

Targeting youth and concerned smokers: evidence from Canadian tobacco industry documents

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Abstract

Objective—To provide an understanding of the targeting strategies of cigarette marketing, and the functions and importance of the advertising images chosen.

Methods—Analysis of historical corporate documents produced by affiliates of British American Tobacco (BAT) and RJ Reynolds (RJR) in Canadian litigation challenging tobacco advertising regulation, the Tobacco Products Control Act (1987): Imperial Tobacco Limitee & RJR-Macdonald Inc c. Le Procureur General du Canada.

Results—Careful and extensive research has been employed in all stages of the process of conceiving, developing, refining, and deploying cigarette advertising. Two segments commanding much management attention are “starters” and “concerned smokers”. To recruit starters, brand images communicate independence, freedom and (sometimes) peer acceptance. These advertising images portray smokers as attractive and autonomous, accepted and admired, athletic and at home in nature. For “lighter” brands reassuring health concerned smokers, lest they quit, advertisements provide imagery conveying a sense of well being, harmony with nature, and a consumer’s self image as intelligent.

Conclusions—The industry’s steadfast assertions that its advertising influences only brand loyalty and switching in both its intent and effect is directly contradicted by their internal documents and proven false. So too is the justification of cigarette advertising as a medium creating better informed consumers, since visual imagery, not information, is the means of advertising influence.

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Keywords: advertising; brand imagery; market research; youth targeting; “concerned” smokers; corporate documents

This review of the role of advertising in cigarette marketing provides a systematic understanding of the processes and outcomes of advertising management in the contemporary period. The principles of advertising and

its management, which are universal to all jurisdictions, are illustrated by reference to cigarette industry documents produced in litigation assessing the constitutionality of Canada’s 1987 Tobacco Products Control Act. This act sought to prevent “inducements” to smoking and to substantially, but not totally, restrict cigarette advertising activity. It was challenged in Imperial Tobacco Limitee & RJR-Macdonald Inc. c. Le Procureur General du Canada, Requete pour Judgement Declaratoire and first tried in Montreal, Quebec, Canada’s “smokiest” province, and before Justice Chabot, himself a heavy smoker.

Because the principals in this legal challenge were Imperial Tobacco (ITL), a subsidiary of British American Tobacco (BAT-UK), and RJ Reynolds-Macdonald (RJR-M), a subsidiary of RJ Reynolds (RJR-US), these firms serve as illustrative examples of the industry’s marketing responses to their current strategic situation, particularly their targeting of the young for recruitment of new smokers, and targeting of health concerned smokers to offer them false reassurances.

The industry advocates, both its lawyers and its so-called “experts”, held steadfastly to the position that cigarette advertising is of no consequence except for brand loyalty and brand switching, despite the wealth of trade, academic, and government conclusions to the contrary. By neither intent nor effect, it is held, does cigarette advertising influence non-smokers, such as potential starters, nor influence existing smokers with respect to quitting. These opinions and assertions were based upon simplistic theorising, for example, the “mature market” hypothesis, and conspicuously ignored the wealth of recent research and the many documents evidencing actual corporate activity.^{1 2}

Cigarette advertising in the contemporary era

Advertising of maximal effectiveness for both individual firms and the collective industry would (a) reinforce current smokers, inducing them to continue smoking rather than quit, and/or (b) attract starters. This would retain the current clientele and recruit an ongoing influx of starters to replace those quitting and dying. If these are not both accomplished, any

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inter-firm or inter-brand competition over market share would be a fight to divide a rapidly shrinking business. The most important inter-firm competition for market share occurs in the battle to attract starters, for once brand loyalties are soon established for this addictive product, business becomes very "locked in". Cigarettes enjoy phenomenally high brand loyalty, the highest of all consumer products.³ A relatively low rate of brand switching is the norm, usually 10% or less.⁴⁻⁷ Therefore, the competition for and successful recruitment of starters is key to long term prosperity of both the individual firms and the collective industry, as is the reassurance and resulting increased retention of existing smokers.

Smokers' needs: reassurance

By the 1970s, health authorities in the US, UK, Canada and many other countries had issued official reports, school education programs had begun, and warnings were appearing on packaging and advertising. In some jurisdictions advertising was no longer appearing on radio and television except through event sponsorships and product placement.

The growing public consciousness and concern about the health consequences of smoking constituted a major threat to the economic welfare of the cigarette firms. Health concerns could increase quitting rates and reduce the volume of new starters beginning to smoke in each year. Even content smokers are subject to reminders that their smoking is offensive to others or risking their health. These reminders and reflections produce what psychologists and consumer researchers call cognitive dissonance—sets of internally inconsistent, conflicted attitudes. One of advertising's common functions is to reassure existing consumers that they have done the right thing, therefore reducing this cognitive dissonance.

This can be seen clearly in the Canadian trial documents. "There is little doubt that the constant reminders of a possible association between smoking and health has had and will have a long term detrimental effect on the cigarette industry. The future long term effects of anti-smoking publicity will most likely be seen in a continuing reduced incidence and frequency of smoking rather than brand switching."⁸ Cigarette firms now face a market where many smokers are questioning their "habit" for health and economic reasons. The present anti-smoking climate has made smokers defensive about smoking both to themselves and to others. "These attitudes result in smokers requiring some reassurance about the social acceptability of smoking."⁹

The threat from health concerns of smokers and would be smokers is exacerbated by the contemporary general interest in health and fitness. "We believe that the qualitative level of smoker's distress is escalating. This direct pressure is complemented by the fact that Canadians are increasingly obsessed by lifestyle. Spearheaded by a baby boom generation that is committed to living forever and is feeling the

first twinges of age, the population is increasingly turning from alcohol, dietary fats, low exercise, etc. The fundamental indictment of tobacco is compounded by the current social environment."¹⁰

