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‘Acceptable rebellion’: marketing hipster aesthetics to sell Camel cigarettes in the US

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Abstract

Objective—The aim of the present work was to understand why and how RJ Reynolds and other tobacco companies have marketed tobacco products to young adult social trendsetting consumers (termed ‘hipsters’) to recruit trendsetters and average consumers to smoke.

Methods—Analysis of tobacco industry documents and industry marketing materials.

Results—Since 1995, RJ Reynolds developed its marketing campaigns to better suit the lifestyle, image identity and attitudes of hip trendsetters (so-called ‘hipsters’), and Camel’s brand identity actively shifted to more closely convey the hipster persona. Camel emphasised in-venue events such as promotional music tours to link the brand and smoking to activities and symbols appealing to hipsters and their emulating masses.

Conclusions—To reach this targeted and socially valuable trend-setting population, public health advocates must tap into hipster psychology and expose to the targeted community the tobacco company’s efforts to infiltrate the hipster community to turn hipsters into tobacco-using role models.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) severely restricted under-18 directed tobacco advertising, the major tobacco companies have increasingly targeted young adults^{1–4} who represent an important market for tobacco companies and also set trends for adolescents. The small segment of the population who serve as ‘innovators’ and ‘early adopters’ of new trends influence consumer trends for the rest of society.^{35–7} ‘Hipsters’, or young trendsetters, are charismatic, approximately aged 18–35, and ‘possess tastes, social attitudes and opinions deemed cool by the cool’.⁸ Influential on mass media and, hence, adolescents and young adults,^{79–13} hipsters represent an important tobacco industry target with the power to drive trends.¹⁴¹⁵ Hipsters, with a heterogeneous and amorphous yet particular lifestyle, are particularly valuable for tobacco industry marketing because they encompass diverse in-crowd subcultures, serving as a cultural clearing house for popular and marginalised youth subcultures. The purpose of this paper is to explore why and how one

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Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

tobacco company, RJ Reynolds (RJR), sought to understand and expropriate the hipster aesthetic to promote cigarettes.

Hipsters are well recognised in marketing and public health literature.^{51016–19} The 2008 National Cancer Institute Tobacco Control Monograph, *The Role of the Media in Promoting and Reducing Tobacco Use*,¹⁹ noted that ‘smoking ‘hipsters’ are recruited clandestinely (from the bar and nightclub scene) to surreptitiously sell tobacco products to unsuspecting young adults in bars and elsewhere’. Martin and Kamins²⁰ examined the effects on potential and current smokers when the consequences of smoking (ie, death) are made explicit. They used terror management theory to examine the psychological defences smokers use to ignore the real risks of smoking, concluding that anti-smoking adverts focusing on the health consequences of smoking may have the ‘forbidden fruit’ effect and stimulate college-aged smokers to identify more strongly with their smoking.²⁰ Hipsters are undeterred by the physical risk of death that smoking poses. This nihilistic attitude leads researchers to conclude that physical threats do not motivate behaviour, but social threats do.⁹¹⁰²¹²² Social disapproval countermarketing effectively conveys risk to young adults. Social acceptability functions as a replacement for fear of death among young adults.²² Rose *et al*²³ described typologies and psychosocial profiles of smokers to tailor public health interventions to effectively access and influence the behaviour of these groups. As tobacco industry marketing capitalises on the nihilistic beliefs of hipsters by discrediting the value of life-span and health in favour of intensity of experience, so public health social marketing can provide an antidote by raising the question of the ‘social mortality’ smoking represents.

In the 1970s, RJR was losing market share to Philip Morris. Noticing future market share growth depended on capturing the youth market, by 1987 RJR had branded Camel with the ‘hipster’ Joe Camel character, with youth as the primary target.²⁴²⁵ While in 1988 Camel had only 0.5% of the under-18 cigarette market;²⁶ by 1991, 32.8% of adolescent and teenage smokers smoked Camels, contributing to a \$476 million increase in sales.²⁶ Retiring Joe Camel in 1997 as a result of litigation alleging that the campaign was targeted at teenagers,²⁷ RJR continued targeting young adult hipsters by developing a network of adult venue promotions, starting with its 1994 ‘Camel Club’ marketing program designed to influence trendsetters to smoke Camels.²³¹⁴²⁸²⁹ RJR viewed hipsters as an opportunity to refocus the Camel brand, regain market share from Philip Morris, raise the status of smokers and make smoking a more ‘aspirational’ activity.¹⁴³⁰ RJR’s goal was not merely for hipsters to smoke Camels, but rather to expropriate the hipster image and use it to appeal to mainstream consumers. The significant resources and research Camel invested designing its products and advertising campaigns using hipster culture to craft the Camel persona to sell cigarettes can help public health advocates to redirect the same consumer audience against smoking.

METHODS

We began with an analysis of tobacco industry documents (available in the Legacy Tobacco Documents Library, <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu>) using standard techniques.^{2431–35} Initial search terms included hipster, scenester, ASU30, Camel Club, hip, tattoo, rebel, nihilism, trend influence marketing, Johnny Depp, DIY and trendsetter. We also examined all Camel documents related to marketing after 2001. We followed these searches up using standard snowball methods based on names of individuals, organisations and products identified in the initial searches as well as adjacent Bates document numbers. We performed the searches between July 2007 and June 2008, and found approximately 200 relevant documents.

