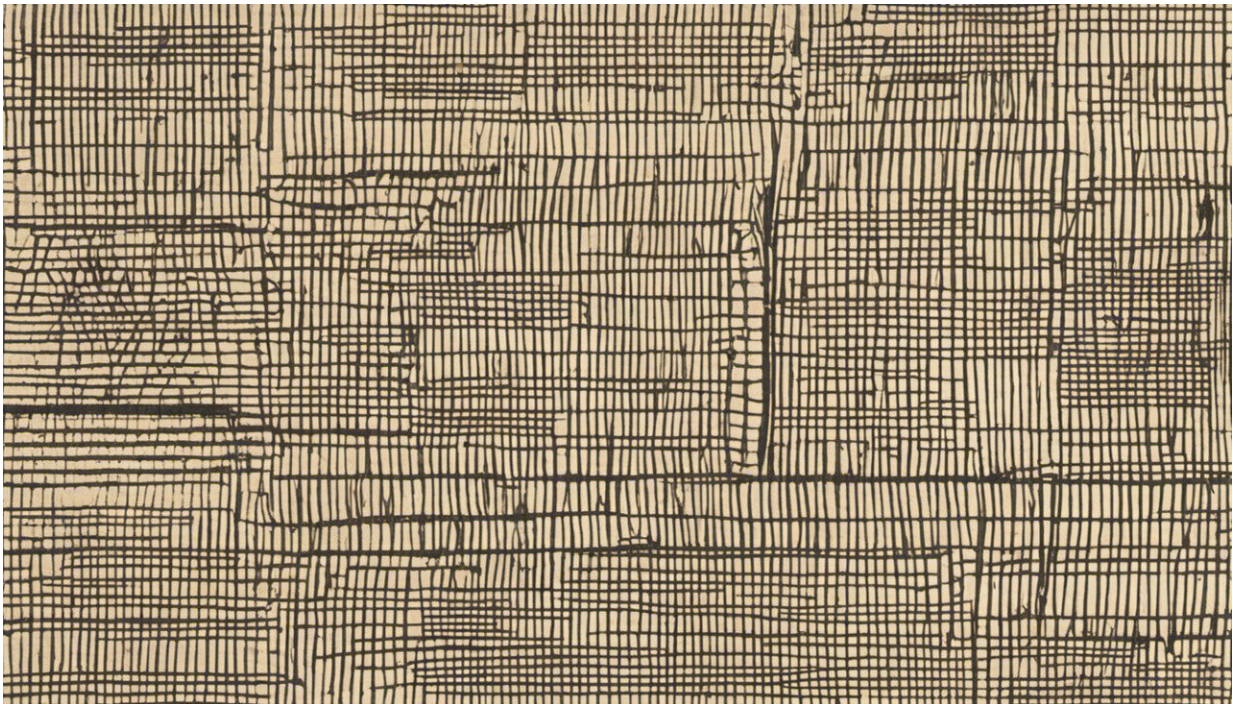


Big Tobacco goes after the young in developing markets

August 10 2017, by Daniel O'Neill



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

A [number of revelations](#) have surfaced recently about the activities of Big Tobacco companies in markets across the developing world. One [investigation by Reuters](#) revealed how Philip Morris International has been targeting young people in India through colourful adverts and promotions at clubs and parties in large cities like Delhi. In Uganda,

British American Tobacco has [won a legal battle](#) to limit the expansion of health warnings on packets and point-of-sale displays.

For those who have studied the history of the [tobacco industry](#), these tactics will come as no surprise. In the developing world, Big Tobacco seemingly is replicating the advertising strategies which it first carried out in countries like Britain more than 60 years ago.