Research sophistication on current and potential smokers

The potential impact of cigarette advertising was greatly enhanced by careful research to identify the effective appeals and executions, leaving nothing to chance or misguided judgement. The cigarette industry has long employed state of the art market research activities in support of its advertising decisions. A Canadian firm in the early 1970s showed that it had as much research motivation and sophistication as the US firms. It supported a large university study to find personality correlates with cigarette brand preferences. Because of its methodological sophistication, highlights were reported in the academic literature. Its principal finding was that "the relationship [between personality and preferences] . . . was particularly marked among the working class respondents with low self-confidence".¹¹

The amount and variety of trade research done to aid the advertising and promotional process for cigarettes is considerable. The techniques range from the pedestrian to the esoteric, from simple questions and discussion to elaborate large surveys, to high technology observation devices. Most of the studies seek insight into the psychological dynamics of potential consumers, and their perceptions, interpretations, and recall of advertisements. The consumer research identifies the needs, interests and concerns of target audiences so that advertising can "position" the product offering in terms that the target audience will find relevant and appealing.

Even apparently small factors are researched in great detail. A pre-test of creative work for a single medium, like outdoor billboards, can lead to reports presenting several hundred pages of tables of data. For a medium like outdoor billboards, experiments would expose subjects to various ads for fleeting glimpses using a tachistoscope. After subsequent data gathering, longer exposures might be provided an additional data gathered.¹²

The evaluation of a single ad can lead to a report of nearly 200 pages. An ad is assessed against benchmark data, for performance on factors like: impact; day after recall; persuasion; supportive qualitative communication and comprehension; and product and user imagery communication, and related diagnostics.¹³

Multiple research resources and perspectives are employed for a single brand. Imperial Tobacco pursued Projects Huron and Erie during the early 1980s investigating the market feasibility of a product that blended American and Canadian tobacco. The target market for Project Huron was "principally young males 15-25".¹⁴ Extensive research was done on this target population, and their reactions to prototype recipes, packaging, brand positioning, advertising, and reasons for quitting the brand

after sampling. At least 33 different studies were executed in a four year period [1982 to 1985], employing at least six different outside research contractors: Adcom Research; Centre de Recherches Contemporaines Limitee; COGEM Inc Marketing; Groupe Innova; Kwechansky Marketing Research; and Realities Canadiennes.¹⁵

RJR-M shows a similar thoroughness in its use of research. Market research activities guiding one advertising campaign began with a relatively qualitative study of a few subjects, identifying their desired self-image, and exploring their reactions to concept boards (sketches of ads), and packaging. This was followed by more in-depth interviews with a larger and more representative sample, testing the attractiveness of the brand “positioning”, and obtaining further direction for creative development. Additional in-depth interviews probed for consumer reactions to alternative advertising art work, repeating this sort of research at various stages as the art work developed from rough to more finished quality. A test market fine tuned the marketing strategy before national launch. Tracking studies followed the advertising’s success at gaining brand awareness, trial purchasing, market acceptance or rejection among various groups, brand loyalty, and repeat purchase patterns.¹⁶

Segmentation analysis

Marketing strategists and managers recognise the human diversity of the markets they sell to. In recognising various types (segments) of consumers, marketing programs and promotions can better target the specific needs of target groups. This segmentation approach yields more efficiency (economic use of resources) and effectiveness (realising desired results) than would be the result of a single undifferentiated effort aimed at the “average” member of the mass market. (Introductory marketing students are sometimes reminded that the average consumer has one testicle.) Knowing the idiosyncrasies, attitudes, needs and “hot buttons” of identified targets allows for product design and advertising that is far more likely to elicit favourable consumer responses.

The research and resulting “positioning” for specific brands occurs in the context of the firm’s understanding of the segmentation structure of the entire market, and the overall product mix strategy—the development of a variety of product “positions” for the various market segments that may exist. The RJR-M “Family segmentation: segment descriptor study” illustrates the types of data generated, the analytical procedures employed, and the insights obtained in segmentation analyses.¹⁷ This document is a summary set of descriptive exhibits based on the 330 paged “Multi-brand tracking, brand family and smoker segmentation” prepared by ABM Research Ltd for RJR-M.¹⁸ This research effort used three complementary approaches in the effort to segment the cigarette market.

The first approach to identifying segments measured how various brands were perceived by collecting data for 16 brand families across

a series of 24 “product user imagery statements”. Subjects indicated, on a seven point scale, the extent to which a brand and/or brand user was or was not perceived to have various attributes. Attribute items included: modern person, sociable person, likes challenges, sophisticated, intelligent, self assured, adventurous, independent, well off, city dweller, younger, and popular. These image data “were subject to a perceptual mapping operation which enabled us to identify five family clusters or segments”. These were labelled with identifiers such as “masculine” (for example, Player’s and Export A), “popular/urban” (for example, duMaurier) or “concerned” (for example, Vantage).

The second approach, called “tobacco-graphics”, clustered consumers based on data showing reactions to 28 statements reflecting attitudes toward smoking. Sample statements included: “I smoke automatically without being aware of it”; “In general, you are more acceptable to people if you don’t smoke”; “There are brands of cigarettes I wouldn’t smoke because of what others might think”; “If a number of my friends smoked a particular brand, I might consider switching to it”; and “I pay attention to what is said in cigarette advertising”. These data, when analysed simultaneously, also yielded five clusters of about equal size. These segments were identified as “experimenters”, “latent quitters”, “unselective habituals”, “selective habituals”, and “ostriches”. “Latent quitters” were characterised as: “Do not enjoy smoking; claim to be habitual smokers; are health concerned; and brand loyal”. “Ostriches” are those who “are not health concerned; are not concerned about non-smokers; enjoy smoking; are not experimental and have strong commitment to [their] regular brand”. Half (48%) of the “ostriches” are in Quebec. They are the least well educated and have relatively low household incomes. Some 39% of “ostriches” smoke Export A or Player’s, but only 1% smoke brands like Vantage, Accord, Medallion or Viscount.^{17 18}

