

Websites Found on Cigarette Packs From 14 Low-and Middle-Income Countries: A Content Analysis

Caitlin Weiger, MHS; Joanna Cohen, PhD; Katherine Smith, PhD; Amy Hong

Background

URLs are often included on cigarette packaging, but little is known about the websites' content. This study examines the content of the corporate web addresses found on cigarette packs.

Methods

- Tobacco packs (N=3307) collected from 14 countries in 2013 for the Tobacco Pack Surveillance System (TPackSS) were coded for presence of a URL
- Codes: promotional tactics, marketing appeals, regulatory controls and warnings, harm reduction terminology, responsible marketing claims, environmental claims, and other corporate social responsibility (CSR) claims
- 80% of websites were double-coded, and discrepancies were resolved via in-person discussion between coders
- Cross tabulations were used to assess the proportion of websites in each code
- It was suspected that Chinese state-owned companies' marketing might differ from the marketing of multinational tobacco companies. Fisher's Exact test assessed this difference.

Acknowledgement: This work was supported with funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies' Bloomberg Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use (bloomberg.org)

Corporate Website Content, by Chinese vs. Multinational Tobacco Company

	Chinese (n=8)	Multinational (n=8)	p-value
Consumer Education	0 (0%)	6 (75%)	.01
Responsible Marketing	3 (38%)	8 (100%)	.03
Environmentally Conscious	1 (12%)	7 (88%)	.01
Educational Support for Students	5 (62%)	0 (0%)	.03
Company as a Provider for Jobs	2 (25%)	8 (100%)	.01
Taste Appeals	5 (62%)	0 (0%)	.03

Translation: The culture of Unity and Peace. United to grow stronger, peace leads us further.

Social Duty:

Disaster Relief & Poverty Relief - Hongta Group Donated RMB 1 million

Educational Assistance - A Donation of Four Million RMB by Hongta for the Completion of the Dormitory Building

Culture Activities & Sports - "Hongta Cup" Tour of Hainan Island Cycling Race



Results

- About a quarter (26.8%) of analyzed packs had a URL
- 89 unique websites were identified, 52 were active
- 24 of 89 unique websites (27%) identified were corporate; 8 from Chinese state-owned tobacco companies, 8 from multinational companies, and 8 from local companies
- 22 were brand-specific websites; four were social media websites; two were for non-tobacco websites

Corporate Social Responsibility on 24 corporate websites

- CSR claims were found on every website (100%)
- CSR claims providing scholarships or other support for education were mentioned on eight websites (33%)
- Support for the community, including investment in local farmers or community activities, was mentioned on 10 websites (42%)

Marketing appeals on 24 corporate websites

- Quality (88%), popularity (54%), and global appeals (79%) were frequently observed

Comparing Multinational and Chinese corporate websites

- Multinational websites (n=8) were more likely to discuss consumer education ($p=.007$), company transparency ($p=.041$), responsible marketing ($p=.026$), and environmental sustainability ($p=.010$)
- Chinese websites were more likely to discuss support for academics ($p=.026$) and use taste appeals ($p=.026$)

Conclusions

Tobacco companies may be putting URLs on their cigarette packs to increase consumer exposure to CSR and marketing appeals. The potential of these websites to advertise and promote tobacco products should be considered when discussing regulation of tobacco marketing.