


truth® or Consequences: An analysis of public service announcements in contemporary society

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The pervasiveness of advertising is continuously increasing in today's society. Though there is no agreed-upon statistic, the most frequently cited estimate proposes that Americans encounter 3000 ads every day.¹ In most industries, advertising plays a central role in the development of successful businesses. But advertising's influence extends far beyond that of a simple economic supplier. The advertising industry is so powerful and so essential to companies today that business decisions and media content are dictated and limited by the fear of losing advertisers' backing. Controversial television shows and news stories are thus weighed against the potential loss of advertising revenue. Moreover, advertising has become so prevalent that newspapers now allocate 50 to 65 percent of their space to ad content so that it is the ads and not the news which are positioned first in the newspaper. Only then is the remaining space – the “newshole” – filled with the actual news content.²

The omnipresence of contemporary advertising has created a society that is made up not of citizens but of consumers. Individuals are bombarded and consequently molded by not-so-subtle messages that products, not personalities or character traits, make people “cool” or sexually attractive. The tobacco industry in particular has perfected this art, especially in its marketing toward teens, promoting its products by glamorizing smoking for nearly a century, aligning cigarettes with images of the cool and the rebellious. However, cigarette promotion is far different from any other product campaign. As an addictive and deadly product, the implications of cigarette advertising cannot be equated with ads for lipstick or soda.

Unfortunately, the success of the tobacco industry and its extensive marketing campaigns has placed cigarette ads in a category of their own. Classic tactics include, as mentioned above, emphasizing cigarettes' ability to make a person appear cool, sexy, and more masculine or feminine. Through the use of celebrity endorsements in the 1950s, the Marlboro Man's ruggedness, and the more modern tradition of attractive, nearly-naked models promoting smoking, the tobacco industry has been successful in glamorizing smoking and establishing a positive image for its product. These notions have not merely been introduced to society; rather, they have become inescapably ingrained in the contemporary mindset.

Yet with the growing awareness of nicotine's fatal qualities,

more and more antismoking campaigns are being developed today to counter the tobacco industry-established belief that cigarettes breed sophistication. These types of campaigns face numerous obstacles in not only reaching people with their message, but actively instilling the message in the mind of the public. The problem that arises with social awareness advertising boils down to one fact: selling a message is a great deal more difficult and complex than selling a tangible product. Specifically with antismoking messages, campaign organizers must additionally combat the billions of dollars allocated by the tobacco industry for advertisements. “According to the Federal Trade Commission, tobacco companies spent more than \$15.1 billion in 2003 to market their product in the United States, up from \$12.4 billion in 2002.”³ Moreover, Colleen Stevens, chief of the tobacco media unit at the California Department of Health Services notes, “When something is as much a part of your culture as smoking, there is no one [message] that stops it.”⁴

These dilemmas raise questions of how to target a nation that has been incessantly bombarded by advertisements, so much so that individuals have become molded by advertisers into the perfect submissive consumers – consumers who have been programmed to buy what they are told will make them happy and take up habits which they are deceptively taught to think are cool. Unfortunately, a policy has materialized where consumers no longer interrogate what is placed before them, leading to a society that is not only consumer-driven, but unquestioning of advertisers' manipulations. The American Legacy Foundation's antismoking campaign – truth® – fights to rattle the submissiveness of citizens and present a no-holds-barred view of the tobacco industry. In what has been widely deemed a “hard-hitting” series of campaigns, truth® turns advertising conventions around, using new methods (especially as compared to traditional public service announcements) to produce a unique message that has successfully lowered smoking rates among teens. However, before examining the creative tactics of the truth® campaign, it is necessary to first explore the tobacco industry and its ad campaigns – specifically focusing on the iconic image of the Marlboro Man – and to contextualize public service announcements through a discussion of early anti-drug ads.

