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Marlboro Man goes artisanal?

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After almost a century in the market, Philip Morris International's (PMI) Marlboro stands among the world's top-selling brands.^{1,2} Marlboro's primary visual identity, the iconic chevron and font style, conveys 'the core values of Marlboro's image, such as self-confidence, independence, leadership, strength and adventure.'³ Brand consistency on the pack is one reason why, despite the widespread ban globally on tobacco advertising, Marlboro continues to be highly recognisable.^{4,5}

However, Tobacco Pack Surveillance System (TPackSS)⁶ Indonesia data collection in 2022 identified two Marlboro non-filtered hand-rolled 'crafted' variant packs, Crafted Selection (red pack) and Crafted Authentic (blue pack), that modify the 'Marlboro' font style while maintaining the chevron (figure 1). The packs, collected in Jakarta, are a departure from the traditional serif font associated with rugged, Western-style typography. The



Figure 2 Marlboro packs and stick of the 'Selección Artesanal' (Crafted Selection) variant collected in TPackSS Mexico, 2021. TPackSS, Tobacco Pack Surveillance System.

word 'Marlboro' adopts a stylised sans serif font, with the text sized to follow the top of the chevron. This branding element, where the text 'Marlboro' is inside the chevron, was carried through to cigarette sticks that could serve communicative purposes, a common practice among cigarettes sold in low-income and middle-income countries.⁷

Additionally, the blue pack is particularly unique as it is Marlboro's first rhubarb incense ('klembak menyan' or 'KLM' in Bahasa) cigarette, a traditional cigarette popular among people in rural areas and farmers in Java, Indonesia.^{8,9} The adoption of the unconventional font style with the 'Crafted' and 'Authentic' descriptors for these handmade cigarettes may evoke an artisan aesthetic appeal to consumers.

Priced at 11 000 Indonesian Rupiah (~US\$0.71) for the red pack and 10 000 Indonesian Rupiah (~US\$0.65) for the blue pack, these 'crafted' variants were notably cheaper than the other Marlboro brand variants collected, priced at an average of 32 200 Indonesian Rupiah (~US\$2.09). Although these 'crafted' packs contained 12 sticks, whereas 75% of all unique Marlboro packs collected contained 16 or 20 sticks, the 'crafted' variants were still cheaper than two 12-stick Marlboro non-'crafted' packs that were purchased at 21 000 and 19 700 Indonesian Rupiah.

Similar 'Artesanal' brand variants were found in the TPackSS Mexico collection in 2021 (figure 2). While Indonesia's packs feature an unusual, non-flip top lid, they share the same font style as the Mexico Marlboro 'Artesanal'. They also similarly feature the hand signature of 'Master Blenders' (or 'Expertos en Tabacos' on Mexico packs), which may mislead consumers about the quality of the product. Despite being larger (20 sticks) than



Figure 1 Packs and sticks of Marlboro 'Crafted Selection' (top) and Marlboro 'Crafted Authentic' (bottom) purchased in Jakarta, Indonesia (Tobacco Pack Surveillance System, 2022).



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Indonesia's 'crafted' packs, Mexico's 'Artesanal' packs were also considerably cheaper than non-crafted Marlboro packs collected in the country.

Marlboro's font style has remained consistent despite modifications in packaging that signify brand extensions or variants and flexibility to adapt to the local market. For example, Marlboro 'fresh' variants have featured different sizes of chevron symbols that may communicate a hierarchy of relative harm.¹⁰ There has also been a shift from the original red towards blue or silver pack colours.¹¹ Additionally, in 2007, PMI introduced a Marlboro version of kretek, the most popular cigarette type in Indonesia.^{12 13}

The introduction of the 'crafted' variants could signify a distancing from the established 'Marlboro Man' towards an 'artisanal' and evolving image. This shift reflects the continued expansion of the Marlboro brand and PMI's identity across various portfolios, as has been exemplified by F1's Mission Winnow.¹⁴ Combined with the lower price and unfiltered hand-rolled sticks, these variants, particularly the blue rhubarb cigarette pack, may be designed to appeal to less affluent consumers.¹⁵

Whether this 'artisanal' Marlboro will become popular in Indonesia and will continue to be introduced in other countries has yet to be determined. Nevertheless, it is evident that countering tobacco industry marketing, especially in tobacco packaging, is critical.¹⁶ The only packaging modification that should be acceptable is the implementation of plain and standardised packaging along with larger health warning labels that can prevent and reduce deadly tobacco consumption.¹⁷

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