Planning documents were compared with advertising and marketing materials, Camel's websites (accessed between May 2007 and August 2008), investment reports, promotional material, news articles, advertising scholarly literature and media reports.

These combined sources presented a three-dimensional picture of Camel's actual operations since the early 1990s. This approach allowed us to track the theoretical claims of the tobacco industry and its consultants and also real marketing and product deployment with regard to (1) marketing to trendsetters to gain popular traction for smoking and specifically smoking Camel and (2) utilising specific design formats and messages that signal to young mainstream adults that smoking Camel cigarettes is an integral part of achieving the trendsetting lifestyle and status they desire (but do not have).

RESULTS

Who are the hipsters?

Hipster culture is the main subculture mass media uses to define and hype new trends for youth pop culture. Hipsters are generally college aged or college graduates, but do not fall into any specific economic level.⁸ In the USA, hipsters and hip hop are the two dominant cultures angst-filled youth aspire to socially,⁷ and in 2008 the trade publication *Ad Age* called the overlap between the two cultures 'Hipster-Hop... Mainstream enough for urban America, weird enough for these young hipsters'.³⁶ A true hipster never admits to being a hipster.⁸

Hipsters are characterised by nihilism.⁹ They go out of their way to thwart societal expectations and buck norms. They are antiestablishment, revelling in their marginalisation while celebrating antiheroes. They enjoy kitsch, because admiring the absurd and antique reinforces the legitimacy and value of their own eccentricities.³⁷ Accepting the awkward, unhealthy and shadow aspects of cultural norms, hipsters brought tattoos back into contemporary fashion. Hipsters are progenitors of selfconsciously cool underground local art and music scenes; aesthetics create the hipster.

Rather than doing things because identity dictates them, hipsters' identity is constructed through what they do and what they consume. This behaviour makes hipsters particularly important to marketers because the consumed product gains value when the hipster makes a statement through using it, rather than depleting it through consumption.³⁷ The hipster is the quintessential postmodern consumer.

Co-opting symbols of hipster culture: marketing firms drive hipsters programs for RJR

Considering 'style is strategy',³⁸ RJR's most advertised brand launched several products and marketing campaigns from 2006 to 2008 designed to exploit hipster imagery: Camel Exotic Blends, Camel Wides (Lights, Filters and Menthol) 'Artist packs', Project Cignature, Camel No. 9 and updated logos for Camel's core brand (table 1). These new products and packages were coordinated with hipster-oriented club, music, art and cultural events to create a holistic identification of the brand with hipster culture.

Since 1994, Camel considered hipsters 'an integral element' of their sales success because 'the hipsters...direct the flow of influence to the ordinary smoking consumer'.¹⁵ According to KBA, the marketing firm RJR hired in 1994 to develop Camel marketing strategies, 'Hipsters' habits are formed and showcased at the venues they frequent at and observed and emulated by the average consumer. This is what will spark the Camel brand as a 'trend' product. ... This trickle down marketplace phenomenon ensures that what begins as an alternative trend ultimately becomes a mainstream one'.¹⁵ Capitalising on hipster emotions, attitudes and values, Camel 'directly and peripherally involv[ed] the hipster' in club events,

‘[p]roviding the hipsters with product during venue visits and generally on the scene guarantee [ing] that hipsters will be encouraged to use the Camel brand’.¹⁵

To convince RJR to target hipsters, KBA capitalised on three facts: (1) Camel was popular with young smokers, (2) Joe Camel had already garnered the image of a bad boy and a scenester (one who frequents trendy venues) for Camel and (3) Camel was a brand in crisis, considered by the industry to have ‘the most confused, least consistent imagery’ of the premium brands.³⁹ To mitigate this confusion, KBA launched a new promotional technique for Camel termed Trend Influence Marketing (TIM).⁴⁰ KBA marshalled support for the profitability of this effort by informing Camel that ‘information obtained from the Surgeon General’s office preliminarily estimates that up to 70% of nightclub and bar patrons are smokers’.⁴⁰

KBA’s strategy would become a blueprint for Camel as a new way of reaching ‘the hardened, twenty-something, market-wary consumer’:

These ‘hipsters’ entire social lives revolve around nightclubs, cafes, fashion and music. Every day these ‘trend-setters’ ride the wave on the crest of cool. These are the people who start trends. Music and fashion, amongst other trends, are made or broken by these select few people. Camel’s goal of Trend Influence Marketing is to attract and convert smokers in the trend setting urban scene... Using T.I.M., the ‘trend-setters’ we convert to Camel will influence other smokers to try Camel and actually help build the Camel brand into a lasting trend.¹⁴

Adopting KBA’s approach, RJR hired additional marketing firms brokering hipster aesthetics to young mainstream (hipster imitating) populations to smoke Camels, including BrainReserve (from 1996 to at least 2000),⁴¹ Gyro Worldwide,⁴² BFG Marketing⁴³ and Kaart Marketing.^{44,53} Coordinating with these firms, RJR focused Camel’s image so its brand penetrated the hipster underground scene.

