

Urban marketing to promote disease or health?

Marketing is used to increase the profitability of a company but has the potential to promote health. This article, written by Derek Yach of the Centre for Epidemiological Research in Southern Africa, Medical Research Council, examines marketing trends aimed at the growing black urban population.

New marketing strategies

The marketing of certain products which could have a negative effect on health if used excessively or inappropriately, includes new strategies to stress the safe use of these products. For example, the Red Meat Board recently collaborated on a marketing campaign with the Heart Foundation. The Board agreed to remove visible fat and promote leaner cuts of meat. Similarly, the South African Breweries have started supporting programmes aimed at addressing the safe use of alcohol. These products are being increasingly and aggressively marketed in the growing urban environment and are not hazardous to health unless abused.

In sharp contrast, tobacco with its strong addictive properties, is a major consumer product that is harmful when used as intended. This article will focus on tobacco advertising.

Advertising to recruit smokers or to change brands?

The tobacco industry claims that advertising results in people changing brands and not in the recruitment of new smokers. Several studies, however, show that this is untrue and that the industry needs to advertise in order to recruit new smokers to replace those who quit or die. Studies investigating the impact of both alcohol and tobacco advertisements have found that advertising reinforces consumption of these products, makes it hard for

A clear example of the dangers of sponsorship and dependency was seen in Rembrandt's recent threats to withdraw its funding to the Cape Town City Orchestra because of Cape Town City Council's plans to introduce smoking restrictions in restaurants. Sponsorship by the tobacco industry is aimed not at promoting the welfare of society, but ensuring that publicity is obtained that would enhance the use of its products.

Undermining the health of people in the townships

Over the last few years there has been a steady and sustained increase in the proportion of tobacco advertising revenue being directed at township populations. In 1987, while tobacco advertising constituted 5,3% of all revenue spent on advertising, it made up 16% of radio advertising, 16,3% of billboard advertising, and 56,3% of cinema advertising. The impact of tobacco marketing in South Africa has resulted in 60% of men and 40% of boys (by the age of 15 years) becoming smokers in Cape Town townships. The favourite brands of both groups was similar to the brands advertised on major billboards and radio in those townships. Already the impact of tobacco products on health has been documented in South Africa. By the year 2 000 and beyond, considerable cigarette-related early deaths will occur among the black and "coloured" population.

1. Radio

Radio advertising is a very powerful way of influencing the black market. It is independent of urban/rural status, is relatively cheap, repetitive and is not affected by whether people can read or not.

2. Billboards

Billboard advertising is increasingly sited on South African Transport Services (SATS) properties in the major municipalities. In Cape Town, billboards advertising tobacco products are appearing on all the major transport routes to and from the townships and suburbs. This is in strong contradiction to recent City Council legislation which has committed itself to eliminating tobacco advertising throughout the city.

3. Cinema and print media

Cinema attendance information clearly shows that adverts in cinemas are directed at youth despite denials by the tobacco industry. While the percentage of tobacco advertising in magazines is still relatively low, with increased readership, particularly

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in the black population, it already reaches a very large proportion of the population. By 1987, three of the top ten selling newspapers in the country were specifically aimed at the black population. All of these - *City Press*, *Sowetan* and *Ilanga*, had readership figures of over 120 000 per edition.

Profits at the expense of the health of township residents

The effect of targeting the townships has already been profitable for the tobacco industry. The black market share of household expenditure for cigarettes has increased from 19,7% in 1970, to 33,7% in 1985. Importantly, the location of outlets where cigarettes and tobacco products are predominantly bought shows how successful the industry has been in ensuring township penetration of sales. 72,5% of cigarettes and tobacco products bought by black consumers in 1985 were purchased in the township (as opposed to the city centre) compared to 46,6% for perishable foods, 25% for toiletries and 2,3% for refrigerators and stoves.

Time for action!

The time has clearly come for strong action. One short-term approach suggests that health warnings be placed on all adverts. In South Africa the voluntary agreement between the Tobacco Industry and the government has resulted in a virtually invisible warning on cigarette packets with no health warning attached to advertisements.

In the USA, a further short-term proposal ensures that tobacco adverts contain no photographs or graphics except the company, brand name, price, tar and nicotine level with a health warning.

Further, tobacco advertising should be banned from all billboards, and tobacco companies should not be allowed to advertise indirectly or sponsor sports events.

Calls for a complete ban on tobacco advertising and all forms of tobacco promotion have been made by various health-related organisations internationally. Such international calls have already resulted in 30 countries partly or completely banning the promotion of tobacco products. In South Africa these calls have yet to have an impact.

Advertising alone will not be sufficient to increase the quit rate and stop the number of new smokers entering the industry. Advertising is not the sole cause of adolescent smoking. The reality is that there are many causes and it is necessary to have a coordinated plan which includes a ban on cigarettes, an increase in the overall price of cigarettes and an extensive education programme. (In South Africa, the price of cigarettes has fallen well behind the consumer price index, making them relatively cheaper than many other products.)



Adverts like this one, placed over the steps onto the black train platforms, have successfully targeted the black township population.

Conclusion

The rapidly urbanising areas of South Africa are providing growing opportunities for the marketing of products such as tobacco, which are hazardous to health. Strong measures are needed to curtail their use. There is an urgent need for counter advertising to be used throughout the townships. For this to be successful, smoking needs to be recognised as a threat. Such counter advertising could make use of the major transport media in the country including buses and taxis.

Instead of advertising harmful products, marketing and advertising companies could go a long way to meet their real social responsibility by promoting products that lead to a better quality of life.

Detailed references for this article are available on request from: Critical Health, P.O. Box 16250, Doornfontein, 2028.