In the third parallel effort identifying segments, consumers were clustered based on their answers to 74 statements dealing with attitudes towards life in general. This identified six segments: “status seekers”, “affluent progressives”, “achievers”, “economically burdened conservatives”, “sex role traditionalists”, and “geriatrics”. “Status seekers”, for example, were the “emotional response group; appearance conscious; . . . peer influenced”. “Geriatrics”, on the other hand, are described as “inward looking, home oriented, not concerned with appearance, not active socially, no future goals, not achievement oriented, not peer influenced, and do not consider themselves leaders”.¹⁷

In addition to these three data bases used to define segments, much additional data were also gathered to provide a profile of the interests and behaviours of segment members. Thus questions were also included in the areas of “leisure time pursuits, media consumption, drinking of alcoholic beverages, vehicle owner-

ship, clothing, and personality descriptors that respondents would like to see applied to themselves". Media consumption data, as an example, measured the frequency of exposure to the major media: newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. For each of these, the frequency of exposure to various types of programming or sections was measured, as in newspaper sections like local news, national news, international news, editorials, travel, sports, entertainment, classified, women's section, business, and comics. Leisure time activities were measured for 64 different types, ranging from visiting friends to playing rugby, and including home improvement projects, contact sports, amusement parks, exercise, bowling, needlecrafts, racetracks, church activities, opera, windsurfing, etc.^{17 18}

Two segments that got attention

Much of the attention in the advertising campaigns of both ITL and RJR-M focused on the segments of concerned smokers ("latent quitters") and the young starters ("new users"). The dual interest in reinforcing existing smokers and recruiting new smokers is shown in many of the documents, with brand switchers of tertiary importance. RJR-M's 1979 annual business plan sought "to reassure all full flavour smokers and convince first time smokers".¹⁹ RJR-M's "Annual Business Plan, 1980" for Canada states: "The primary objective is to maintain current brand users. Secondly, Export A has always had strong appeal to young adult smokers and this important source of business should continue to be supported. Full flavour switchers represent a smaller tertiary objective."²⁰

The F88 marketing plan of ITL notes the particular strategic importance of the youth segment: "If the last 10 years have taught us anything, it is that the industry is dominated by the companies who respond most effectively to the needs of younger smokers. Our efforts on these brands will remain on maintaining their relevance to smokers in these younger groups in spite of the [poor] share performance they may develop among older smokers."²¹

Recruiting the young

RESEARCHING THE YOUNG

Both ITL and RJR-M have generated many studies and advertising campaigns focused on starters. Capturing a significant share of the starters market yields significant long run returns, either through brand loyalty or down switching to seemingly lighter or milder versions of the same brand. The 1971 Matinee marketing plan states: "Young smokers represent the major opportunity group for the cigarette industry. We should therefore determine their attitudes to smoking and health and how this might change over time."¹⁸

The Marketing Research Library list of ITL shows that in 1982, for example, they commissioned four such studies from either Kwechansky Marketing Research or Multi-Reso Inc. In 1987 a major study was done by Creative Research entitled "Youth Target Study '87", with four volumes of results, the

summary document and three additional volumes providing tabular data on demographics (volume 1), lifestyles (volume 2), and the results of more customised research (volume 3).²²

PROJECT 16

Imperial's "Project 16" researched 16 and 17 year olds in the fall (autumn) of 1977. It was described in a follow up study as a "memorable project" with the purpose of understanding "why do young people start smoking, and how do they feel about being smokers . . . The results were in depth, revealing, at times even fraught with drama in glimpses of the baring of that much investigated but still mysterious adolescent psyche".²³ Project 16 was conducted at hotels, with "closed circuit television observation facilities in use for observers from Imperial Tobacco, McKim Advertising Limited, and Spitzer Mills and Bates (Imperial's ad agencies)".²⁴

"Serious efforts to learn to smoke occur between ages 12 and 13 in most cases." "The adolescent seeks to display his new urge for independence with a symbol, and cigarettes are such a symbol." "However intriguing smoking was at 11, 12 or 13, by the age of 16 or 17 many regretted their use of cigarettes for health reasons and because they felt unable to stop smoking when they want to." Neither teachers nor health warnings inhibited starters. "Teachers who admonish students about smoking are not listened to." The fine print Canadian health warning of the time was perceived as laughable. "The 'avoid inhaling' words are singled out for the strongest derision since smoking a cigarette in this way is seen as a waste and, in their word, 'goofy'."²³

PROJECT PLUS/MINUS

Imperial's subsequent studies sought additional insight into the teenager's perception of the health risks of smoking, and their frustrated desires to quit. It was also interested in brand selection "in particular as regards the view of light brands as potential substitutes for quitting". It concluded that: "Starters no longer disbelieve the dangers of smoking, but they almost universally assume these risks will not apply to themselves because they will not become addicted. Once addiction does take place, it becomes necessary for the smoker to make peace with the accepted hazards. This is done by a wide range of rationalizations . . . The desire to quit seems to come earlier now than before, even prior to the end of high school. In fact, it often seems to take hold as soon as the recent started admits to himself that he is hooked on smoking. However, the desire to quit, and actually carrying it out, are two quite different things, as the would-be quitter soon learns."²⁵

Quebecois subjects expressed similar attitudes about their cigarette habit. The primary researcher, Alain Olivier, a psychosociologist, concluded: "They are sorry that they ever started smoking because it's harmful but they feel somewhat trapped. They are constantly reminded of their lack of willpower. To

defend themselves they tend to put on a jaunty air. They do this to save face because they would really like to quit and not appear to be slaves to their cigarettes . . . Those who have tried to give up smoking have found the experience very painful. It made them realize that, although they thought they could quit easily, they have become slaves to their cigarettes."²⁶

