

Tobacco imagery still common in films rated suitable for kids and young teens

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Tobacco imagery is still relatively common in films rated suitable for kids and young teens, despite significant declines in the cinematic depiction of smoking over the past 20 years, indicates research published in *Thorax* today.

Based on their findings, active product placement may still be taking place, particularly in UK films, say the authors.

They analysed the occurrence of depictions of [tobacco use](#), including brand appearances and [smoking](#) paraphernalia, for periods of at least five minutes (tobacco intervals) in the 15 most commercially successful films screened in the UK between 1989 and 2008.

Commercial success was defined as accounting for around 50% or more of each year's gross box office takings, while smoking paraphernalia included ashtrays, lighters, etc.

Between 1989 and 2008, the average occurrence of five minute tobacco intervals plummeted from 3.5 per hour to 0.6 for all films, a fall of 80%.

But imagery persisted in all age categories of films given a certificate by the British Board of Film Classification. This included those deemed suitable for children and young teens.

Two thirds of films classified for under 18s and over half (61%) classified for under 15s featured tobacco intervals. Between 2004 and

2008, of the films containing tobacco intervals, 92% were rated as suitable for those under 18.

Among the 15 most popular films, tobacco intervals occurred in seven out of 10 films, over half of which (56%) were classified as suitable for those under 15 and 92% for those under 18.

The film with the highest number of brand appearances was Pulp Fiction, which was classified for adults (18).

But brand appearances were nearly twice as likely to occur in films with UK involvement. UK producers were involved in one out of five films and were solely responsible for 3% between 1989 and 2008.

Twelve different brands appeared in Bridget Jones's Diary (certificate 15) - the highest for any film. In About a Boy (certificate 12), the main character smoked Silk Cut regularly throughout the film, yet in the book on which the film was based, the lead character smoked infrequently and no particular brand was mentioned.

Marlboro and Silk Cut were the two brands most likely to be featured. While Marlboro has more than 42% of market share in the US, Silk Cut has just 5% of UK market share, prompting the authors to suggest that its appearance was "disproportionate."

"The specific repeated occurrence of some brands of cigarette in some films raises the possibility that product placement by tobacco companies is still occurring," they suggest.

Smoking in films is a potent driver of youth and adult smoking, say the authors, who suggest that film certification should take smoking into account for films targeted to young people.

"...it is apparent that children and young people watching films in the UK are still exposed to frequent and at times specifically branded [tobacco](#) imagery, particularly in films originating from the UK," they conclude.

Provided by British Medical Journal

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