Hipster marketing channels

In the early 2000s Camel was aligned with hipsters via several integrated efforts. Infiltrating hipster venues, creating an atmosphere of exclusivity and indulgence for hipsters and blanketing free alternative news publications with imagery invocative of hipster aesthetics all helped repackage Camel as an organic component of hipster culture. Although Philip Morris also engaged in using these same subculture distribution channels, they appealed solely to the wannabes rather than the hipsters themselves. The Camel Club program, ‘Camel WIP’ (works in progress),⁴⁵ and subsequent campaigns have focused on both.

Bars—Alcohol use in social environments, notably bars and clubs, can lower inhibitions against people trying new risky behaviours such as smoking, or cause an ex-smoker to relapse.³⁴⁶ Social smokers also often begin smoking in bars.³⁴⁷ When they negotiated the MSA, the tobacco companies were careful to protect adult-only venues for tobacco advertising and promotion.⁴⁸ Between 1994 and 1999, tobacco advertisements in bars and clubs increased 300%, especially at adult venues where the average patron age was under 25.²⁸

At some 2007 Camel club events, RJR deployed rebuilt tour buses configured as portable ‘deluxe smoker’s lounges’ in front of hip venues which, by law, were smoke free inside⁵³ to invert the social environment in a way that transformed smokers from outcasts to VIPs.

Tours and in-club events—In 2004, the BFG advertising firm created and coordinated Camel’s Speakeasy Tour, which reintroduced:

The irreverence and indulgence of the ‘Golden Age’, a time when anything could and likely did, happen behind closed doors. And for one incredible evening after another, Camel adult smokers were treated to an experience unlike any other and given the freedom to name their pleasure.⁴⁹

This pro-smoking atmosphere created the aura of ‘irreverence and indulgence’ Camel aimed to achieve, with event evaluations reporting, ‘invited guests partied all night with the hottest DJs on the circuit’.⁴⁹

The sensory stimuli Camel introduced in its events to attract customers included a ‘collection of talent and entertainment that included burlesque dancers, 1920s flappers girls (with a decidedly modern day spin), illusionists, and much more!’⁴⁹ BFG called itself an ‘experimental marketing firm’ ‘producing and promoting this national [Camel] tour to help bring the latest trends in entertainment to an audience who craves discovery, and to clients who want to associate their brands with emerging voices’.⁴³ BFG also produced the Camel Signature Events in 2006, ‘Celebrating the Indie Spirit’, cobranding Camel with up and coming and already popular independent rock bands.⁴³

Websites—Camels’ websites (<http://camelsmokes.com>, <http://camel.com>, <http://camelno9.com>, <http://camelwides.com> and <http://camelsnus.com>) were significant marketing components for Camel. According to BFG, whose ‘charter [was] to create a lifestyle magazine online’, these websites were designed to integrate relational marketing with lifestyle: ‘Camel and BFG don’t just put on events, we support the adult smokers’ lifestyle and help create community around the brand’.

Coordinating website content with direct mail, advertising and product releases, Camel websites offered visitors profiles on performance artists (2007—2008), create your own tattoo games (2007), a full listing of all Camel sponsored events and free ticket downloads for them, among many other features. The websites integrated with Camel’s current marketing campaign are continuously updated, leaning heavily on music, do it yourself (DIY) success stories, art and artists, and how Camel’s products support these scenes.

In 2007 Camel briefly fielded a sister website <http://thefarmrocks.com>, which showcased indie rock music, the preferred music of many hipsters. The website had an internet music player where web surfers could learn about the bands featured, listen to their music and engage in various fan activities related to indie rock music. Camel intended to produce 1 million CDs of the featured artists (most of which were unknown or only had local followings) until a lawsuit by the attorneys general of eight states closed down the website, which featured cartoon images⁵² (figure 1) that were outlawed by the MSA. The website was coordinated by Kaart Marketing⁵³ that claims to ‘take brands into territory where they have never been or thought to go, but where they need to be’.⁵³

Direct mail—Tobacco companies build customer databases to send tailored direct mail marketing materials, promotions and loyalty incentives to target consumers.³⁵⁴⁵⁵ RJR used direct mail in 2006—2008 to introduce new products, including Camel No. 9s, the Camel Wides tattoo imagery advertising campaign, the Camel Artists Packs, the Signature Blends and Project Cignature, and the new packaging for the core Camel family (table 1). All direct mail referred consumers to <http://camelsmokes.com> for events, music, freebies and learning more about the Camel brand.

For example, an autumn 2006 Camel magazine mailer, titled ‘Swagger: Walk the Walk’⁵⁶ promoted Camel’s events with well known and up and coming musicians. ‘Swagger’ interviewed music industry executive Richard Gottelher on the ‘impact of indie music has on today’s culture’:

Indie music is the place where culture begins, and artists are free to express themselves without feeling the need to be accepted by the mainstream... when it comes to indie music 'the early tastemakers are only found there... and if independent music is just a way of saying 'music that comes from a counterculture', then the indie artists represent today's counterculturalists and thus our most important innovators to watch.⁵⁶

Another spread in the same mailer titled 'Don't Label Us: 5 tactics for label-less bands' tells bands how not to sell out, bemoans the consolidation of record labels and heralds DIY and web 2.0 (eg, <http://myspace.com>) as promotional opportunities. Other self-conscious audacious comments such as 'Start your own label. Yeah, we said it',⁵⁶ feed into a sense of empowerment for the indie rocker wannabe ('you can do anything, like start your own label'), transgression ('yeah, we dared to say it') and gumption ('we don't put limits or labels on you').