PROJECT STEREO

The final report for ITL's combined projects Stereo and Phoenix notes that "the young age of the subjects has a lot to do with what they see". "Their view of the world directs our attention to this re-emerging emphasis on affection without the fear of being hurt, on sharing as a means of fighting failure, and on helping each other as a vehicle for interaction . . . [advertisers have] considerable creative latitude if they wish to penetrate the younger generation's realm of concerns . . . That knowledge can not only help in designing effective advertising strategies and focused executions, but also in updating image measurement that are currently being used by the company."²⁷

PROJECT VIKING

Project Viking, whose stated goal was "expansion of the market", included substantial research about starters.²⁸⁻³¹ This research compared "experimenter/rejectors" and "non-experimenters" with "starters". The 1022 subjects of this research were 15 years old and up. Demographic information was collected about their age, sex, type of employment, role if unemployed (for example, student, homemaker), family composition, absence of male/female head of household, level of education, and household income. Whether non-starters came from particular family environments was addressed by measuring adult smoking, family pressures about starting, and smoking by teenage peers. Other data were gathered about memberships in clubs, unions or other groups or associations, the kind of car driven, and usage of a variety of consumer goods. Oral habits were measured with data on consumption of coffee, alcoholic beverages, chewing gum, and breath mints. Lifestyle was measured along 15 dimensions such as *laissez-faire*, workaholic, wimpishness, or dropout. Personal health was measured for diseases of concern, symptoms experienced, serious medical problems and personal fitness, with starters experiencing above average amounts of dry mouth, shortness of breath, excess phlegm, chest pains, and serious breathing or respiratory problems. Expected age of death was measured, and height, weight and shape of physique observed.²⁸

Attitudes and knowledge about association between smoking and health were also studied in great depth. The images of smokers, quitters, and never starters were measured along 17 dimensions. Data on the image of tobacco products was gathered on 25 scales. Subjects responded to a variety of scenarios involving public smoking. Advocacy issues were tapped by measuring awareness of

anti-smoking campaigns and the credibility of various sources of information, such as doctors, teachers, government, and manufacturers.²⁸

Perhaps the most striking component to this massive research effort was the measurement of personality traits, using a sophisticated clinical psychometric tool based on self reported data known as Cattell's 16 personality factors. The subtlety of this research instrument is evidenced by the nature of its dimensions, or scales, and their extremes or end points. The first scale ranges from "sizothymia" (reserved) to "affectothymia" (warmhearted). Another scale measures the extent to which someone displays "desurgency" (sober) to "surgency" (happy-go-lucky). Other scales have ranges of "harria" (tough minded) to "premsia" (tender minded); "alaxia" (trusting) to "protension" (suspicious); or "threctia" (shy) to "parmia" (adventuresome). Still other scales measure (in more common language) intelligence, ego strength, submissiveness, shrewdness, imaginativeness, guilt proneness, conservatism, self sufficiency, and self discipline.²⁸

Advertising to the young

PLAYERS VERSUS EXPORT A

These two "full flavour" brands compete head to head for male starters, just as Marlboro and Camel competes for them in the US and elsewhere. In recent years, Imperial's Player's brand has been getting much the better of RJR-M's Export A. Both firms seem to agree that this is because of Player's successful pre-emptive modernisation of the masculinity in Player's advertising imagery.

ITL's Project Stereo studied "today's meaning and relevance of masculinity [for Player's] and of materialism [for duMaurier]". It found that both Player's and its closest rival Export A showed strong, masculine, hardy men, alone in the fresh air of the outdoors, engaged in physical effort. The brand images for Player's and Export A were, however, contrasted as follows, with the Player's image mentioned first: choosing to be alone versus being a "loner"; masculine, but softer man versus macho, rugged, stern; able to show feelings versus can't show feelings; can get along with women versus no women; better job and steady worker versus working class, blue collar; adventurous and willing to try new things versus daredevil; independent, strong willed versus doesn't care about society.³²

PLAYER'S

"Since 1971, ITL's marketing strategy has been to position Player's as a masculine trademark for younger males. It has been our belief that lifestyle imagery conveying a feeling of independence/freedom should be used to trigger the desire for individuality usually felt by maturing young males."³³ Project Stereo provided creative guidelines for the effective display of freedom and independence in imagery with appeal to a young market. It recommended showing people "free to choose friends, music, clothes, own activities, to be alone if he wishes", who can "manage alone"



Figure 1 Exhibit 1: Player's contemporary lifestyle (solo wind surfer).

and be “close to nature” with “nobody to interfere, no boss/parents”, and self reliant enough to experience solitude without loneliness.³²

The thinking behind the 1980s advertising for Player's is interesting for the corporate sensitivities to the subtleties in crafting ad imagery. One document outlines advertising where the scenes are outdoors, with activities that “should not require undue physical exertion.” “They should not be representative of an elitist's sport . . . one which is practised by young people 16 to 20 years old . . . The activity should not be limited to a certain social class or inaccessible to our target group because of modest means . . . the chosen scene should ideally [sic] depict a pause or moment of relaxation . . . However, the scene may show participants in action if the moment of product consumption can be assumed to be close to the



Figure 2 Exhibit 2: Export A rough blue collar imagery (trucker).

