Point of Sale Tobacco Marketing

Disproportionately Targeting Vulnerable Populations

Point of Sale (POS) tobacco marketing disproportionately affects specific demographic groups such as youth, racial and ethnic minorities and those of low income or education.¹ This marketing includes advertisements, price promotions and product displays and is largely controlled by tobacco manufacturers through coercive contractual agreements with retailers.²

The manufacturers’ marketing scheme is purposely designed to recruit replacement smokers (i.e., youth) and retain current users – disproportionately representing low-socioeconomic (SES) communities.³

Manufacturers know who to target and how to reach that audience:

- Youth, African-Americans, and low-SES consumers tend to be price-sensitive and are more likely to take advantage of price promotions.⁴

- Tobacco companies increasingly use point of sale price promotions (e.g. special prices or offers, cents off discounts, or multi-pack sales) to recruit new (i.e., youth) consumers, and retain their African-American and low-SES consumers.⁵

- Retailers located in minority and low-income neighborhoods contain substantially more storefront advertising and offer more price promotions compared with retailers located in more affluent, non-minority neighborhoods.⁶

- Tobacco retailers are more highly concentrated near schools and areas with a high proportion of youth.⁷ Stores located near schools or in which adolescents frequently shop display nearly three times the amount of tobacco advertisements and promotional materials⁸ and tend to offer significantly lower cigarette prices⁹ than other stores in the community.¹⁰

- Retailers located in minority communities tend to market cheaper cigarettes or provide more “buy-one, get-one” deals than those in more affluent, non-minority communities.¹¹

Marketing of menthol products illustrates the industry’s strategy:

- Menthol cigarettes (popular among youth and African American smokers¹²) are promoted more aggressively in low-income, minority communities¹³ and communities with high proportions of youth.¹⁴

- Tobacco industry documents reveal the industry developed specific marketing strategies for small, inner city stores to incentivize those retailers to promote menthol cigarettes to young, black smokers and smokers of low-SES.¹⁵

- Two to three times more cigarette advertisements,¹⁶ particularly those for menthol products,¹⁷ are found in minority and low-SES communities than in more affluent, non-minority communities.¹⁸

The industry controls the retail environment:

- Most (about two-thirds) tobacco retailers participate in some type of incentive program offered by tobacco manufacturers.¹⁹

- The majority of retailers participate in multi-pack discount promotions (when available through the manufacturers).²⁰

- Cigarette companies spend about 50 cents per pack on price promotions (i.e., discounts).²¹

- Seventy percent of stores in New York were found to offer at least one price promotion in 2009, averaging 4.4 promotions per store.²²
Marketing more aggressively in “focus” communities with predominately low-income, Black residents). Tobacco companies use price promotions and other marketing strategies to make their products more affordable to kids and low-income smokers, who are more price-sensitive. The cigarette companies’ spending on price promotions amounts to a discount of about 50-cents per pack.

African Americans) increased, and the price of Newports decreased at tobacco retailers in these neighborhoods). Increased, the proportion of menthol cigarette advertising rose, promotion of Newport brand cigarettes (the most popular brand among youth and manufacturer assertions that availability of price promotions is not based on ethnicity, as the proportion of African-American high school students increased, and the proportion of African-American high school students increased, the proportion of African-American high school students increased, the proportion of African-American high school students increased, the proportion of African-American high school students was twice as likely to be found within 1000 feet of a school in minority neighborhoods than in non-minority neighborhoods); Novak et al., supra note 6, at 673 (study found that “retail tobacco outlets were more highly concentrated in areas where a large proportion of residents were younger than 18 years.”).";

L. Henriksen et al., Reaching youth at the point of sale: Cigarette marketing is more prevalent in stores where adolescents shop frequently, 13 TOB. CONTROL 315, 316 (2004).


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See, e.g., L. Henriksen et al., supra note 6, at 118.

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Rachel Widome et al., The Relationship of Neighborhood Demographic Characteristics to Point-of-Sale Tobacco Advertising and Marketing, 18(2) ETHN. HEALTH. 136, 137 (2013).

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