In a spread on Mix Master Mike, a famous pioneering DJ (and DJ for the Beastie Boys), Camel highlighted that he played Camel's Impulse tour and, in addition to focusing on his spiritual connections (when he's spinning, he's just 'transmitting a message, a signal sent from up above'), Camel quotes him describing mixing records with the same artistry as Camel desires its 'premium tobacco blends' to be viewed: 'It's about matching it up, like Picasso or Basquiat matches color'.⁵⁶

Alternative news media

Usually published weekly or online and almost always free, alternative newspapers or magazines are widely read by trendsetters as well as by teenagers eager to find out where their favourite band is playing next. Sepe and Glantz⁵⁷ found that from 1994 (the year the Camel Club and Trend Influence Marketing began) to 1999, tobacco advertisements in the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, a respected weekly among San Francisco hipsters, jumped from 8 to 337 adverts per year. They also found that rather than directly promoting cigarettes, half of all tobacco industry advertisements instead promoted branded bar nights and events, linking the tobacco brand with the venues, integrating brands into the scene.⁵⁷

In 1999, *Paper Magazine* (now <http://papermag.com>), one of New York's quintessential hipster publications, sent 86-page reports to several tobacco companies urging them to advertise in their publication:

THE SMOKERS!!!

Every month, *the* fashionable, trendy, nightlife crowd **devours**

PAPER Magazine to find out who, what when and where things are happening — before they are happening anywhere else!

THE QUESTION IS.... HOW?

How are they going in style?

How are they going to make their statement?

How are they going to pick their cigarette brand?

How are you going to reach them?⁵⁸

By 2004, Camel advertised heavily in *Paper Magazine*⁵⁹

In 2007, the *San Francisco Bay Guardian* regularly ran full-page advertisements for Camel (table 1), with colourful cardstock inserts appearing for Camel No. 9s (14 February), Camel Wides (14 March), and Camel Signatures (6 March). These leaflets fell out of the *Guardian*

when a reader opened it, creating colourful litter on the city sidewalks for days after the advertisements appeared. This sort of ‘on the ground’ advertising, combined with the associational pairing with the *Guardian*, an alternative paper, gave the adverts widespread visibility.

Through coordination of these various marketing channels Camel ingratiated itself with hipster culture to present itself as a cool and sympathetic part of the in crowd.

Usurping hipster culture to authenticate the smoking lifestyle

Camel’s advertising messages and branding messages incorporate carefully studied mimicry of the hipster ethos and lifestyle. In a 2000 marketing plan document on ‘Affinity Marketing’, the WIP hipster market plan set out its objectives:

Drive brand differentiation via association between Camel and contemporary art/ artists

Provide legitimization for brand and brand equity among smoking young adult trendsetters

Provide ‘permission’ for brand presence in venues frequented by smoking young adult trendsetters⁵⁵

Marketing Camel as the brand that caters to the young artists’ world sought to give Camel credibility with this trendsetting market. At the same time, creating a financial dependency on Camel would make artists as reliant on Camel for funds as Camel was on the artists for authenticity. (When Philip Morris announced in October 2007 it no longer would patronise the New York art world, over 200 dance, music and other art organisations were ‘stunned’, ‘bracing’ against a cultural ‘exodus’.⁶⁰) Providing corporate dollars to give struggling unknown artists their ‘break’ implies that without tobacco industry philanthropy, the funded artists could not have made it.⁶¹ Camel’s strategy to engage even the most maverick hipsters was to ‘create or feature art ‘events’ (fashion shows, film festivals, etc)’ in Camel bar venues, as well as ‘support creation of ‘artworks’ and leverage (these artworks and their artists) in appropriate, existing Camel (sponsored) vehicles’.⁴⁵ By integrating Camel’s brand into the local art world, Camel got increased exposure among its target audience and also associated Camel with the authenticity and credibility of the underground art world.

RJR concluded that Camel’s counterculture imagery (edgy, but still mainstream enough not to scare away ordinary consumers) produced an illusion of authenticity through portraying mystical and fantastic yet gritty and bold images and associations.⁶² Pushing the idea that Camel ‘goes places people never go’⁶² by transgressing social limitations and traditional boundaries positions Camel as having the same dark creative force hipsters relish and others imitate.

To sell smoking, Camel portrayed hipsters’ nihilism, the posture of welcoming rather than fearing death, dismissing the civilising project and order maintenance of dominant culture, which manifests as rebelliousness, self-destructiveness and negation of accepted symbology.²⁰²¹ The dark curiosity of cigarettes must be acknowledged to understand how Camel exploits their seduction. Richard Klein, in *Cigarettes are Sublime*, described the 19th century dandy’s analogously nihilistic view to the hipster’s: ‘living, as distinct from surviving, acquires its value from risks and sacrifices that tend to shorten life and hasten dying’.⁶³ This quality over quantity equation also may have the effect of inoculating hipsters against most public health messages offering a long but boring life. BrainReserve sought to exploit hipsters’ disdain for life span at the expense of lifestyle, asking in a presentation to RJR ‘Can the growing anti-medical establishment sentiment be ‘leveraged’ to support the personal choice aspects of smoking?’³⁰