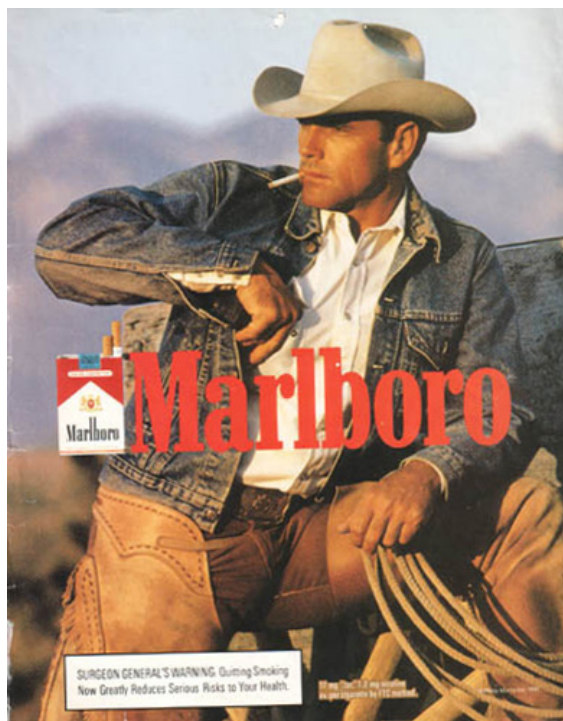


Figure 2: Marlboro ads - the Marlboro Man.^{8,9}

The example of the Marlboro Man is indicative of the methods the tobacco industry has used to ingrain certain notions within society's mind – that smoking is cool and/or glamorous, that it strengthens one's masculinity or femininity, that it is a mark of sexuality and thus increases one's sexual desirability. Moreover, the iconic status of the Marlboro Man is apparent in the following anecdote. A fifth-grader submitted an entry to an antismoking-poster contest held by a New York nonprofit in the early 1990s. The child's piece portrays "a skeleton with a cowboy hat, riding a horse into a cemetery" and includes the statement "Come to where the cancer is."¹⁰ This direct parody of the Marlboro campaign and its slogan "Come to where the flavor is" exemplifies the pervasive and identifiable nature of the Marlboro brand. More significantly, the ability of a child – one with only eleven years' worth of exposure to advertisements – to reconstruct the meaning of the symbolic Marlboro Man speaks volumes about the image's recognizable status in contemporary society. While the message of the fifth-grader's poster is ultimately a positive declaration against smoking, the fact that such a young adolescent could produce this level of parody illustrates the continuing need for antismoking campaigns. Ultimately, however, the power of the Marlboro icon proves the difficulty of the antismoking campaigns' mission, and creators of public service announcements are left to battle the longstanding and compelling idea that smoking is glamorous.

Attempting to Change Public Sentiments

The main purpose of the public service announcement (PSA), a type of noncommercial advertisement, is to educate the public. According to the Ad Council, a leading creator of PSAs in the United States, the most important aspect of awareness advertising is to "mobilize" the public and "make lasting and positive social change."¹¹ Cigarette and drug usage are key topics of public service campaigns given their known health

risks and connection to adolescents. Unfortunately, teens are a particularly hard demographic to reach with important social messages and PSA creators have long struggled to produce effective ads that actually influence teenagers to change their perceptions of cigarettes and drugs.

This manner of advertising was initially introduced in the 1980s as a result of First Lady Nancy Reagan's push to bring the "War on Drugs" to the forefront of American public issues. Her effort to educate U.S. society – particularly teens – about the dangers of drug use and abuse gave rise to a television campaign bearing the title "Just Say No." An attempt to empower and enlighten kids regarding their ability to become active agents against peer-pressured drug use, the campaign challenged teens to follow the campaign's title and "Just Say No." One campaign commercial shows an array of adolescents – boys, girls, whites, blacks – all being solicited to try various drugs by an off-screen husky male voice. Each child continuously rejects the man's offer with a resounding and confident "No," apparently somewhat disgusted and almost taken aback by the assumption that they may be interested in his illegal proposition. A male teen provides a voiceover, which is interspersed with the queries of the older man and the rejections of the teens. "If someone offers you drugs, instead of saying something you really don't mean, just say 'No!'" He continues: "No big production number, just say 'No!' you'd be surprised at how well it works." In both instances, the statements of "No!" are voiced diegetically by the adolescents.¹²

The exaggerated portrayal of the manipulation and pressure that teens face in regard to drug temptation is an attempt to elicit fear and anxiety, for teens themselves and also for parents. But beyond parents' concerns about abduction and forced drug use, the lurking, unseen man represents the ever-present apprehension teens experience daily in regard to peer pressure. The commercial thus endeavors to allay these fears by offering adolescents an alternative method to the influence of peer

pressure. The simple answer to kids' problems – "Just Say No" – is meant to be the obvious solution that was missing from public discourse for so many years.

