not require Western-type advertising of products, including tobacco. Prior to the early 1970s, Western tobacco products were not widely available; however, since then, these products have gradually begun to appear and have gained popularity both in Moscow and in other large industrial cities of Russia.

The first broad "acquaintance" made by Russian smokers with Western tobacco occurred in the mid-1970s after the joint Soviet-American space project, Apollo-Soyuz. At that time, the Moscow Yava tobacco factory and Philip Morris agreed to celebrate the space victory by releasing a joint product - Apollo-Soyuz cigarettes. Not surprisingly, these cigarettes became extremely popular among Russian youth because they embodied a popular Western lifestyle image and a heroic space theme. Unlike other areas, collaboration in tobacco manufacturing and trading between the two dissimilar systems was quite successful: the Soviet-made Marlboro brand, as well as several other Western-made cigarette brands, appeared increasingly on the Russian market in the late 1970s and 1980s.

In 1980, the Soviet Government adopted a regulation (not a law) that banned the advertising of tobacco products through such channels as mass media, outdoor posters, and billboards. This regulation had been generally followed everywhere in the former Soviet Union until the late 1980s.

Glasnost for advertising

In recent years, on the wave of the revolutionary political and economic developments, Western European and US transnational tobacco corporations (TTCs) have commenced a powerful attack to win over the huge Russian tobacco market. Currently, tobacco advertisements are becoming an increasingly distinctive street "decoration" in Moscow and in other large Russian cities. Moscow has been turned into an advertising pavilion of products from a number of TTCs, and picturesque cigarette advertisements can be seen widely on illuminated billboards (figure 1) and street signs (figure 2). Huge political propaganda slogans which could be seen on the walls of apartment buildings

before *perestroika*, are now being replaced by cigarette ads (figure 3). Particular attention is being paid to advertising at points of sale. In many residential areas, ordinary gloomy grey tobacco kiosks were recently replaced with brightly painted "brand-name" kiosks, featuring characteristic Camel or Marlboro names and colours.

Public transportation is an indispensable part of everyday life for a vast majority of



Figure 1 A row of illuminated billboard ads in front of the Bolshoi Theatre, advertising four different cigarette brands (Gauloises Blondes, Lucky Strike, West, and HB)



Figure 2 Illuminated street signs

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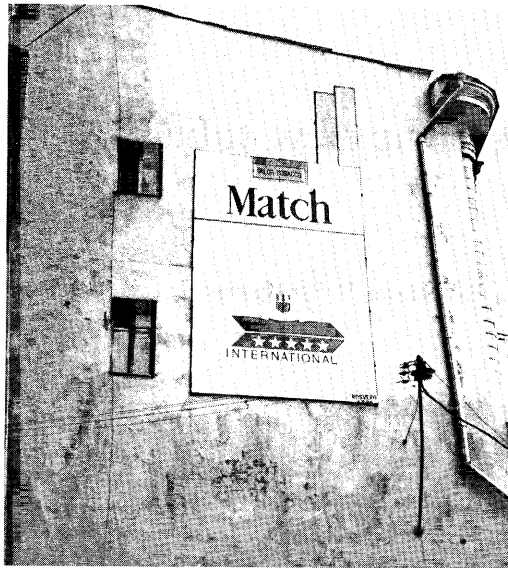


Figure 3 A new “wall painting”



Figure 4 Advertising on a bus-stop shelter



Figure 5 Information board alongside a city street. The Russian message at the bottom says “The whole world enjoys them”



Figure 6 Rothmans commercial on TV

Russians who do not own a car. As a result, TTCs have targeted bus stops for their advertising (figure 4), and renew the ads every month, giving bored Muscovites an opportunity to update themselves on available cigarette brands while waiting for the bus. Information boards on streets are also widely used for tobacco advertising (figure 5). Thus, in terms of tobacco advertising, Russian cities are increasingly resembling Western cities, although one significant difference can be noted: unlike the same ads in the West, Moscow ads carry no health warnings.

Although tobacco advertising via radio and TV was prohibited decades ago in the US and Western Europe, it is common nowadays in Russian mass media. On a daily basis, television airs commercials which encourage people to smoke Lucky Strike (because it is “true America”), invite viewers to “go and see Marlboro-land”, and urge them to “test the West”. Figure 6 shows an image from the TV screen of a frequently aired Rothmans commercial. Usually such clips are created with a great deal of professionalism; therefore, they are extremely appealing and convincing. The content of tobacco commercials leaves little

doubt that their prime target is the younger generation. The recent and growing population of Russian businessmen are also a target. Specifically, people in business are told that selling cigarettes is a very profitable business to get involved in. Our attempts to obtain official information on the overall exposure time of tobacco commercials failed – Russian TV representatives told us they were not authorised to disclose “commercial secrets”. Therefore, in August 1993, we spent four hours in front of the TV conducting direct chronometry.