Refurbished packaging and ‘shameless’ promotion

In February and March 2008 RJR sent direct mail Camel promotions in elaborately packaged boxes to their database customers containing a cigarette pack⁶⁴ (table 1). The cover of the package read ‘The Shameless Pursuit of Pleasure’ and ‘We Remastered our Classic Blend’.⁶⁴ The double meaning in the word ‘shameless’ could exonerate the smoker from any residual guilt felt for smoking as well as complement the smoker on his or her boldness for smoking as a personal pleasure, lauding the smoker’s strong personality. ‘Remastered’, a term commonly used by DJs to refer to increasing the quality of audio recordings, mixes the newness Camel aims to excite in customers with the ‘classic’ Camel, banking on Camels self-built reputation of quality and authenticity while celebrating newness.

In another promotion in 2006 and early 2007, Camel’s Artist Packs special cigarette pack designs, featured famous tattoo artists’ original work made for Camel cigarette packs, offering limited time ‘collector’s’ packs (table 1). These packs featured the artists’ biographies on the back of the packs, telling a story of the artist’s struggle, and relating modified ‘American Dream’ genre stories for the underground.⁵⁰⁶⁵ The tattoo theme of the Artists’ Packs was integrated throughout the Camel brand at the time. For example, in 2007 Camel set up a Camel Lounge at the ‘Meeting of the Marked’ tattoo convention in an effort to strengthen the coupling of Camel cigarettes with the tattoo world.⁶⁶

Famous New York tattoo artist Scott Campbell, who spearheaded the Camel Artists Packs and Wides campaigns (table 1), was first approached in 2005 by Camel’s advertising firm Gyro Worldwide to create art for Camel’s new marketing image.⁶⁵ Gyro Worldwide also owned the Sailor Jerry classic tattoo design clothing and merchandise brand designed by Campbell and other Camel tattoo artists.⁶⁵ Gyro Worldwide, Camel’s marketing agency, exploited business connections with top ‘authentic’ artists in the field to arrange for Camel’s ‘tattoo/authenticity/ marketing nexus’.⁶⁵

Evidence of effectiveness

RJR’s market share increased during its campaigns for Camel Artist Packs, Wides, No. 9s and Signature. Between the end of 2006 and 2007, retail share of Camel cigarettes went up 0.4% to 7.8%, more than double the market share increase of any other RJR brand.⁶⁷ Camel No. 9 alone captured 0.5% of total cigarette market share by the end of 2007, less than a year after its introduction.⁶⁸ Camel cigarettes’ growth in market share continued through 2008, increasing 0.3% over 2007.⁶⁹

DISCUSSION

RJR, with the guidance of key marketing firms (KBA, BrainRe-serve, Gyro, BFG, Kaart), actively sought to integrate Camel into all aspects of hipster culture. Contemporary hipsters, different in culture but similar in influence to the 1950s and 1960s beat generation with the same name, are valuable for tobacco marketers because hipsters (1) comprise the subculture that sets the trends for mainstream youth culture; (2) define themselves through the aesthetics that appeal to them and through the objects they consume; and (3) embrace a philosophical nihilism that is compatible with the dark appeal inherent in smoking. The coordinated marketing efforts targeting hipsters integrated print imagery of hipster-like artwork (tattoo art, kitsch, classic underground icons), hipster-oriented activities (club, art and music events) and hipster ideologies (transgression, independence/DIY, nihilism and hedonism) in an effort to funnel these emotions into smoking as a signifier of (what Camel called) ‘acceptable rebellion’.⁷⁰

All these elements (bar nights,²³²⁸ music tie-ins,⁷¹⁷² lifestyle marketing,⁷³ package redesign,³⁴⁷⁴ and viral marketing¹³⁷⁵) have been employed by tobacco companies before, but Camel's efforts to target hipsters integrates alternative marketing in a seamless way unseen in previous marketing efforts. This resulted in Camel appearing ubiquitously in this coveted trendsetting culture.

One of Camel's key marketing strategies in using hipsters to promote their products is mutual promotion. As Camel draws the authenticity of genuine culture, the aberrant cultures (or 'counterculture', as Camel calls it⁵⁶) Camel pretends to embrace are legitimised by a major transnational corporation spending money on people in that culture. Camel promotes to the masses a sanitised version of the hard life that birthed particular 'alternative' cultural expressions as an acceptable and desirable way of living. Adverts at non-hipster bars and non-hipsters places nonetheless contain hipster aesthetic elements, toned down (but well within the sphere of hipster imagery) to be marketed to the general public. Hip 'outsider' Camel collaborators become icons for mainstream cool seekers. Whomever transnational corporations exploit, they also legitimise.

