

## Brief Report

# Promotions on Newport and Marlboro Cigarette Packages: A National Study

Joseph G. L. Lee PhD, MPH<sup>1,2</sup>, Amanda Richardson PhD, MS<sup>1,3</sup>,  
Shelley D. Golden PhD, MPH<sup>1</sup>, Kurt M. Ribisl PhD<sup>1,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Health Behavior, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC; <sup>2</sup>Department of Health Education and Promotion, College of Health and Human Performance, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC; <sup>3</sup>Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC

Corresponding Author: Joseph G. L. Lee, PhD, MPH, Department of Health Education and Promotion, College of Health and Human Performance, East Carolina University, 1000 E 5th Street, Mail Stop 529, Greenville, NC 27858, USA. Telephone: 252-328-4661; Fax: 252-328-1285; E-mail: [LEEJOSE14@ecu.edu](mailto:LEEJOSE14@ecu.edu)

## Abstract

**Introduction:** While cigarette pack designs are part of integrated marketing efforts, it is unclear the degree to which packs are used to advertise promotions and whether the tobacco retailers' neighborhood characteristics influence the likelihood and type of pack-based promotion in the United States.

**Methods:** Between June and October 2012, data collectors purchased packs of either Marlboro Red ( $n = 1090$ ) or Newport Green ( $n = 1057$ ) cigarettes at 2147 stores that were part of a national sample of tobacco retailers in the contiguous US. Coders rated packs for the presence of an exterior and interior pack promotion, placement of exterior promotion (eg, front, back), presentation of exterior promotion (eg, onsert, tear strip), and nature of the promotion (eg, contest/give/away). Using Census tract data, we examined the association of pack promotions with tobacco retailers' neighborhood demographic characteristics.

**Results:** Marlboro packs were approximately twice as likely to have promotions as Newport packs (31.7% vs. 14.7%). Fewer Marlboro packs (14.6%) and no Newport packs had interior promotions. The majority of exterior promotions were for contests (>80% for both brands), while almost all interior Marlboro promotions (97.5%) were for a discounted price. There were few differences in presence or type of promotion by tobacco retailers' neighborhood characteristics.

**Conclusions:** Exterior packs promotions, in particular, were fairly common and may contribute to the allure of tobacco products.

**Implications:** Use of promotions on the interior and exterior of cigarette packs are a mechanism that the tobacco industry uses to sell its products and should be continually assessed for their influence on consumer behavior.

## Introduction

Tobacco industry marketing has been shown to contribute to death and disability by promoting initiation<sup>1-3</sup> and continued use of tobacco.<sup>4-7</sup> Over \$9 billion is spent marketing tobacco in the United States,<sup>8</sup> and, in 2012, cigarette companies spent \$67.9 million alone on advertising at the point-of-sale and over \$8 billion in price discounts and coupons.<sup>8</sup>

The cigarette pack itself is a marketing tool. Pack branding communicates a set of values, aspirations, images and beliefs to

consumers and allows them to easily distinguish one product from another.<sup>9,10</sup> The design, shape, size and descriptors on the pack contribute to smokers' perceptions of the cigarettes inside.<sup>10-15</sup> The exterior and interior of the pack can also serve as a vehicle for promotions, such as contests, price discounts, and multipack offers. Promotions attached to the outside of packs can be used to attract new consumers and as an incentive for current consumers to remain loyal or buy more.<sup>16</sup> Despite this, there has been little assessment of whether and how the pack is used to advertise promotions in the United States.

## Methods

### Sample

The cigarette packs analyzed in this study were purchased as part of the ASPIRE study, in which store audits were conducted on a national sample of tobacco retailers. Details of the parent study are described in detail elsewhere.<sup>17</sup> In brief, 100 counties in the lower-48 US states were randomly selected with probability proportionate to population size and minimal replacement; 97 of these were unique counties. Approximately 26% of the total US population lives in these counties.<sup>18</sup> Tobacco retailers were selected within these counties through purchased business lists of likely retailers from NAICS Association and ReferenceUSA. This approach has been validated<sup>19</sup> and is a recommended approach for large-scale data collection involving retailers.<sup>20</sup>

### Data Collection and Coding

Between June and October 2012, trained data collectors traveled to 2346 verified stores. Auditors were able to purchase a single cigarette pack in 2147 stores. Auditors alternated between purchasing Marlboro Red cigarettes and Newport Green (menthol) cigarettes. These brands were chosen as they represent the two cigarette brands with the largest market share,<sup>21</sup> with Marlboro's marketing share being primarily non-menthol and Newport being primarily menthol. Packs were not purchased if no audit was conducted (eg, store not found at the verified location, store closed at time of audit), no interior audit was conducted (eg, clerk refused audit), or packs were inadvertently not purchased as part of the audit. After purchase, data collectors wrote the store ID number on the pack; due to smudging or coding errors, 48 of these could not be linked to neighborhoods. Descriptive statistics are reported for 2147 packs (or 92% of all phone-verified stores; modeling of neighborhood disparities was based on the 2099 packs with legible store IDs).