scene depicted . . . The people should appear to be less than 25 years old.”³³

The endorsement of the recommendations is evidenced by their being echoed in the subsequent documents. “The ads will continue to carry imagery visuals to promote the consumer benefits; i.e. to reflect the brand's popularity among young people, to demonstrate the social acceptability of these brands among the target consumers' peer group, and to place the products in scenarios and setting which invite the target consumer to easily associate a Player's brand with a pleasant lifestyle to which he will identify.” The target market will “emphasise the under 20 year old group in its imagery reflection of lifestyle [activities] tastes but must be cautious in terms of alienating the older.” “The illustration will visualise attractive young people engaged in leisure activities in the ‘Great Canadian/Quebecois outdoors’, accessible in all respects, to those people we identify as target consumers . . . added to the leisure scenario is [sic] scenic values . . . Models in Player's advertising must be 25 years or older, but should appear to be between 18 and 25 years of age. Their appearance, attitudes, etc, should reflect contemporary tastes and style of a popular and affordable nature” (fig1).^{34 35}

EXPORT A

The advertising plan for Export A called for the advertising copy and creative to be relevant to “young adult males who require the assurance of the Export imagery to promote their desired self image . . . semi-skilled with below average education . . . desirous of masculinity, independence, ruggedness and determination as their self image” (fig 2).³⁶ In the early 1980s, documents mention “optimising product and user imagery of Export A against young starter smokers” and an “offensive Export A strategy against young adult male starter smokers”.³⁷

The Export Family Strategy Document concludes that “Export A is in an accelerated decline primarily because its imagery has not kept pace with the psychological needs of today's young male smokers . . . Export A currently has a highly polarised image as old-fashioned, low class, blue collar, less popular/sophisticated and not as youth oriented as the Player's or duMaurier families . . . While the 1981 Consumer Wants study shows that masculinity is a key psychological need . . . we have continued to define masculinity as rough, tough and rugged to the extreme. Values which may have been important in the 60s and 70s but are seen as uncouth in the 80s.”³⁸

“Very young starter smokers choose Export A because it provides them with an instant badge of masculinity, appeals to their rebellious nature, and establishes their position amongst their peers. As they mature, they gain more confidence . . . acquire other symbols of their masculinity . . . and strive for social and peer group acceptance . . . Export A is declining in its ability to hold the young adult males as they go through the maturing process, due

to its outdated irrelevant image.” This led to the recommendation to “contemporise [sic] the user imagery” while maintaining a distinctiveness from Player’s by images of a male who is “independent, adventurous and has the qualities of natural leadership as characterised by peer group acceptance; an achievement orientation; charismatic youthful virility and self confidence . . . women are attracted to these men because of their youthful virility, independence and spirit of adventure”.³⁸

Communicating peer and social approval

Export A had not yet been fully “re-positioned” as of Fall (autumn) 1987, when the “Export A Brand, Long Term Strategy” noted the continuing loss of market share, and the negativity of the “blue collar” image for the prime prospect group. The target market is described under “Whose behaviour are we trying to affect?” as giving emphasis on “new users . . . establishing their independence and their position in society.” “They look for peer group acceptance . . . symbols that will help reinforce their independence and individuality . . . this group is conscious of changing norms within society, recognising the increasing societal concerns surrounding cigarette consumption and secondary smoke hazards. Therefore it is necessary for them to find an environment that is relaxed and comfortable . . . Export supports the love of the outdoors, while delivering a sense of relaxation, contentment and comfort . . . a brand that is keeping up with the times. Lighter and more contemporary. A brand you can relax with and enjoy.”³⁹

The emphasis on relaxation to communicate a reassurance about the social acceptance of smoking stems from the November 1986 “Key findings and communications implications, brand family and smoker segmentation study [85]”. This document gives emphasis to the problem of social acceptance. “Export’s masculine, rugged image needs to be placed in a more social/socially acceptable context com-

municating that it’s alright to smoke, especially Export”.⁴⁰

Other recent advertising efforts have also been concerned with social approval and peer influences, and sought to communicate peer acceptance for some brands.

PROJECT STING

The 1988 summaries of the Imperial’s research projects includes one with the code name STING. “Project STING will address the potential for developing a proposition with overtly masculine imagery, targeted at young males . . . Young males are going through a stage where they are seeking to express their independence and individuality under constant pressure of being accepted by their peers.”⁴¹

TEMPO

The tailoring of advertising to the young person’s need for peer acceptance is also seen in RJR-M’s efforts, most notably that for the Tempo brand, developed under the code name Third Family. The target group was characterised as “extremely influenced by their peer group . . . influenced by the brand choice of their friends.” “Third Family will differentiate itself from competitive brands by major usage of imagery which portrays the positive social appeal of peer group acceptance. Third family imagery portrays relaxing and enjoyable social interaction where acceptance by the group provides a sense of belonging and security.”⁴²

The launch of TEMPO was concentrated in the large urban population centres (100 000+) of Ontario and Quebec, beginning in Ontario in September 1985. The media plan called for heavy spending to obtain “high advertising frequency and presence against the target group”. Nearly C\$2.75 million dollars was budgeted (C\$2 725 800), primarily for magazines and out-of-home media. Magazines such a Flare and Marquee were chosen “to reinforce the sociability aspects of the campaign”. “New generation magazines [were chosen] to increase advertising frequency in an editorial environment specifically designed to reach young people” (Now Magazine, Quebec Rock, Croc, etc). The majority of the budget, however, went to the out-of-home media. These commanded over C\$2 million dollars, or more than three quarters of the total, for “backlights, posters, mall posters and permanents”. These were the primary advertising medium because of their “dramatic impact through size, quality reproduction, efficient reach of the target group, excellent advertising frequencies, [and] targeted positioning of key youth locations/meeting places in the proximity of theatres, records stores, video arcades, etc” (fig 3).⁴³

RJR-M began their evaluation research in December 1985, when the product had been on the market for only a few weeks. The results were mixed, and not entirely encouraging. “The present anti-smoking climate has made smokers defensive about smoking both to themselves and others. This has resulted in a preference for smoking to be a relaxing,



Figure 3 Exhibit 3: TEMPO peer group support (reciprocated shoulder hugs).