Camel worked hard to keep tobacco use normalised in hipster subculture just when it was becoming denormalised in mass culture, reinforcing hipster culture's self-representation as the outsider. Hipsters feel simultaneously superior to pop culture and misunderstood and alienated by mainstream society, and hence define themselves against it. Camel's celebration of traditionally socially marginalised activities such as tattoo culture aims to convey that Camel understands and accepts hipsters. This legitimisation process also occurs when the tobacco industry financially or socially supports groups such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community, where the marginalised group feels accepted and understood by society through the simulacra of the corporation.⁷⁶⁷⁷

RJR is not the only tobacco company that has attempted to engage trendsetters. Philip Morris, in a 1992 Social Networks Focus Groups document, reached similar conclusions, finding that group '[l]eaders have more influence in younger groups... 18–21' and that '[i]nformal group leadership can be used to leverage promotional efforts'.⁷⁸ Internationally, tying tobacco brand personalities to music and other encompassing yet fluid cultural expressions has allowed tobacco companies to associatively integrate with cutting edge youth trends through alternative marketing channels.⁷⁹

Countering RJR's co-opting of hipster culture

In August 2000, Camel used hipster artist Michiko Stehrenberger's 'Blue Girl' artwork for a national Camel advertising campaign without her permission.⁸⁰ RJR had taken Stehrenberger's art from a promotional postcard, airbrushed out her copyright and signature, changed the picture's colouration from blue to sepia, reversed the image and added a Camel logo on the headphones of the Blue Girl character (figure 2). According to Stehrenberger, this advertisement 'potentially target[s] teens and kids through [RJR's] use of a stylised cartoon character after they were barred from using cartoons by the states' attorneys general'.⁸⁰ She sued RJR for copyright infringement and started working with tobacco control. As a result of this misuse, Stehrenberger collaborated with the Hawaii Health Department and Public Health Seattle, among other health organisations, to develop public health anti-tobacco campaign materials in 2006, sharing the story of her personal fight against the tobacco industry and using the hipster appeal of her art (including the infringed Blue Girl) to attract audiences not normally interested in tobacco prevention materials. In a collection of postcards she authorised for a smoke free campaign's distribution, Seattle-based ArtPatch wrote:

Several artists, photographers, and performers have had their work incorporated into tobacco advertising against their will or without their knowledge. Through cigarette branded sponsorships of local music venues, event spaces, and even hair salons, the tobacco industry is continuing a long-running effort to affiliate smoking with the age-old themes of outsiderism, rebellion, independence, and fashion essentially using our culture and arts to market their product.⁸⁰

A high profile violation of the MSA occurred in the 15 November 2007 40th Anniversary issue of *Rolling Stone* magazine when RJR advertised Camel's <http://thefarmrocks.com> website in a four-page 'gatefold' advertisement, touting Camel's The Farm 'Free Range Music' campaign as giving 'independent artists. more opportunities to be heard through online music and countless events'⁸¹ (figure 1). Promoting 'indie rock', the advertisement's cartoonish picture of a surreal farm showed radios with wings, birds, gramophones and other cartoon images. The inside fold-out cartoon poster, titled 'Indie Rock Universe',⁸¹ played with a space theme, claimed by RJR and *Rolling Stone* to be unrelated 'editorial content'.⁸²

The popular hipster blog <http://thedailyswarm.com>, doubting the sincerity of *Rolling Stone* and RJR' professed claim that the advertising and the editorial boards had no communication and that it was pure coincidence that the editorial cartoon form matched with Camel's indie rock advertising, wrote in an article entitled 'Kill Rock Stars'⁵³:

If you're like most indie rock music fans who paid any attention to those pages, you likely assumed that the 'Indie Rock Universe' poster was part and parcel of the Camel advertising campaign; if not, the message was clear... Camel's got indie rock's back...⁵³

Shortly after the *Rolling Stone* issue appeared, nine state attorneys general sued RJR claiming a violation of the MSA.⁵¹ RJR took down the <http://thefarmrocks.com> website and agreed to not advertise in any magazines for 2008.⁵³

Interventions

Just as last year's fashions are cast aside for this season's, hipsters are not committed to smoking when it no longer suits their image or social needs and hipsters have the capacity to regard smoking as a non-essential behaviour or trend. Because addiction is not fully appreciated by young adults, however, the temporary identity social smoking confers can harden into physiological rather than merely social identities. Public health can take advantage of its regulatory powers and ability to advertise in venues the tobacco industry cannot to head off young adult smoking.

Because of the MSA, the tobacco industry cannot advertise at large music festivals, for example, because they are all-ages events. Smoke-free marketers have the opportunity to develop a presence in this arena. The American Legacy Foundation's truth campaign participated in the Van's Warp tour,⁸³ a punk rock music concert that travelled across the country and attracts tens of thousands of the hipster-aspirational psychographic at each stop. Tobacco control projects have a monopoly on this valuable venue and can reach a wider audience. Smoke-free interventions such as this festival or at other privileged locations such as coffee shops, with the right approach mimicking tobacco industry marketing practices (hiring young, cool, attractive marketing representatives) can execute high visibility and propensity to quit level interventions with less money than the tobacco industry spends on its adult-only venues.

A 2008 in-venue study found 56% of hipsters aged 18–29 smoke socially.⁸⁴ How to effectively help this targeted population reduce tobacco use? A possible solution comes

from programs that use informal interventions led by aspirational peers to lower smoking prevalence among youth. In a UK school-based youth tobacco use prevention program,⁸⁵ researchers asked students to identify the leaders in their class, the children most classmates looked up to and most wanted to be like. Those identified peer leaders were then trained to provide informal peer education and, more importantly, to act as tobacco-free role models for their admiring classmates. Engaging social leaders to deliver smoke-free messages and act as smoke-free role models may be a successful strategy for targeting young adult hipsters as well.

