Spotting Smoking Scenes

Concept for spotting smoking scenes in movies and video clips

Pilot project Austria

"There is a strong association between an awareness and involvement with tobacco promotion and being susceptible to tobacco use or a user of tobacco products."

David Altman, in American Journal of Public Health, 1996

Introduction

With the implementation of stricter tobacco legislation and regulation on advertising of cigarettes and other tobacco products, the tobacco companies typically increase methods of indirect advertising, applying cigarette brand names, logos etc. to non-tobacco products. For example, cigarette advertising restrictions imposed by the "Loi Veil" legislation in France in 1976 led to the advertising of Marlboro and Camel lighters, and Pall Mall matches, which were strikingly similar to ads for the same-brand cigarettes. In 1995, the French Justice Department obtained internal documents from the headquarters of RJ Reynolds France, called "World Brands Inc Strategic Plan 1993-1997," which described how to circumvent legal restrictions by promoting products and services such as Camel Boots, Camel Trophy, and Winston clothes.

With the guideline 2003/33/EG adopted by the European Commission on 26 May 2003, the regulations for tobacco sponsoring, tobacco advertising in print media, broadcast transmissions – with exception of the already forbidden TV commercials – and other news services were standardized and restricted. Thus, tobacco companies have to pursue other ways for tobacco promotion to sell their products, and product placement gains more and more importance for the tobacco industry. Many experts have seen the portrayal of smoking in films as a possible reason for increased smoking initiation among adolescents in the 1990's. Some argue that popular films should be considered as important as parents and teachers as models of values, beliefs, and behaviours. Film stars have the potential to be even more powerful role models than parents and teachers because of the high visibility of their behaviour on and off screen and their larger-than-life status.[1]

To raise awareness among young people on this subliminal and hidden form of advertising, the project entitled "Spotting Smoking Scenes" will be developed in the framework of the campaign for smoking prevention among adolescents in the European Union, FEEL FREE TO SAY NO. As agreed with the European Commission, the project "Spotting Smoking Scenes" will be developed in Austria as a pilot project that could be subsequently applied in other countries. Spotting Smoking Scenes will be elaborated in collaboration with the National Focal Point Prof. Dr. Neuberger and the youth magazine Xpress, the campaign's media partner in Austria.

Prof. Dr. Neuberger is heading the Department for General Preventive Medicine at the Institute of Environmental Health of the Vienna Medical University and has been working in the field of smoking prevention for years. The institute conducts research projects on the health effects of passive smoking on children, and develops successful programmes,

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[1] WAKEFIELD, M.: Role of Media in Influencing Trajectories of Youth Smoking, Victoria Carlton, Australia, 28-29.

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seminars and school initiatives together with ENYPAT – in Austria lead-managed by the Austrian Cancer League.

Background

Cinema is not the only source for the depicture of smoking and tobacco product placement. Although portrayal of tobacco in fictional television programmes is less frequent, it increased during the 1990's, as well.[2] Additionally, smoking is portrayed in music videos, song lyrics, and video games. A study of music videos broadcast on network television revealed that tobacco use was present in 26 per cent of those broadcast on MTV.[3]

Teenagers are much more likely than adults to be frequent moviegoers.[4] US-America studies estimate that the average teenager goes to the movies approximately once each month and watches two feature movies per week on television or videotape.[5] For the tobacco industry, young people are a special and important target group: more than 90 per cent start smoking before they turn 18. Thus, influencing young people is crucial for the sales figures. After all, the tobacco companies need offspring smokers to replace the more than 500.000 people in the EU who die every year in consequence of smoking.

Smoking scenes in popular films occur with much more frequency than expected on the basis of smoking prevalence. The rate at which tobacco appears per minute of film in Hollywood films increased during the 1990's: of a random sample of the top 20 highest grossing films each year from 1990-1996, an average of 5 minutes per film involved a tobacco-related incident (including implied or actual consumption of tobacco, talking about tobacco etc.), of which only 43 seconds involved an anti-smoking message.[6]

An important point at indirect advertising, such as product placement in films and music videos, is that there are no health warnings on such a sponsorship, as there has to be on, for example, cigarette packages according to EU legislation.[7]

When smoking is portrayed as normative, teenagers are more likely to overestimate smoking prevalence, which may increase their decision for taking up smoking. Having a favourite film star who smokes on and off screen is associated among teens with susceptibility to become a smoker.[8] And usually smokers have a more positive image and character in the film than non-smokers. Even more: a study from the year 2000 revealed that films aimed at young audiences were less likely to carry negative messages associated with tobacco use

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[2] HAZAN, A.R. & GLANTZ, S.A. (1995) Current trends in tobacco use on prime-time fictional television. American Journal of Public Health, 85(1), 116-117.

