DISPLAY Study:
“It's like sludge green”: Young people’s perceptions of standardised tobacco packaging

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November 2017
Background

- Point of sale (PoS): an important source of exposure
- PoS may increase awareness of brands
- Scottish legislation banning PoS displays (2013 and 2015)
Background

- Standardised cigarette packs were introduced in Scotland and the rest of the UK in May 2016.
- Retailers were allowed to continue to sell branded products to use up old stock: May 2017.
- Pack shape, colour, opening mechanism and font are regulated, together with the size and position of health warnings/number of cigarettes in a pack.
Background

Smoking damages your lungs

Get help to stop smoking at www.nhs.uk/quit

Chesterfield Blue
20 Cigarettes

Smoking causes heart attacks

Get help to stop smoking at www.nhs.uk/quit

Pall Mall Double Capsule
20 Cigarettes
Methodology

- DISPLAY Study 2013-18
- Data collected annually 2013-17
- 4 secondary schools – S2 and S4
  - Qualitative - Focus groups (Feb/March)
  - Quantitative – School survey (Jan/Feb)
  - Retailer audit
  - Mapping study
Qualitative methods
Qualitative Methods

Sample

Young people most at risk of becoming adult smokers i.e. are smokers or have contact with smokers (e.g. peers, family)

Topic Guide

- The community context (school and home); local smoking behaviours and cultures
- Access to tobacco products: direct, indirect/proxy
- Awareness of and views on tobacco promotion including point of sale, other direct marketing methods, pricing
- Feb - March 2017: to explore their perceptions of standardised packaging
Qualitative Methods (cont)

2013 (baseline pre-) & 2014 (post-implementation in supermarkets)

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2015 (pre-implementation) 2016, 2017 (post-implementation in smaller retailers)

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Qualitative Methods (cont)

- 16 focus groups across the 4 schools (n=82)
- A group of male and a group of female pupils in both S2 & S4
- Second wave of groups to cover the ban on POS promotions
- The first time views on plain packaging were probed in detail - facilitator used examples of actual plain tobacco packs as prompts
- Digitally recorded, transcribed, inductive thematic analysis (NVivo)
Key findings: 2017
Smoking Behaviours

- Tobacco consumption varied from 2-3/day to 20/day
- Rolling tobacco mentioned most frequently: Amber Leaf (Golden Virginia, American Spirit and Gold Leaf also mentioned)
- Most common cigarettes: Players & Mayfair
- 28 of the 82 participants were current smokers (34% compared with 27% in 2016)
- 19 of the current smokers were in S4 groups, 9 in S2 groups
- 4 female and 3 male groups composed entirely of non-smokers
Views on smoking

- Positive views on smoking: ‘the social factor,’ ‘the nicky rush,’ and to ‘just chill’

- Both smokers and non-smokers reported negative views: ‘disgusting,’ ‘they stink,’ ‘they’re bad for you,’ the expense was also raised

- A sense of stigmatisation was noted in two schools: smokers were perceived as ‘dodgy’ and ‘nobody really likes the smokers’
Accessing Tobacco

- Most common approach was through proxy purchasing – using a ‘jump-in’ and approaching ‘junkies’, ‘jakeys’ or ‘randoms’ to buy for them.

- Borrowing from family, buying and selling within school and clubbing together to buy cigarettes were all still common.

- Fewer reports of vans selling tobacco, or takeaway delivery drivers leaving the cigarettes with food orders.
Plain packaging

- Only one S2 female group had not seen the plain packs
- Most had seen the packs via family/friends or in the litter; smokers had purchased directly
- Almost everyone reported that these packs were unattractive and not appealing; ‘disgusting’, ‘minging’ and ‘horrible’
- Colour scheme: dull and depressing, contrasted with previous pack colours
- Imagery: very negative responses
(I saw plain packs)… on the ground. Like I've seen like litter on the ground…

with the lungs, it says “Smoking can kill”, and it's like in big writing. .. but that one just looked like it was like a nude picture of somebody on a sheet thing really.

From like my friend’s mum, when I saw her once… I saw it on her packet…

I've seen it like lying about my house…

I saw a Reddit post.  (School D, Group S2, Male)
It's like sludge green…
  .. army green.
  The Golden Virginia ones are like scaffie green…
(School D; S4 Female)

It's like .. a greeny-browny colour. It's not .. like got loads o' writing on it. It's got like more dangers, and there's a little picture on it, and it's got the brand name.

HOW EASY OR DIFFICULT IS IT TO TELL THE BRAND NAME?
It's quite hard.
(School B, Group S4, Female)
Mayfair's no black...
Aye. It is.
Mayfair's blue...
They changed it. Look (produces a pack - facilitator comment)
All the packets. JPS are black. Mayfair are black.
(School A, Group S2, Male)

See my niece? – she'd .. she'd cry if she saw that, that's not something you should expose children to
(School A, Group S4, Male)
Perceived impact of plain packaging

- A consensus that they would have little impact on smokers but the negative imagery may put off occasional and non-smokers

- It was viewed that shuttered displays have the potential to dilute the impact of plain packs
I hate that one with the hole (in throat).
Eww.
Like that’s so disgusting!
I don’t really want to see that…
Is it on the other side? Can we turn it over?!
It is on the other side. Oh!
It's so disgusting.
Makes me feel sick

(School B, Group S4, Female)
They're very depressing, you just want to sit there and slit your wrists
(School A, Group S2, Male)

Yeah. But they can't even see it. They're not allowed to see it, so what's the point?.. So it only can be seen after they bought it
(School D, Group S2, Male)
…The Golden Virginia ones are like scaffie green…

Yeah. But just coz like they’ve changed the boxes and stuff, like we're gonna smoke ..

.. we're still gonna smoke it!

Like so they've changed it, but anyone that smokes is gonna smoke regardless of what the box looks like.

.. They're not gonna give up just because of a fag packet.  
(School D, Group S4, Female)
Just the fact that it's .. you only see a bad image. You don’t see like fancy colours or bright colours that make you look .. well, “Oh, that looks cool”.

But do like some people actually care about that?

People that smoke, I would say don’t care about it because they just want to smoke, but for .. for someone who’s not tried it before ... it will not tempt them so much I’d say. It is helpful to stop young people getting in to it in the first place.

(School B, Group S4, Male)
P: They’re in really shiny packets I think, when I’m just looking in the shops when you go to the counter it’s just like ‘in your face’!
P: So really like bright and shiny.
P: If you go to like sweetie shops and that its like how they’re displaying it, it’s like…do you know how when you got to sweetie shops they have like a big section of bonbons and stuff, it’s like that…. P: It looks like an adult sweetie shop!...
P: They don’t really promote it, but when you go there it looks quite promoting.

(School D; Group S2 Females; 2013)
Conclusions and implications

- Young people had high awareness of plain packs before May 2017
- Packs directly purchased, and observed in possession of family and friends, and in litter
- Packs described as dull and unappealing; imagery provoked negative responses
- Likely Impact?: Smokers vs never/occasional smokers
- 2013-17: Major changes in PoS displays, packaging and branding – continue to monitor in the future
DISPLAY Study Team

DISPLAY is funded by NIHR’s Public Health Research Programme

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