If young adult hipsters (trendsetters) are more socially visible and have more social connections than ordinary age group peers, they have an increased ability to effect smoking mores positively or negatively. Data from the Framingham Heart Study demonstrated a 61% higher risk of smoking if one's close friend smoked; 29% if friends of friends smoke; and 11% for friends of friends of friends.⁸⁶ These findings are consistent with RJR's expectation that the behaviour of trendsetters may have a 'trickle down' effect on more mainstream consumers.¹⁵ Similarly, identifying and motivating influential group members to lead the pack in remaining smoke free can effect entire groups (and their affiliated groups). Lower social acceptability for smoking has a profound impact on smoking prevalence⁸⁷ yet must be cultivated through group-specific communication channels bearing culturally relevant messengers and messages.

Outrage like that evinced by Michiko Stehrenberger and the bands featured in <http://thefarmrocks.com> *Rolling Stone* incident can be (and has been) galvanised by successful tobacco control messages to encourage critical target markets to speak out against their culture's exploitation by tobacco corporations. A prime example is the American Legacy Foundation's (formerly Florida's) 'truth' campaign, which marshals youthful rebellion against tobacco industry manipulation of young people.⁸⁸⁸⁹ A 2007 truth campaign called 'whudafxup' focused on irony, deadpan humour and graffiti street culture. 'Whudafxup', as a fabricated word, fits the slang of urban youth street culture. As a public health campaign, 'whudafxup' integrated the rebellious allure of graffiti art, DIY stencilling instructions and stencil patterns to download from the internet and strong messages of exposure of and resistance to tobacco industry lies. As with this campaign, the use of the internet, mobile phone and other communication technologies increasingly is a component of public health campaigns. Figure 3 shows the 'two-faced' stencil created by graffiti artist Eelus for the campaign.

The main strategy behind the truth campaign is not raising awareness that smoking is dangerous, but rather turning the tables on tobacco with an 'antimanipulation' message as a way of tapping into nihilism and rebellion.⁸⁹⁹⁰ Appealing to the causes young adults care about, such as the environment, globalisation and global poverty by discussing the tobacco industry's complicity may also elicit anti-tobacco industry attitudes. Studies show that anti-tobacco industry attitudes are predictive of nonsmoking among young adults¹⁹¹ and of not progressing to regular smoking among young triers.⁹²⁹³ Denormalising smoking and the tobacco industry through 'antimanipulation' messages is likely to be particularly effective among the fiercely identity-conscious hipster population as well as the wider population of young people who seek to emulate them.

Limitations

Tobacco document research is by nature archival, whereas this paper focuses on current events. We have taken marketing plans at face value; it is important to remember that marketing firms have a vested interest in selling their services, so may overstate the importance and agency of cultural groups about whom they claim expertise when multimillion dollar contracts are at stake. To mitigate these problems and the lack of recent

tobacco documents, we triangulated our analysis with up to date mailers, website, promotional materials and news sources. This paper is a case study limited to the Camel brand. These same mechanisms probably work in different guises in other tobacco brand promotions. Furthermore, Camel's hipster marketing is US based. Although less nuanced than Camel's US marketing approach, the global model for transnational cigarette brand campaigns demonstrates a generalisation of globalised young adult and youth culture.⁷³⁷⁹

What this paper adds

- ▶ Young adults, especially young adult trendsetters, are disproportionately targeted by the tobacco industry because of their unique social habits and status to influence other adjoining age groups.
- ▶ This paper documents RJ Reynolds' fixation on marketing to young adult trendsetters (hipsters) to propagate a 'trickle down' effect to attract tobacco consumers. In the early 2000s RJ Reynolds began co-opting hipster iconography for their general Camel marketing campaigns.
- ▶ Accessing hip trendsetters allows the tobacco industry to maintain smoking as a normalised activity among an especially socially visible and hence influential population. To counteract the tobacco industry's overtargeting of hipsters, effective public health interventions must address young adult trendsetters using culturally relevant approaches.

Conclusions

Hipsters are a key population for tobacco companies. Hipsters have been consistently overlooked by the public health field because they do not fall into any of the typical marginalised groups public health concentrates on (such as homeless, minorities, youth, or low SES). Yet, because of their social lifestyle and unique positioning as trendsetters for a large portion of young adult and youth culture, hipsters are a sought after market because their habits and actions are often followed by their peers and the average consumer. Because hipsters are frequently also followed by the media and are by definition more visible and more frequently out and about for others to interact with and emulate, it may be more cost effective for tobacco control advocates to target hipsters, who share common values, aesthetics and motivation, which influences others, than targeting a demographic group. Making Camel cigarettes (and other tobacco products such as snus) more appealing to young adult smokers by tailoring brand identity and advertising to the specific aesthetics and values created in the scenes hipsters inhabit, RJR harnesses the counterculture to promote smoking as a culturally germane element, masking the fact that smoking is imposed through outside corporate promotions. To reach this targeted and valuable population public health must mobilise the critical side of hipster psychology against the predatory company attempting to infiltrate the hipster community and presume to tell them what's cool.

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Figure 1.