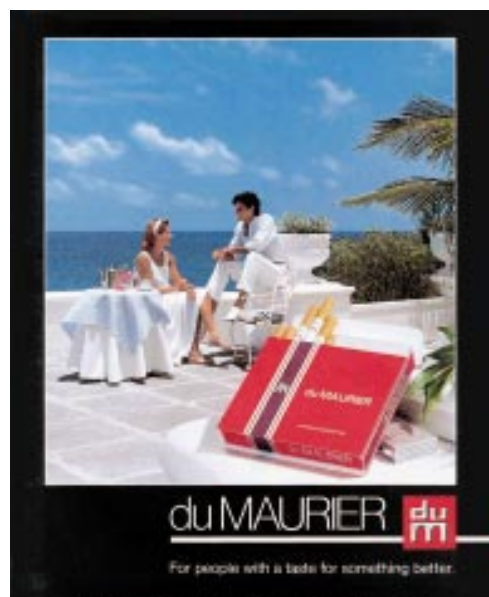


Figure 4 Exhibit 4: duMaurier aspirational lifestyle (Greek ocean side holiday).

understated activity, which makes the smoker inconspicuous and less prone to social censure . . . These attitudes result in smokers requiring some reassurance about both the social acceptability of smoking [and smoking a particular brand] . . . TEMPO's advertising does not seem to have given this support . . . and the brand's visibility may make it a little uncomfortable for smokers . . . TEMPO's advertising is seen as: (a) highly intrusive [for example, all over the place, highly colourful, pushy], which may be too visible for comfort; (b) youth oriented [for example, for teenagers, people under 25, new smokers] . . .; (c) lacking identity with the target groups . . . appear to have few redeeming qualities except an interest in fashion and trends." Put briefly, it seems that TEMPO's advertising was too trendy and heavy handed in its style and deployment, becoming transparently interested in a youthful market. This backfired because adolescents are decidedly disinterested in symbols of adolescence, wanting symbols of the adulthood they aspire to.⁴⁴

The images used and their importance

Positive lifestyle images are believed by industry marketing executives to effect the continued social acceptability of smoking.⁴⁵ Imagery rehearses and shapes the perceptions of smoking, both in general and a specific brand, among not only the smoking population, but also among their family, friends and associates, whether smokers or not. Everyone is exposed to the images, such as those for Player's and Export A, which portrays the smoker as attractive and autonomous, accepted and admired, athletic and at home in nature.

"In a market with minimal product differentiation, advertising becomes a disproportionately important part of the marketing mix as compared to most other mass consumer products", and "without price differentials and

without easily perceptible product differentiation [except for extremes, for example, Matinee versus Player's] consumer choice is influenced almost entirely by imagery factors."⁴⁶

As already noted, a campaign targeting youthful audiences featured solitary wind surfers, skiers, and mountain climbers. These are activities of a youthful nature that also communicate a feeling of independence and freedom, in settings of excellent scenic value where the environment is pure and pristine. The total impression is the very picture of health, and the risk taking athleticism and autonomous independence make these brand images particularly appealing to young people seeking autonomy and its symbols.⁴⁷⁻⁵¹ Other campaigns reinforcing existing older smokers (for example, exhibit 4) use lifestyle imagery depicting aspirational settings, in material terms, liberation from daily routine, demonstration of "arrival" at a desirable income plateau, and carefree relaxation (fig 4).⁵²

Reassuring the "concerned"

Cigarette marketers of many brands felt that their advertising should reassure smokers of their brands, and that it was necessary to do so frequently. For example: "The Export smoker must also be constantly reassured that it is alright to smoke. Especially Export."⁵³ The need for reassurance was particularly intense among "concerned smokers". These people were conflicted between their health concerns and their continuance of smoking. The 275 paged Vantage usage and attitude study of 1983 noted that some smokers do not feel comfortable at all about smoking and perhaps even harbour some guilt over the fact that they smoke. "Despite their claimed concern about tar and nicotine levels, Vantage smokers continue to be one of "heaviest" smoking groups in the market".⁵⁴

"Daily per capita consumption is consistently increasing suggesting that as smokers trade down to lower tar brands, they require more cigarettes to achieve the same relative smoking satisfaction . . . Industry volume trends indicate movement from high to medium to low tar segment brands; . . . the industry is placing dramatic media effort behind the "lower" segments in an attempt to expand that end of the market."⁵⁵

A typical pattern is for concerned smokers to down switch, changing to "lighter, milder" lower yield products within a brand family. "As consumers shift from full flavour cigarettes to brands with lower tar and nicotine levels, they will desire as much flavour and satisfaction as possible while easing their concerns about the smoking/health controversy."⁵⁶

This presents a dilemma to the manufacturer, since flavour and satisfaction are dependent on tar and nicotine delivery. "There are a large number of reasons why people smoke and chiefest [sic] of these is probably the physiological satisfaction provided by the nicotine level of the product."⁵⁷ For Vantage, the solution to this dilemma was a cigarette stronger than its image suggested. "The low tar/health aspect satisfied their psychological need while the physical need is satisfied with a

10 mg cigarette.”⁵⁸ The ITL team felt that Vantage “‘cheated’ on the consumer with their ‘health’ claim versus their actual tar delivery.”⁵⁹

For many smokers, psychological conflicts about smoking have increased in recent years due to new information about the health effects of second hand smoke, changing social norms, and reduced consumer confidence that low yield cigarettes are indeed safer. “Socially aware, this group is conscious of changing norms within society, recognising the increasing societal concerns surrounding cigarette consumption and secondary smoke hazards.”⁶⁰

ITL recently noted some loss of consumer confidence in low yield cigarettes. “There is no question that the majority of smokers in Canada are highly dissonant when it comes to reconciling their attitudes with their behaviour on smoking . . . the evidence increasingly suggests that the bloom is off the rose. The majority of smokers either disagree or are uncertain that lower tar cigarettes are ‘safer’ than higher tar cigarettes . . . a market that used to quite clearly see the health benefit of lower tar products increasingly lumps together all cigarettes as ‘dangerous’ with only marginal levels of improvement associated with even ultra low delivery products.”⁶¹

Advertising to health concerns

Several brands have been positioned against the concerned smoker, seeking their brand to be perceived as responsive to the health concern by virtue of being “light” or “mild” and to be perceived as an intelligent response to the health concern.