Unfortunately however, this commercial fails on many levels. Though the time period in which it was aired must be taken into consideration – public conversation about drug use was not as open and realistic during the 1980s – the entire ad campaign lacks numerous components that prevent it from effectively instilling anti-drug sentiments in America's youth. First and foremost, the slogan and premise of the entire campaign, "Just Say No," offers no motivation or reasoning to support its assertion. Why shouldn't individuals use drugs? What is bad about drugs? Essentially, why should a teen say no? There is no information given citing the dangers of drugs or the possible long-term effects. The implication of the campaign is clear – drugs are bad, don't do them – but the lack of concrete proof gives teen viewers absolutely no reason to buy into the ad's message and reject drugs in the future.

Moreover, it might even be argued that the furtive role of the off-screen narrator could potentially intrigue teens about the mysterious (and consequently alluring) life of a drug user. Though his hushed, barely audible voice is clearly meant to minimize the impact of the drug names presented in the commercial, it is possible that some teens might perceive him as a tempting figure of clandestine authority. Additionally, when adolescents are explicitly told what to do they often consciously choose to do the opposite. While the campaign attempts to combat this by offering, but not forcing, a clear-cut solution, a firmly rebellious child might reject such an unrealistic and oversimplified line.

As a result of the ineffectively argued stance of the "Just Say No" campaign, as well as the lack of reasoning behind its slogan, later PSAs attempted to portray more assertive anti-drug messages. In 1998, the Partnership for a Drug-Free America produced a commercial which veered away from the non-aggressive tone of the "Just Say No" ads. Playing off an earlier commercial that the organization had created in 1987 – which showed an egg frying in a pan to represent "your brain on drugs" – the later ad took the original one step further.

The 1998 ad does not just present an egg and a frying pan as a metaphor for the damage drugs cause human brains; it recontextualizes the overall harm that stems from drug use. A young woman holds up an egg and, mimicking the 1987 commercial, states: "This is your brain." She then gestures with the frying pan in her other hand. "This is heroin."¹³ Looking directly at the camera she announces "This is what happens to your brain after snorting heroin" and then proceeds to violently smash the egg with the frying pan. "And this," she declares as egg yolk drips down her arm, "is what your body goes through." "It's not over yet," she continues. "This is what your friends go through. And your family. And your money. And your job. And your self-respect. And your future." Her monologue is interspersed between shots of the passionate and aggressive anger she takes out on the kitchen. She completely demolishes the contents of the entire room, breaking and shattering dishes, glasses, a lamp, even the clock on the wall. Finally, a black screen takes over, displaying the commercial's sponsors in white lettering: "Office of National Drug Control Policy; Partnership for a Drug-Free America." But the woman is allowed the last word, and the now-wrecked

kitchen reappears. Tossing the frying pan aside and squarely looking at the camera she inquires, "Any questions?"¹⁴

The aesthetic and cinematic components of the commercial emphasize the more assertive nature of this ad as compared to both the 1987 version and the entire "Just Say No" campaign. The color palette is made up of muted grays and whites, which add to the dimness, despair, and grittiness of the entire scenario. Moreover, the commercial represents a fast-paced and thus teen-directed approach, utilizing tools that will specifically catch the eye of the adolescent viewer the ad is targeting. Lastly, the commercial employs unconventional methods of cinematography such as jump cuts and awkward angles. These tools allow the commercial to stand apart from mainstream advertisements, but more, so they emphasize the jarring content and attitude of the ad.

In terms of anti-drug strategies, this commercial's attempt to elicit fear is considerably more effective than the previous "Just Say No" commercial. The intensity of the woman's actions is both unforgettable and haunting. Moreover, the extremity of those actions leaves viewers in a state of shock. While this commercial certainly provides more concrete reasons not to do drugs than "Just Say No," it could also be construed as telling teens what they already know – that drugs are harmful, dangerous, and detrimental. Furthermore, the ad's excessive and radical nature creates a possible situation where kids may dismiss it as unbelievable, and perhaps even as humorous.

An article written shortly after the debut of the commercial presents the reactions of numerous adolescents to the ad itself. The article outlines why one student thought the commercial was unsuccessful: "The frying pan ad failed to tell the audience what really happens when someone uses drugs and what effect it has on their family."¹⁵ In the 15-year-old's own words, "It was kind of phony. The lady with the frying pan – that just made me laugh."¹⁶ By indicating his acknowledgement of the ad's construction and the unrealistic situation it presents, he also reveals the dangers of creating overdramatic public service announcements. Ultimately, the article sums up a theory by psychologist Robert B. Butterworth, noting that "Evidence suggests these ad campaigns fail to deter drug use and don't connect with students beyond a mild chuckle."¹⁷ According to Butterworth himself, "It's an MTV visual that won't make an impact."¹⁸ This use of MTV-style imagery is indeed an attempt to specifically target a teenage audience, but as Butterworth points out, appropriate visuals don't ensure the desired response.