Two TV channels in Moscow are viewed the most: Channel 1 and Channel 2. We found that the length of each tobacco commercial was 20 to 30 seconds. In the most viewed time period from 20:00 to midnight, total exposure to tobacco commercials was 8 to 10 minutes on Channel 1, and 8 to 9 minutes on Channel 2. Tobacco commercials were played at the best possible time – prior to, and immediately after the evening News programme, as well as during the most popular TV serials and movies. For example, every Saturday and Sunday from 20:00 till 22:00, a Lucky Strike ad accompanies the Columbia Pictures movie

on television. The movies are interrupted by Lucky Strike commercial breaks three or four times in a 90-minute period; the overall tobacco advertising time is up to two minutes per show. Moscow radio is not far behind: all channels try to sell the most profitable broadcasting time to TTCs. Readers of the Russian press are also heavily exposed to tobacco advertisements.

Tar wars

The quality of tobacco products imported from Western countries is important to consider. Even though the American and West European cigarettes sold in Russia carry the same brand names as those sold in the West, as a rule, they do not meet Western standards in terms of the content of noxious substances, such as carbon monoxide, nicotine and tar. Researchers from the National Cancer Research Centre in Moscow¹ recently reported the results of quantitative analyses of noxious substances in the same brand of cigarettes purchased in Moscow versus those purchased in the US. The tests were conducted by commonly accepted techniques using a smoking machine and ion-exchange chromatography. Their results showed higher tar yields of cigarettes sold in Russia compared with those available in the US (table).

Table Comparative data on contents of tar, nicotine, and carbon monoxide (CO) yields (mg/cigarette) in same-brand cigarettes sold in Russia and the US, May 1993*

Brand	Russia			US		
	Tar	Nicotine	CO	Tar	Nicotine	CO
Kent	20.2	1.0	4.4	13.0	1.0	3.6
Winston	19.0	1.2	3.4	15.0	1.0	4.1
Camel	19.2	1.0	4.6	16.0	1.0	4.1
Marlboro	21.5	1.1	3.4	16.0	1.1	3.9
L & M	16.7	1.0	5.0	14.0	1.0	3.6

* Source: R Safayev¹

Characteristically, Western-manufactured cigarettes sold in Russia have no health warnings; however, they do carry a message of a different kind, namely "US tax exempt. For use outside US". It looks as though TTCs have finally found a sizable market for the high tar cigarettes rejected by consumers in their own countries due to their higher carcinogenicity. In addition, some cigarette brands with clearly Western names, such as "B.O.Y. US", which are registered neither in the US nor in Western Europe, are nonetheless sold in Russia.

Along with direct advertising, TTCs push various kinds of tobacco promotion. For example, RJ Reynolds supports a national lottery, called "Lotto-Million". All sales points of the "Lotto-Million" in Moscow are decorated with the Camel trademark. When buying the lottery ticket, customers are invited to purchase a pack of Camel cigarettes at the same time. Plenty of Western cigarette brand promotional items, such as belts, pens, lighters, key-holders, caps, and T-shirts, can

be purchased everywhere in Moscow. Plastic bags (which are typically bought by Russians for multiple use) carrying the images of Camel, "HB", Marlboro, and other brands, can be found in stock in all commercial kiosks and stands in Moscow.

Curbing the spread

Attempts to curb the spread of tobacco advertising and promotion have been made by researchers and tobacco control advocates from the National Research Centre for Preventive Medicine in Moscow. They provided the Russian Government and Moscow local authorities with data on the apparently high current smoking rates, dangerous trends toward an increase in the popularity of tobacco in the country, and the expected health consequences of the tobacco epidemic. Immediate approval of legislation that would ban mass media-based tobacco advertising completely was urged. As a result, the Moscow City Council approved, in July 1993, an Act restricting tobacco advertising through the mass media and on billboards and posters. Further, the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation adopted the Basic Law on Health Care for Citizens of the Russian Federation (No 5487-I), which states that "for the benefit of public health, alcohol and tobacco advertising through the mass media is prohibited. Violation of the prohibition will result in punitive measures as defined in the Law of the Russian Federation". Thus, it seems that the Russian legislative authorities have taken the first important step - prohibiting tobacco advertising through the mass media. Unfortunately, because of the extremely unstable political and economic situation in Russia, their executive power is weak and its translation into action is very slow. Therefore, so far there are no signs of enforcement of the above-mentioned legislative measures in Moscow, and the amount of tobacco advertising does not appear to have changed appreciably.² Moreover, since the measures were approved, overall public exposure to cigarette advertisements has continued to increase. Here are two examples: (a) our personal communication with a representative of the Moscow Department of Public Transportation has recently revealed that, at present, within the downtown Moscow city limits, there are 75 bus stops featuring tobacco ads, whereas by the end of 1993, there will be about 200 such bus stops; and (b) although the Moscow Trade Department could not give us the number of "brand-name" tobacco kiosks in Moscow, they assured us that this number will increase.

In conclusion, we have to acknowledge regretfully that, despite legislative counter-measures, the TTCs' invasion into Russia continues to spread, and the general tobacco situation in the country continues to deteriorate.

1 Safayev R. What do we smoke? *Argumenty i F акты* 1993; 28: 7. (Rus)

2 Davis RM. Tobacco ad ban in Russia? *Tobacco Control* 1993; 2: 277.