MATINEE

“Due to continuing anti-smoking publicity, the public continues to be aware of and concerned with the suggested hazards of cigarette smoking. Matinee then is in an ideal position to take advantage of this situation with its low tar and nicotine and ‘safer for health’ propositions.” They adopted a strategy “to capitalise on present smoker awareness of Matinee as a low tar and nicotine cigarette and exploit this USP [unique selling proposition] in a positive manner in relation to smoking and health”.⁸ “Retain Matinee mild image so as to be well positioned to attract new smokers as they become increasingly aware of the smoking/health controversy.”⁶²

MEDALLION

Media schedules were timed to coincide with the peaking of consumer concerns. “Advertising should be sensitive to predictable seasonality, e.g. an ensured presence during the New Year’s ‘quitting/switching to milder cigarettes’ period and unpredictable seasonality [sic], e.g. a short term, heavy-up schedule following the Minister of Health and Welfare’s report on smoking and health.”⁶³

PLAYER’S EXTRA LIGHT

“Player’s Extra Light continues to be positioned as a milder, therefore healthier, version of Player’s Light. It remains a health oriented alternative for interested Player’s smokers.”⁶⁴

VANTAGE—AN INTELLIGENT CHOICE?

The target or “prime prospect”, the Vantage brand/user image was viewed as “female, white collar, extremely concerned about their health, and would like to quit smoking”.⁶⁵ A Vantage ad of 1982 which ran in both the US and Canada, “To smoke or not to smoke”, stated: “Vantage is the cigarette for people who may have second thoughts about smoking and are looking for a way to do something about it”.⁶⁶

The basic strategy was to position Vantage as an intelligent choice, “positioning Vantage as the only contemporary choice for intelligent smokers”.⁶⁷ The tactic was to influence consumer perceptions. The 1983 media plan included the objective “to establish a consumer perception that vantage is a contemporary cigarette for intelligent smokers”.⁶⁸ Apparently this was accomplished, for a few years later the goal for a target audience with a “high amount of quitters” was “to maintain consumer perception that Vantage is a contemporary cigarette for intelligent smokers”.⁶⁹

The 1982 Vantage family creative campaign stated: “The concept of the ‘Contemporary Taste’ campaign is that ‘Vantage will be shown as intrinsic to the contemporary lifestyle led by intelligent individuals pursuing rewarding creative activities’ . . . Research indicates that a positioning against ‘intelligence’ is extremely aspirational to the Vantage source smoker. Likewise, that ‘intelligent people’ are best symbolised as individuals pursuing creative occupations.” “In the initial campaign stage the product will be positioned as ‘hero’ to transfer imagery and enjoyment values.” Once the campaign and the associative transfer between ‘intelligent people’ and the brand has been established, subsequent ads can reduce the emphasis on the ‘product as hero’ and serve more simply as a reminder and reinforcer of the learned image.”⁷⁰

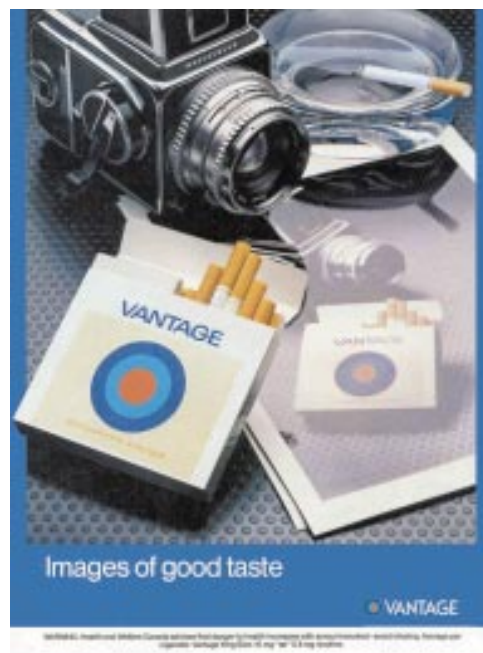


Figure 5 Exhibit 5: Vantage “Images of Good Taste” using inanimate props (Hassleblad camera).



Figure 6 Exhibit 6: Matinee "Picture of Health" (cross country skier)

The "Vantage family copy strategy and platform" stated the brand's psychological "benefit" in terms of being seen as intelligent (fig 5). "Vantage smokers will be perceived as being intelligent urban adults who enjoy or aspire to a progressive cosmopolitan lifestyle. Moreover, their cigarette brand will be viewed as the only contemporary choice for intelligent smokers. As intelligent individuals, they will be seen as self confident, career oriented socially active and cosmopolitan in their outlook on life".⁷¹

Research and image control

Images and ad copy had to be carefully selected least the ads reinforce fears rather than offer reassurance. In 1980 one Vantage ad made direct reference to "what you may not want" from a cigarette only to find it alarmed some readers about cancer. "The fact that a Vantage ad dares to raise the issue of 'what you may not want' generates defensiveness toward smoking in general, and a feeling of discomfort. The reference to the taste of Vantage is lost; overpowered by the implications of tar, nicotine and cancer."⁷²

Individual ads were carefully pretested to insure that the intended message was being communicated, sometimes using a tachistoscope, a device for controlling high speed exposures.⁷³ One tested ad failed to get across the "no need to quit smoking" message intended. "Correct perception of the message as 'no need to quit smoking, if you smoke Vantage' was at a relatively low level."⁷⁴ Other ads were more successful at communicating health without making explicit health claims. Another ad, using the phrase "Smoke Smart" was perceived to mean better for you and safe.⁷⁵