Butterworth's points are significant in understanding the failure of even this later attempt to reach teens with an effective and compelling message. The fact that these ads do not successfully "connect" with teens points to the root of a greater problem: to get individuals to truly accept a message and, more important, persuade them to change an ingrained belief, the sender of that message must be keyed into the mindset of the target audience. The damage drugs cause not only to the drug user but also to surrounding loved ones certainly gives one pause, but for teens this notion is easily dismissed after the initial impact wears off. Adolescents often require instant gratification and immediate reasoning. Explanations based on intangible notions regarding the consequences of drug use don't reverberate in the minds of teens. Lisa Unsworth, the executive vice president of a Boston ad agency responsible for

state government-sponsored anti-drug ads, says, “Kids think they will live forever. Talking about a disease you may get when you’re 50 or 60 isn’t a compelling motivator.”¹⁹ The “Your Brain on Drugs” commercial doesn’t even point to such a specific outcome as a disease; rather the incentive is based solely on the intangible notion that family and friends will go through an experience equivalent to a kitchen being demolished.

Though the powerful imagery of this ad cannot be wholly dismissed, it must be understood that teens will not effectively absorb the core objective of the ad. The core objective must be distinguished from the surface-level message: drugs are bad and using them will have consequences. However, the core objective represents the deeper essence of the ad that relates to effecting tangible behavioral changes in viewers. By 1998 it was no secret that drugs were harmful, but again, teens were not fazed or disconcerted by this elusive fact. The only way that any anti-drug ad can be effective is if it can successfully turn teens into active agents against the very same outlets associated with teenage rebellion. The “Your Brain on Drugs” commercials and the “Just Say No” campaign each fail on this count and thus can only be used to demonstrate ineffective modes of public service announcements.

Changing Conventions Through the truth®

As a result of the ineffective public service campaigns of the past, new methods and different approaches to PSAs became increasingly necessary to combat the continued presence of smoking in U.S. society in the late 1990s. The growing awareness of cigarettes’ deadly effects led to a major lawsuit brought against the tobacco industry (“Big Tobacco”) in 1998. In what became known as the Master Settlement Agreement (MSA), 46 states²⁰ and five U.S. territories signed an out-of-court agreement which strove to hold Big Tobacco accountable for its alleged knowledge and concealment of the dangers of smoking and required, among other things, that tobacco companies publicly release their internal documents.²¹ Additionally, the MSA led to the establishment of the American Legacy Foundation, the organization responsible for the creation of the most effective public service campaign to date – the truth® campaign.

According to its website, the American Legacy Foundation “develops national programs that address the health effects of tobacco use through grants, technical training and assistance, youth activism, strategic partnerships, counter-marketing and grass roots marketing campaigns, public relations, research and community outreach to populations disproportionately affected by the toll of tobacco.”²² More important, Legacy attempts to transform the entire societal mindset regarding smoking that has been fostered by Big Tobacco – that smoking is glamorous, cool, sexy, sophisticated, and rebellious.

The ultimate goal of the foundation provides insight into the distinct and innovative mentality of this organization: “The American Legacy Foundation is dedicated to building a world where young people reject tobacco and anyone can quit.”²³ The most significant component of this objective is the first statement regarding Legacy’s attempt to inspire a negative and active reaction among teens in order to motivate them to reject smoking. The intention is not just for kids to understand the well-known dangers of cigarettes, but rather, to make them rethink the concept of smoking and consciously

choose to renounce tobacco products. This attitude signifies the new way of thinking, which characterizes the contemporary approach to public service announcements.

Also noteworthy is the reference to “tobacco” as opposed to “cigarettes” or “smoking.” This carefully selected word choice is crucial and reflects the American Legacy Foundation’s focus on the corruption of Big Tobacco as a way to discourage teens from thinking positively about smoking. This tactic of painting the tobacco industry as a manipulating and deceitful corporate entity speaks directly to the anti-authority mindset of adolescents and provides a new reason to refuse cigarettes based on moral, rather than health, reasons. In fact, “The evidence is mounting that consumer awareness about tobacco industry manipulation of consumers and of government (to obstruct tobacco regulation) is a powerful force in inducing consumers to stop using tobacco, or, in the case of youth, not to start.”²⁴ The American Legacy foundation has thus chosen to devastate the image of Big Tobacco rather than relying on the already-known health risks of cigarettes.

