

NCI TOBACCO CONTROL MONOGRAPH SERIES

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Major Conclusions

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN PROMOTING AND REDUCING TOBACCO USE

MONOGRAPH NINETEEN

19

A major public health challenge of this century is finding a way to harness the powerful influence of the media to curtail tobacco use. This monograph begins the important process of understanding the full extent of this influence, especially among youth—one of our most vulnerable populations.

Now—as media have expanded beyond traditional channels such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television to the Internet and interactive video gaming—the challenge is even more urgent. Both tobacco control and tobacco industry forces are using the media to influence the attitudes and behavior of the American public. Despite a decline of roughly 50% in smoking prevalence over the past 40 years, about one in five Americans continues to smoke, and more than 4,000 young people smoke their first cigarette each day.

The National Cancer Institute presents this 19th monograph, *The Role of the Media in Promoting and Reducing Tobacco Use*, in the Tobacco Control Monograph Series. The monograph provides a critical, scientific review and synthesis of current evidence regarding the power of the media to encourage and to discourage tobacco use. As such, it is the most current and comprehensive summary of the scientific literature on media communications in tobacco promotion and tobacco control. Research included in the review comes from the disciplines of marketing, psychology, communications, statistics, epidemiology, and public health. All are vital to understanding how exposure to the media influences tobacco use. Armed with that understanding, it is possible to explore effective ways to leverage the media to improve public health.

Major conclusions from the monograph are:

1. Media communications play a key role in shaping tobacco-related knowledge, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors among individuals and within communities. Media communications on tobacco include brand-specific advertising and promotion, news coverage, depictions of tobacco use and tobacco products in entertainment media, public relations, corporate sponsorship, corporate advertising, political advertising for ballot initiatives and referenda, and media campaigns for tobacco control.

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2. Cigarettes are one of the most heavily marketed products in the United States. Between 1940 and 2005, U.S. cigarette manufacturers spent about \$250 billion (in 2006 dollars) on cigarette advertising and promotion. In 2005, the industry spent \$13.5 billion (in 2006 dollars) on cigarette advertising and promotion (\$37 million per day on average). Currently, most of the cigarette industry's marketing budget is allocated to promotional activities, especially price discounts. Price discounts accounted for 75% of total marketing expenditures in 2005 (\$10.1 billion in 2006 dollars). Less than 1% of cigarette marketing expenditures are now used for advertising in traditional print media.
3. Tobacco advertising has been dominated by three themes: providing satisfaction (taste, freshness, mildness, etc.), assuaging anxieties about the dangers of smoking, and creating associations between smoking and desirable outcomes (independence, social success, sexual attraction, thinness, etc.). Targeting various population groups—including men, women, youth and young adults, specific racial and ethnic populations, religious groups, the working class, and gay and lesbian populations—has been strategically important to the tobacco industry.
4. The total weight of evidence—from multiple types of studies, conducted by investigators from different disciplines, and using data from many countries—demonstrates a causal relationship between tobacco advertising and promotion and increased tobacco use.
5. The depiction of cigarette smoking is pervasive in movies, occurring in three-quarters or more of contemporary box-office hits. Identifiable cigarette brands appear in about one-third of movies. The total weight of evidence from cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental studies indicates a causal relationship between exposure to depictions of smoking in movies and youth smoking initiation.
6. Evidence from controlled field experiments and population studies shows that mass media campaigns designed to discourage tobacco use can change youth attitudes about tobacco use, curb smoking initiation, and encourage adult cessation. The initiation effect appears greater in controlled field experiments when mass media campaigns are combined with school- and/or community-based programming. Many population studies document reductions in smoking prevalence when mass media campaigns are combined with other strategies in multicomponent tobacco control programs.

About the NCI Tobacco Control Monograph Series

The National Cancer Institute established the Tobacco Control Monograph series in 1991 to provide ongoing and timely information about emerging issues in smoking and tobacco prevention and control. Monographs are available at no cost in print and online.

For More Information

For more information or to order this monograph, go to <http://www.cancercontrol.cancer.gov/tcrb/monographs/19/index.html>. To order a free copy, call the NCI Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237) and ask for NIH Publication No. 07-6242.