The Farm Rocks, Camel's 'independent' record label, touted itself as 'non-corporate' and 'free range music'.⁵² The irony that Camel, the flagship brand of the transnational RJ Reynolds corporation (RJR), aims to identify itself with the anticorporate ethos of indie rock music demonstrates the intended cognitive dissonance to manipulate the consumer. After an advertisement indistinguishable from editorial content on indie rock appeared in *Rolling Stone* magazine, 2 of the 180 bands *Rolling Stone* mentioned in the accompanying article filed a class action suit against *Rolling Stone* and Camel,⁵³ and attorney generals from 8 states sued RJR for violating the Master Settlement Agreement (MSA).⁵¹



Figure 2. Michiko Sterenberger’s original art postcard (left) picked up and illegally used by RJ Reynolds for their ‘SuperJane’ ‘F.I.R.E. (Feminine Ingenuity Redefining Energy)’ Camel-sponsored events (right).



Figure 3.

The truth campaign's 2006–2007 'whudafxup?' social marketing campaign used graffiti artist Eelus to demonstrate the 'two-faced' lies of the tobacco industry. Taking anti-tobacco messages to the hip streets of New York city, Eelus' graffiti on one side of the wall says 'On their websites, tobacco companies encourage people to quit smoking', and the other side reads 'In 2006 a court found that tobacco companies manipulate nicotine levels to keep smokers addicted'.⁹⁴


Table 1

Camel cigarette promotional campaigns using hipster imagery, 2006—2008

Product	Date introduced	Sample images	Target subgroup (within hipsters)	Brand personality	Slogans	Image elements	Promotion channels
Camel Exotic Blends	1999–2006		Fashion-conscious hipsters, luxury seekers and upwardly mobile hipsters, youth	Exclusivity/ scarcity, luxury, indulgence/ embracing vice, sweet flavours, festive, limited time blends	'Roaring 2000s'	1920s characters updated with 1990s elements (tattoos, nose rings), ⁴³⁴⁹ exotic, foreign, hedonism ('pleasure to burn')	Roaring 2000s tour, point of sales, direct mail, print media, alternative press, in-venue events

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Product	Date introduced	Sample images	Target subgroup (within hipsters)	Brand personality	Slogans	Image elements	Promotion channels
Camel Artist Packs (includes Wides, Filters, Menthol and Lights)	2006		Tattoo, artists, the blue collar worker, bikers, tougher outdoors persons, macho segment, ⁹⁵ non-urban male Marlboro market	'Real rebels have always had real style', identity through exclusiveness, creativity and style, 'acceptable rebellion' ⁷⁰	'Big, Fat, Delicious', 'Different is authentic'	Tattoo art, underground 'Sailor Jerry' tattoo imagery, psychedelic art.	Direct mail, alternative press, point of sales, in-venue events, website
Camel Signature (Project Signature)	2006		Less popular, less included posers who desire a feeling of contributing and belonging to a group, youth and starters (candy flavours)	Flavoured cigarettes created by consumer preference sampling and voting, consumer-interactive cigarette design of taste and packaging graphics, populist cigarette created by fellow smokers, DIY ethos	'Project Signature: A Collaboration', 'A taste and design initiative', The art of collaboration never tasted so good'	Surreal and slick, minimalist, art nouveau, customised designs	Direct mail, alternative press, Signature Blends tour, point of sales, in-venue events, website
Camel No. 9	February 2007		Young women, femme hipster identifying with kitsch and retro imagery, stylish segment ⁹⁵	Romantic but naughty, combining traditional aesthetics with today's cultural mores of sexual equality, feminine yet dark aesthetic, naughty and/or empowered without having to shed their feminine sexuality, Chanel No. 19, Love Potion No. 9, 'dressed to the nines', being on 'cloud nine'. ⁹⁶	light and luscious', 'You think the other night was hot...', 'Now in Stiletto'	Magenta and black (teal and black for menthols), kitsch and the retro domestic (Betty Paige) 1950s style, pack designs made by Santino (edgy designer showcased on the TV show <i>Project Runway</i>), coordinating merchandise: Santino-designed 1920s era cigarette holders, ⁹⁷ free phone 'bling' (plastic rhinestones to cover one's cellphone with), chapstick, lipstick, cigarette cases, record albums,	In-venue spa and female-oriented events and bar nights, female fashion-oriented magazines, ⁴⁵ website (http://cameIno9.com), alternative press, direct mail, promotional products (cigarette extenders, colour-coordinated accessories)

Product	Date introduced	Sample images	Target subgroup (within hipsters)	Brand personality	Slogans	Image elements	Promotion channels
Camel core styles (filters, lights, menthol) new pack	January 2008		Average young smoker who identifies as a non-conformist	Social (5 million smokers were invited to vote on the new packaging), yet different and 'acceptably' rebellious	The shameless pursuit of pleasure', 'We remastered our Classic Blend' (January—June 2008), 'Our best blend ever', '100% natural menthol', 'Refusing to be ordinary.' ⁶⁴	fashion and beauty care accessories; ⁹⁸⁻¹⁰⁰ 'Clean, more iconic' (http://camelsmokes.com), emphasis on art school-style modern design and form. Between 2006 and 2008 Camel Wides and Lights became an integrated part of the Camel 'core family' of products; a direct challenge to the similarly angled Marlboro. Camel Menthol also became more integrated into Camel's marketing during this period.	Direct mail, bar nights, point of sales, website (http://camelsmokes.com)