[3] DURANT, R.H., ROME, E.S., RICH, M., ALLRED, E. ET AL. (1997) Tobacco and alcohol use behaviors portrayed in music videos: a content analysis. American Journal of Public Health, 87, 1131-35.

[4] TERRE, L., DRABMAN, R.S. & SPEER, P. (1991) Health-relevant behaviors in media. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 21: 1303-19.

[5] VERONIS, SUHLER AND ASSOCIATES INC. (1996) The Veronis, Suhler and Associates Communications Industry Forecast. (New York: Veronis, Suhler and Associates.)

[6] STOCKWELL, T.F. & GLANTZ, S.A. (1997) Tobacco use is increasing in popular films. Tobacco Control, 6, 282-84.

[7] Although this indirect advertising not reaches as far in Europe as it does for example in the Dominican Republic where the Marlboro name and colours appear on street-name and highway distance signs or in Romania where the Camel name and logo have appeared in the amber filters of many of the traffic lights in Bucharest.

[8] DISTEFAN, J.M., GILPIN, E.A., SARGENT, J.D. ET AL. (1999) Do movie stars encourage adolescents to start smoking? Evidence from California. Preventive Medicine, 28, 1-11.

than were movies aimed for mature audiences.[9] On the one hand, Hollywood films tend to ignore the negative consequences of smoking and the role model in favour of smoking they may give to young people. On the other hand tobacco portrayal in films has often been a form of considered product placement.

The tobacco industry denies that advertising is targeted to children and adolescents. But these statements are in contrast to internal documents that have surfaced in recent years. Even when the tobacco industry doesn't show young people in their advertising this doesn't mean that they do not target young adolescents. Indirect advertising via product placement and lobbying is an effective way for the tobacco industry to avoid advertising bans and other restrictions imposed by European and national legislation.

Most of the research undertaken so far about the way in which tobacco is portrayed in movies has focused on quantitative assessment, such as minutes of exposure to tobacco images, and adult perceptions and ratings of movie images and scenes involving tobacco.[10] But important to know is also how young people perceive portrayal of tobacco in films.

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This is the starting point for the project Spotting Smoking Scenes: it raises awareness among young people on indirect advertising of tobacco products in films and music videos. It intends to reveal which kind of product placement, subliminal advertising, or influence by lobbying of the big tobacco companies adolescents recognize and how they differentiate between a conscious influencing of the viewer and the portrayal of smoking as a necessary element to characterize the figure. For not every smoking-related scene is indirect advertising or product placement – even though a lot of them are – but part of the drama. The target group for this project is 12 to 18 years old.

As smoking scenes and the appearance of cigarettes in a film does not have a fixed meaning and does not always mean intended product placement or subliminal advertising, the questionnaire of the project has to differentiate between the portrayal of smoking. Depending on context and character, cigarettes can be used to signify a wide range of meanings, some of which actually promote negative associations with smoking. Thus, it is important to determine what kind of messages about tobacco teens take away from films, music videos etc.

Implementation

FEEL FREE TO SAY NO's Austrian media partner Xpress will present Spotting Smoking Scenes with an editorial that calls for participation in the project in the youth magazine as well as on the magazine's website. A small series about the outcomes will be published. Additionally, an article could be published on the Austrian Be smart website. A questionnaire will be developed and placed on the Austrian sub site of www.feel-free.info, supplemented by a detailed information section about Spotting Smoking Scenes. All articles published in

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[9] ESCAMILLA, G., CRDOCK, A.L. & KAWACHI I. (2000) Women and smoking in Hollywood movies: a content analysis. American Journal of Public Health, 90, 412-414.