To develop our coding system, we created a coding manual and had 10% of packs coded independently by two raters. Inter-rater reliability scores (Krippendorff's alpha<sup>22</sup> and Cohen's kappa) ranged from 0.69 to 1.0; we then modified the coding manual for items that received lower scores to clarify procedures. Packs were then coded by one research assistant for presence of exterior and interior promotions, placement of exterior promotion (front, back, front and back), presentation of exterior promotion (onsert, cellophane, insert, tear strip), nature of the exterior and interior promotion (contest/give/away/enter to win, special offer, special price (cents off), multipack discount, product information, or other tobacco product offer), and whether consumers had to link to a website or call a telephone number to acquire the promotion.

We obtained demographic characteristics of stores' census tract from Census 2010.<sup>23</sup> These characteristics included the percentage of residents in the tract who were African American alone or in combination with other races, Hispanic, and under 18 years of age. From the 5-year American Community Survey estimates, 2008–2012, we obtained a measure of the median income of residents within a census tract.<sup>24</sup>

### Data Analysis

We calculated frequencies of different placements and content of pack promotions for Marlboro Red and Newport Green packs with SPSS 22 (IBM, Chicago, IL). The frequency of exterior and interior promotions by store type was calculated but interpretation was complicated due to small cell sizes (some <5); therefore, this analysis

was excluded. We assessed the relationship between neighborhood characteristics and pack promotion characteristics using hierarchical generalized linear regression that accounting for the clustering of stores within counties. Analyses were implemented using PROC GLIMMIX in SAS 9.4 (SAS Institute, Cary, NC) using 9-point adaptive quadrature estimation. Following Poole, we did not use a multiple comparison correction.<sup>25</sup> We set alpha to 0.05 and used two-tailed tests. The UNC Institutional Review Board (IRB) deemed this project not human subjects research (#12-0765).

## Results

Frequencies are displayed in Table 1. There were differences between Marlboro and Newport in the presence of promotions,  $X^2 (1, n = 2147) = 87, p < .001$ . Of the 1090 Marlboro packs purchased, 345 (31.7%) contained exterior promotions, and the majority of these (92.5%) were placed on both the front and back of the pack. Most exterior promotions (90.7%) were presented on cellophane, rather than tear strips, onserts or another mechanism. The majority of Marlboro exterior promotions (81.7%) were for contests/give aways/enter to win, and were generally related to music or other prizes. Website links asking consumers to sign up were commonly associated with entry (82.0% of packs offering promotions). No Marlboro exterior promotions offered special prices or multipack discounts.

Fewer packs of Newport contained exterior promotions ( $n = 155, 14.7%$ ). Of those offering promotions, the majority displayed the promotions only on the back of the pack (83.9%) and most were presented as onserts (84.5%). Similar to Marlboro, the overwhelming majority of Newport exterior promotions were for contests or give aways (83.9%); in contrast to Marlboro, Newport packs mainly advertised promotions related to trips. Both phone and website links were advertised to drive consumers to register for these contests. Unlike Marlboro, which had no exterior price discounts, 16.1% of Newport promotions offered price discounts.

Only 14.6% of Marlboro packs contained interior promotions and almost all of those offered a special price discount (97.5%), the majority of which was for Marlboro's smokeless tobacco product, snus. No Newport packs contained interior promotions.

We found no significant associations between the census tract demographic characteristics of the store in which the pack was sold and the presence of pack exterior promotions or interior promotions in our regression models (data not shown), with one exception. There was a statistically significant negative association between the percent of the population that is Hispanic and the presence of a promotion for a contest/give away for Marlboro packs ( $OR = 0.89, 95\% CI: 0.81-0.99$ ).

## Discussion

Nearly one quarter of cigarette packs we purchased as part of a national study included promotions on the outside of the pack. The exterior design of a cigarette pack is used to communicate brand image to current or potential customers and is associated with customer appraisal of a brand experience and the people who smoke it.<sup>10,26</sup> Although less prevalent than other forms of point-of-sale tobacco marketing,<sup>27</sup> our results suggest many consumers who frequent tobacco retailers will be exposed to alluring pack-based tobacco promotions. Exterior pack promotions generally advertised chances to enter or win a contest or give away. Advertisements of