MATINEE

The imagery chosen was described: "Our woman is front and centre. She is unquestionably the star. She is happy and healthy. She is

not a physical fitness fanatic but loves to take part in healthy fun activities." The planning documents governing the photography to generate these images are known as the "shoot books". Publicite BCP Ltee generated shoot books for the Matinee campaign that ran during most of the 1980s featuring models riding bicycles, skiing, and windsurfing. Each of these identify a creative strategy that "will focus on depicting active forms of leisure that are in keeping with people who value a sense of physical well-being".⁷⁶ The plan for the skiing photo called for the photography to be done at Parc Maisonneuve, Montreal. Five casting agencies were contacted in the model search and a selection was tested for their cross country skiing ability and overall appearance. A photographer who had done previous work for Imperial was hired. The budget for this one photograph was C\$52 210 in the early 1980s. Similar efforts for generating the photograph of a bicyclist and a wind surfer cost C\$37 221 and C\$45 250, respectively.^{77 78}

Conclusion

Cigarette advertising has shown remarkable power to create a demand for cigarettes, greatly promoting its popularity, and inducing far more people than would otherwise be the case to become smokers. This was most evident in Canada and the US era historically, when promotional spending increased the total market size dramatically, particularly among women. In the contemporary era, with growing knowledge of the health consequences of smoking, the functions, level of financial support, and accomplishments of cigarette advertising have been equally impressive. It has sought to induce large numbers of young people to view smoking as attractive, counteracting health education. It has sought to induce concerned smokers to continue smoking rather than quit, despite their manifest concerns and intentions.

As illustrated by the practices of the Canadian affiliates of BAT and RJR, the research that guides the advertising process has grown increasingly sophisticated in its data gathering technologies, statistical inference, and psychological subtleties. Careful and extensive research has been employed to all stages in the process of conceiving, developing, refining, and deploying cigarette advertising strategy. It has provided considerable psychological insight into starters and smokers, such as their motivations, perceptions, attitudes, interests, and responses to test advertising. The diversity of consumers has led to multiple market segmentation analyses and strategies, identifying market segments like "ostriches". Two segments commanding much management attention have been "starters" and "concerned smokers". For starter brands, images are created to communicate independence, freedom, and peer acceptance to young targets. The advertising images portray smokers as attractive and autonomous, accepted and admired, athletic and at home in nature. For "lighter" brands directed at smokers with health concerns, ads image a sense of

well being, harmony with nature, and a consumer's self image as intelligent.

Because ads are public and not distributed solely to identified target segments, the image management and control portrays cigarettes with images that shape and reinforce everyone's perceptions. Seeing imagery is an experience that rehearses and shapes the perceptions of smoking, both in general and of a specific brand, among non-smokers and smokers alike, as well as their families, friends, and associates. Advertising thereby promotes greater social acceptability of smoking than would otherwise exist, and this is an explicit objective of corporate policy.

Advertising and promotional activities and communication serve to induce many changes in the public's perceptions creating: more positive attitudes toward smoking and smokers; less consciousness and fear of any unhealthy consequences of smoking; a stronger self image among smokers; more confidence of some social support for smoking; and perceptions that smoking is a cultural commonplace to be taken for granted. To smokers it is a reminder and reinforcer, while to non-smokers it is a temptation and a teacher of tolerance.

Advertising and promotion controls and regulation, and even total ad bans, are still only partial remedies to the problem of the marketing of cigarettes, with slower and smaller impact that would be realised with a more comprehensive demarketing program. Demarketing, a coherent marketing programme to decrease rather than increase consumption, would involve all elements of the marketing mix, affecting not just advertising but also other elements such as packaging, distribution, pricing, product design, public education, and addiction assistance. With a ban of advertising, however, fewer of tomorrow's children will be induced to become starters, fewer will become concerned smokers, and potential quitters will be dissuaded from making attempts to quit, and fewer of those attempting to quit will be tempted by advertising to resume.

Epilogue

Canada's first effort in the late 1980s to curtail tobacco promotion substantially was ultimately found unconstitutional, more for legal than substantive reasons. This decision was reached even though the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court did find the corporate documents partially described above very telling and contradictory to the industry's claims. "Perhaps the most compelling evidence concerning the connection between advertising and consumption can be found in the internal marketing documents prepared by the tobacco manufacturers themselves. Although the [tobacco] appellants steadfastly argue that their marketing efforts are directed solely at maintaining or expanding brand loyalty among adult smokers, these documents show otherwise. In particular, the following general conclusions can be drawn from these documents: the tobacco companies are concerned about a shrinking tobacco market . . . [and] must reassure current smokers and make their product attractive to the young and to non-

smokers; they also recognise that advertising is critical to maintaining the size of the market because it serves to reinforce the social acceptability of smoking by identifying it with glamorous, affluence, youthfulness, and vitality."⁷⁸

This article is based upon material submitted as an expert opinion in: Imperial Tobacco Limitee & RJR-Macdonald Inc c. Le Procureur General du Canada, Requete pour Judgement Declaratoire.

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- 30 ITL Project Viking 111: Product issues [Trail Exhibit #AG-021C]
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- 66 RJR-M Vantage Marketing Strategy Recommendations, February 1982. [Trial Exhibit #AG-205A]
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Yes, indeed. It's fun to be fooled by Camel... by not being told about carcinogens, that there's a small problem about lung cancer after years of use, and quite a few more things besides.



And here are some other tricks we didn't find in the book. Light up, and watch people leave the room. Works every time! Ask a tobacco executive to tell you what "cause" means... wait an hour, and now try and untie the verbal knot he creates. Bet you can't!"