[10] GOLDSTEIN, A.O., FISCHER, P.M., RICHARDS, J.W. & CRETEN, D. (1987) Relationship between high school student smoking and recognition of cigarette advertisements. Journal of Pediatrics, 110, 488-91.; STOCKWELL, T.F. & GLANTZ, S.A. (1997) Tobacco use is increasing in popular films. Tobacco Control, 6, 282-84.

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the magazine Xpress and on the Be smart webpage will include a link to the Austrian FEEL FREE TO SAY NO website.

The questionnaire contains open as well as closed questions. In case of TV films, it asks for the character that smokes, the programme, the channel, the date and the time of the observed film. For cinema films and videos/DVDs the title, the director and the character smoking have to be named. Music videos and song lyrics have to be indicated with the song title and the interpreter and in case of the video with the TV channel where it was seen.

To encourage participation in the project, prizes will be raffled among all participants – but Spotting Smoking Scenes should not be considered a competition. The period of time for the project Spotting Smoking Scenes should be limited in the first attempt. We propose a time frame of 2-3 months.

The results will be available for the Austrian Council on Smoking and Health. After having drawn experiences out of the Austrian pilot project, Spotting Smoking Scenes can be, if necessary, adopted and implemented by the national partners in the other countries.

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Questionnaire

<u>Text proposal</u>:

Carry Bradshaw in "Sex and the City" does it, Bruce Willis' character in "Pulp Fiction" as well. In a lot of films and music videos the actors smoke. And you don't really notice it; it seems to be quite normal… But it is not!

In a lot of cases it is hidden advertising from the tobacco industry. Because several forms of tobacco advertising are already forbidden, among others classical cigarette spots on television. So the tobacco industry has to think of something new: how they can influence you and make you buy their cigarettes.

Even though not every smoking scene is advertising, you find yourself quite often confronted in films with the topic "smoking" – more often as you might imagine. Films are an ideal tool for the tobacco industry to transport their advertising messages sub-consciously.

Sometimes you can even recognize a certain brand. This kind of indirect advertising is called product placement, or the smoking scenes are a result of constant lobbying of the big tobacco companies. But indirect advertisement is not only limited to cinema and TV films, you can find smoking-related scenes in sitcoms, music videos, and song lyrics, as well. Surely you all know the "Come Undone" video by Robbie Williams.

And here is where your task begins: The next time you watch a movie or a music video, be aware of what smoking stands for. Is it necessary to describe a person or situation or would the story work without smoking? Is smoking an important part of the content or does the cigarette "only" transport image values? And are these values positive or negative?

Take notes and find out how often and for which purpose the smoking scenes appear in the film. Then fill in this questionnaire and send it to us. We are very keen on what you find out and what you think!

Among all participants who send us their observations until XX(DATE)XX we will raffle a DVD player – and a collection of smoke-free films. Additionally, the best observations will be published in the Xpress!

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Proposal for questions:

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Name of respondent: _____

Sex of respondent: female
 male

Age: _____

Email.
(not necessarily)   _____

Address: _____

 _____

Do you?   I never smoke.
I smoke sometimes.
I smoke regularly.

Did you spot a smoking-related scene in?

Cinema movie / video / DVD

Film title	
Name and role of the characters who smoked	

TV film / sitcom etc

Title of the programme	
TV channel	
Date and time when you saw the programme	
Name and role of the characters who smoked	

Music videos / lyrics

Song title	
Interpreter	
TV channel	
Date and time when you saw the programme	

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General questions

1.) If you think that this film/video did not promote smoking but was critical, explain why (e.g. by showing negative consequences to health or wellbeing, by depicting nasty smokers, etc.)

2.) If you think that this film/video did promote smoking, mark all reasons which contributed:

O	many smoking scenes	O	well being
O	association of smoking	O	relaxation
	with a winning personality	O	sex
O	a beautiful/handsome actor	O	power
O	positive feelings	O	necessary to cope with stress
O	constituent part of social life	O	frustration
O	pleasant surrounding	O	aggression
O	positive actions	O	other reasons; which:

Who supported smoking?   O a main character   O a woman   O a man

3.) O Is smoking in the scenes you spotted necessarily linked to a character and part of the drama?
  O Or could it be replaced by other actions or characterizations?

4.) Were you able to identify a certain brand or a doubtless connotation to a brand?
  O no
  O yes, which:

5.) Do you think this film/video was sponsored by tobacco (indirect advertising or product placement)?   O   yes
        O   no