The truth® campaign specifically has been described as edgy, hard-hitting, and unapologetic not only by the American Legacy Foundation itself but also by the mainstream press when describing the campaign. The Legacy website details the tactics of truth®, stating: “By telling the truth about the tobacco industry and its products and exposing their marketing tactics, truth® allows teens to make informed choices about tobacco use. It doesn’t preach. It doesn’t judge. It just works.”²⁵ Though this statement might be read as biased or even self-righteous, in fact it has been statistically proven that the truth® campaign was a factor in reducing youth smoking. The results of a study published in the March 2005 issue of the American Journal of Public Health “indicate[s] that the [truth] campaign accounted for a significant portion of the recent decline in youth smoking prevalence. We found that smoking prevalence among all students declined from 25.3% to 18.0% between 1999 and 2002 and that the campaign accounted for approximately 22% of this decline.”²⁶

These impressive statistics demonstrate and confirm the effectiveness of the truth® advertisements and prove that it has far outstripped the past tactics of eliciting fear or portraying the immediate harm caused by drugs. The truth® ads have found a way “to change what is considered normal,” getting at the root of longstanding societal conventions and altering the way those conventions are perceived by the general public.²⁷ Peggy Conlon, president and CEO of the Ad Council, recognizes these antismoking ads, noting that “They’re making kids appear smart if they resist smoking.”²⁸ The new-fangled notion presented by truth® – that in fact it may be wiser and even cooler to reject cigarettes – transforms the age-old “Just Say No” mentality and provides new reasoning to follow the advice of the slogan.

The website of Arnold Worldwide – the Boston-based ad agency that has paired up with Crispin Porter + Bogusky in Miami to produce the truth® campaign – outlines the mindset used in crafting the truth® advertisements. To start with, the creators differentiate this campaign from past public service announcements by allowing the facts – the truth, if you will – to speak for itself.

truth isn’t anti-smoker or even anti-smoking. truth is pro-knowledge. truth understands that young people are smart. And

*they hate being manipulated by grown-ups. truth simply lays the facts out for teens to consider for themselves, so they can make an informed decision about smoking. Facts about the product, the industry's marketing and manufacturing practices, and ultimately the consequences. Facts that are damning enough to turn a young person's need to rebel back on the industry itself.*²⁹

Moreover, these two agencies demonstrate a deep understanding of their target audience, which they use to speak to teens more directly. "Think about your average teenager. They want nothing more than to demonstrate some independence and exert control over their lives."³⁰ Even more perceptive is the following statement regarding the reason teens smoke and what that implies for anti-smoking ads:

*It turns out that young people who are open to smoking also tend to be open to other sensation-seeking behaviors. They index high on things like "daydreaming about ways to get even" or "standing up to adults" or "breaking the rules." We call them "sensation seekers". A Just-Say-No communication strategy to this group is the last thing that will work. And, unfortunately, it's the strategy that most smoking-prevention campaigns of the past have taken.*³¹

This acknowledgement and analysis as to why past PSAs have failed enables Arnold and Crispin to truly grasp the necessary components of an effective anti-smoking campaign and refrain from making the same mistake as "Just Say No" or "Your Brain on Drugs."

Lastly, Arnold and Crispin recognize the rebellious, anti-authority nature of youth. At one point, rebellion came by taking up smoking; now the goal is to make choosing not to smoke seem equally rebellious. A key detail that these agencies consciously distinguish and appreciate is the fact that "if you tell teens not to do something, they'll do it."³² Exactly the opposite of the "Just Say No" strategy, this realization engages Arnold and Crispin to make ads which will educate and appeal to teens without coming across as preachy or authoritarian:

*On the rational side of the equation, truth is about honest facts and information that expose Big Tobacco or shed light on the realities and consequences of smoking. This puts teens in control. Emotionally, truth is about being rebellious, risky, intelligent, empowered, independent and tolerant.*³³

By reappropriating the rebellion once associated with cigarettes and asserting teens' ability to ultimately make their own decisions, the truth® campaign appropriately and successfully addresses its target audience.