**Table 1.** Presence and Features of Marlboro and Newport Pack Promotions

Pack exterior	Marlboro ( <i>n</i> = 1090)	Newport ( <i>n</i> = 1057)
	N (% of total)	N (% of total)
Has promotion	345 (31.7%)	155 (14.7%)
Placement of promotion (on pack)	N (% of those with promotions)	N (% of those with promotions)
Front and back	319 (92.5%)	24 (15.5%)
Front only	2 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)
Back only	24 (7.0%)	130 (83.9%)
Presentation of promotion		
Onsert	23 (6.7%)	131 (84.5%)
Cellophane	313 (90.7%)	0 (0%)
Tear strip	0 (0)	24 (15.5%)
Promotion for? <sup>a</sup>		
Contest/give away/enter to win	283 (82.0%)	130 (83.9%)
For what?		
Music	255 (73.9%)	0 (0%)
Trip	25 (7.3%)	115 (74.2%)
Money	4 (1.2%)	15 (9.7%)
Prizes (vague)	254 (73.6%)	0 (0%)
Special offer	38 (11.0%)	0 (0%)
Special price (cents off)	0 (0)	25 (16.1%)
Multipack	0 (0)	0 (0)
Product info	23 (6.7%)	0 (0%)
Other tobacco product offer	1 (0.3%)	0 (0%)
Website link from promotion	283 (82.0%)	130 (83.9%)
Phone	0 (0)	130 (83.9%)
Pack interior	N (% of total)	N (% of total)
Insert	159 (14.6%)	0 (0%)
	N (% of those with promotions)	N (% of those with promotions)
For what purpose?		
For cigarettes	40 (25.2%)	0 (0%)
For snus	115 (72.3%)	0 (0%)
Contest/give away/enter to win	3 (1.9)	0 (0%)
For what?		
Music	0 (0)	0 (0%)
Trip	0 (0)	0 (0%)
Money	0 (0)	0 (0%)
Prizes (vague)	3 (1.9)	0 (0%)
Special price	155 (97.5%)	0 (0%)
Multi-pack promotion	1 (0.6%)	0 (0%)

<sup>a</sup>Categories not mutually exclusive.

music and trips may convey a specific image of smoking as entertaining, adventurous and an escape from the drudgery of life. Additionally, these types of promotion fit with the tobacco industry's sophisticated use of psychographic market segmentation based on lifestyle, aspirations, and identity.<sup>28</sup> The different pattern of pack-based promotions on the two different brands likely reflects the use of different corporate marketing approaches and targeted marketing to appeal to specific targeted consumer groups.<sup>29</sup>

We found fewer interior promotions on the packs we purchased (14.6% overall), most of which provided opportunities to receive a special price on a future purchase. Since consumers must first buy the pack to access the interior promotions, these may be intended to strengthen brand loyalty by rewarding existing customers with price discounts. In the case of Marlboro, most of the interior promotions were used to market Marlboro snus; this cross-product marketing may be a way that the industry attempts to diversify their target customer's tobacco product use through promoting dual use and expanding their brand.

Pack promotions are likely used as part of a sophisticated marketing system. Almost all of the exterior pack promotions required

consumers to register for entry through a website or telephone call. Brand websites are the most common way of joining a direct mailing list,<sup>30</sup> and serve as a mechanism by which the tobacco industry obtains personal information that they can use to further advertise to consumers via email, text or direct mail.

While the tobacco industry has been repeatedly shown to target vulnerable populations through point-of-sale tobacco product advertising,<sup>31-33</sup> we did not observe similar relationships between neighborhood demographic characteristics and pack promotions. Promotions at the point-of-sale are often negotiated based on incentive programs, such as volume discounts, display allowances and buydowns (time limited price reductions or sales) and outlined in individual contracts between the store and the tobacco companies.<sup>34,35</sup> In comparison, it is likely that cigarette packs are sent through the normal supply chain to distributors/wholesaler and then to retailers, and the industry may not be readily able to target specific packs to stores or neighborhood. Future work should assess the role of pack promotions in exacerbating health inequities by targeting based on race, gender, or psychographic profile.

In the United States, some local governments, including Providence, Rhode Island, and New York City, have implemented policies that restrict some promotions, like prohibiting retailers from redeeming coupons or honoring other price discounts for tobacco products.<sup>36-38</sup> How these might impact pack promotions is unclear. After Great Britain passed and implemented point-of-sale marketing restrictions, marketing on packs increased and become more sophisticated.<sup>39,40</sup> It is possible this will be a growing trend in the United States given restrictions on other marketing channels. However, the pack could also serve to inform the public. Onsets, which were present on almost 85% of Newport packs and 7% of Marlboro packs in this study, will be required as part of the Department of Justice Corrective Statements in the future.<sup>41</sup> Canadian inserts containing information about quitting show evidence of effectiveness.<sup>42</sup>

This study has several limitations. Only one pack of cigarettes was purchased at each store in the sample during a relatively short study period in 2012. Additionally, only two brands (Marlboro and Newport) were examined for pack promotions. It is possible that the frequency and type of pack promotions has changed since 2012. Marlboro snus pack-based promotions likely corresponded to a unique marketing push for that product that may be repeated for other tobacco products. Brands with less market share may have more incentive to use pack marketing techniques to promote brand switching or initiation; future work should consider other brands. Our sampling weights were not designed for the alternating purchase of cigarette types and thus were not used. Thus, this sample may not be generalizable beyond the included countries.

Despite these limitations, this study provides critical data on the presence and type of pack promotions on packs of two of the most popular cigarette brands in the country. While the data indicate that this is not the most prevalent form of marketing, it was found in a substantial proportion of cigarette packs purchased in 2012 and may increase with time. Establishing baseline measures of pack marketing and tracking changes over time will be critical.

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## Declaration of Interests

An author (KMR) is serving as an expert consultant in litigation against cigarette manufacturers as part United States v. Philip Morris USA Inc.

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