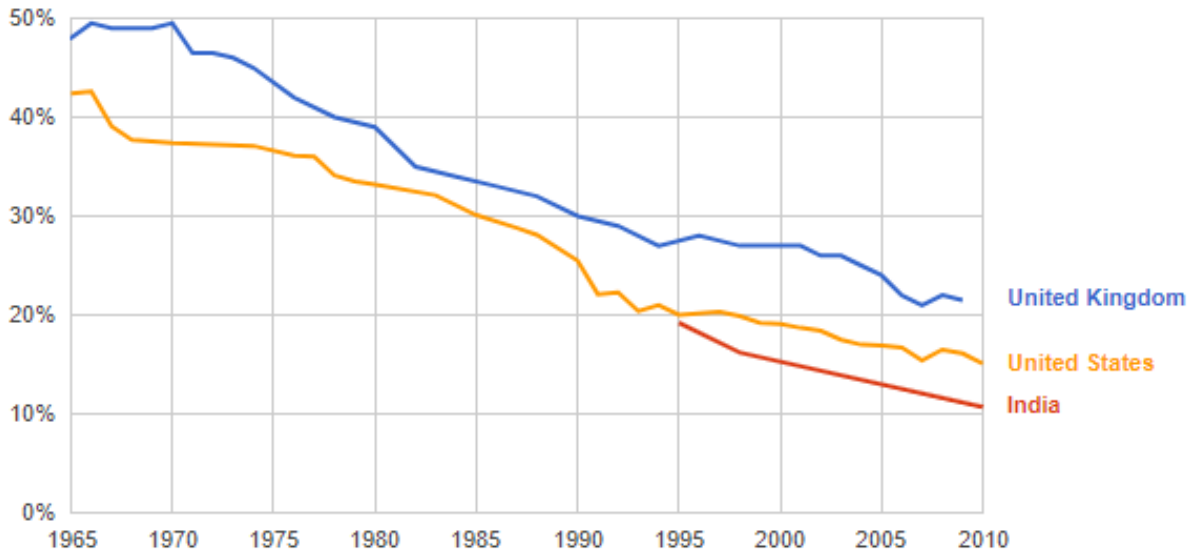
Public health efforts in Western countries have proved effective in changing the law and stubbing these out – and subsequently [boosting the decline in smoking rates](#). It is this experience that has made some [tobacco](#) companies so determined to fight against similar [public health](#) measures in the developing world.

A historical perspective, then, can be useful in illuminating their strategies, helping to explain why the tobacco industry is so protective of its marketing activities.

Introducing market research

Cigarettes are a fairly standardised product. There are only a few properties that can be altered to distinguish one brand from another, which is why advertising is so important. It's through marketing and advertising that different brands distinguish themselves in what remains a crowded marketplace.

Adult population smoking daily



Data from OECD Factbook 2013.

This was particularly apparent in the UK in the 1950s and 1960s, when the British tobacco industry resumed advertising cigarettes following a lull in sales during the period of rationing that trailed World War II. Powered by the developing techniques of [market research](#), tobacco companies began tailoring their promotions [to specific demographics](#).

In particular, studies of the motivations of consumers in the mid-1950s emphasised how important [young people](#) were for cigarette manufacturers. Market research for John Player & Sons and Imperial Tobacco, for example, [found that](#): "The maintenance and stability of the cigarette market depend in large measure on the constant recruitment of youth (age 15–23, roughly) to the cigarette smoking habit."

To do this, admen suggested a host of advertising themes and promotions which they thought would appeal to young people. They talked about a

brand having a particular "atmosphere" or "identity", and marketing activities were designed to enhance this.

For instance, the tobacco manufacturer WD & HO Wills introduced a new filter-tipped brand in 1960, Strand cigarettes. Adverts featured a lone figure – [the Strand man](#) – stalking around a city at night, smoking. The tag line went: "You're never alone with a Strand."

Loneliness, and the suggestion that Strand cigarettes could help you overcome it, were emphasised in the campaign because it was believed this would resonate with young people. Market research at the time [revealed](#) that youth was a time of heightened insecurity, with young people socialising and going out more as they entered the adult world. The ads presented Strand cigarettes as a foil to this – a social prop to occupy yourself with when social situations became awkward or you found yourself alone.

Get 'em while they're young

Equipped with this knowledge of young people and their social habits, [tobacco companies](#) also began supporting their ad campaigns by running promotions, which took place at various commercial leisure venues. For example, in support of their Bachelor cigarettes brand, [John Player & Sons](#) ran a competition in the early 1960s which took place at Mecca dance halls up and down the country.

Dubbed the "Ideal Bachelor Competition", male contestants and their female dance partners could win prizes of cigarettes and money by dancing the "Bachelor Quickstep" and answering several questions. All entries had to be aged under 40, and a panel of six young women picked the winner, basing their decision on the "Qualities of an Ideal Bachelor". These included qualities you might expect, such as having a "bright and cheerful personality", "a smart appearance" and a "good steady job", as

well as being a smoker.

Events such as this provided a tobacco firm with the opportunity to publicise and give out samples of their product. What's more, it made brands seem exciting, youthful and modern.

The tobacco industry targets young people because they're impressionable. Their product and brand preferences are not yet set, and they tend to be willing to experiment. Companies need new generations of smokers to sustain sales, replacing those smokers who either quit or die.

One of the reasons that smoking remained so prevalent within Britain during the 20th century is that the government enacted anti-smoking measures in a [piecemeal fashion](#), allowing the industry to invest in other avenues such as sport sponsorship. Governments in developing countries should take notice of this and tackle tobacco marketing comprehensively, leaving no avenue for Big Tobacco to exploit.

This article was originally published on [The Conversation](#). Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

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