With these insights in mind, it is now possible to examine specific examples of truth® advertisements and the way that Arnold and Crispin's recognitions translate into effective public service announcements. One commercial actually contains no spoken dialogue, but remains a particularly striking demonstration of the innovative, unique, and distinct approaches of the truth® campaign. In 2002, truth® debuted an ad (named "1200") which attempted to illustrate the number of deaths caused by cigarettes each day.³⁴ The spot opens as a mass of people walk through a city's streets. This mass is portrayed through a random mix of shots from various distances and camera angles – close-ups, medium-close ups, high angles, overhead shots. There are shots of faces, bodies moving forward, and the numbers on each person's chest identifying each as just one out of 1200. As the commercial progresses, more and more high-angle shots are used to depict the substantial number of people which constitute the mass gathering. Ominous music plays, mixed with clamoring noises

and the sound of a helicopter to create a sense of foreboding and anticipation. As a low-angle shot pans up a glass skyscraper, a caption appears, reading "Outside a major tobacco company." The sound continues to intensify, and the camera turns to focus on the crowd below, seeming to swoop down onto the masses. Suddenly the entire crowd drops to the ground. Bodies collapse and smash against the pavement. Then, total silence. The camera intently surveys the damage – the frozen faces of the individuals, the heaps of crumpled bodies. The sound of the helicopter resumes slowly as a lone individual stands with an orange sign. It reads "Tobacco kills 1200 people a day." He flips over the sign. "Ever think about taking a day off?"

This ad doesn't use statistics alone to drive a point home; rather, it uses imagery to visualize those statistics and lend new meaning to boring and meaningless numbers. In its intensity, the commercial reestablishes the implication of 1200 people dying each day from tobacco-related illnesses. Images have long been shown to be more powerful than language, and the ad fully capitalizes on this reality. The de-emphasis of language throughout the majority of the commercial serves to bring the attention wholly to the visual elements. Moreover, the lack of words allows the viewer to interpret the ad however he or she chooses and thus prevents the message from sounding too "preachy." As Arnold and Crispin affirm, the goal is twofold – to present viewers with a set of facts and allow each individual to make of them what s/he will, but to present facts that ultimately speak for themselves.

Additionally, the commercial takes on a sarcastic tone in probing tobacco executives with the line "Ever think about taking a day off?" The ad's upfront jab at the heads of tobacco companies attracts a teenage audience in its mocking, cheeky nature and causes those viewers to engage more directly with the commercial. The reaction that this line elicits in teen viewers in turn prompts them to dissect the implication that the deadly consequences of cigarettes are unending. Moreover, "In unmasking these practices, 'truth' seeks to replace the attractive identity portrayed by tobacco advertising with a 'truth' alternative identity."³⁵ However, despite its ability to engage teens, the ad actually seems to be more explicitly directed at tobacco executives. Yet, the intention is not for these executives to see the ad and suddenly become aware of the ramifications of their occupation. Rather, this approach prevents teens from feeling hit over the head by a message and again refrains from any preachy sentiments. The seeming indirectness of the ad's message creates a dismissive quality which further draws a youth audience and authorizes teenage viewers to make their own meaning out of what is presented.

Another series of truth® ads titled "Crazyworld" (2003) presents an interesting view of the twisted reality of contemporary society. Highlighting the deceit of the tobacco industry even more so than the 1200 spot, this series explicitly points out the ludicrous nature of a world where Big Tobacco is permitted to promote a product it knows to be deadly. Crazyworld exposes the tobacco industry for knowing about cigarettes' dangerous effects long before this vital information was revealed to the public. The campaign largely focuses on the lack of accountability demanded of the tobacco industry, illustrated by the following paradox: cigarette packages are not required to list ingredients, yet were those same ingredients to be found in any other common consumer product, a recall

would be issued immediately.³⁶ The deeply ironic message that makes up the Crazyworld campaign causes viewers to stop and think much more than “Your Brain on Drugs” or “Just Say No.” By imparting facts that rattle rational thought and disrupt convention, the Crazyworld ads have quite a different tone than past PSAs.

One Crazyworld ad starts by depicting a jumbled first-person point-of-view of a rollercoaster ride, symbolizing the craziness that is about to ensue. The camera proceeds to move extremely quickly and choppily, presenting a hasty montage that is both disconcerting as well as reminiscent of the contemporary MTV aesthetic. Carnival-type music plays as viewers are taken through a neighborhood setting, then the aisles of a supermarket, and a back alleyway with dumpsters. The camera is shaky. The scenes are shown upside-down, sideways, right-side-up. The camera spirals and twists through a graveyard and moves on to a fast-paced, jerky street scene. A woman’s voiceover carries throughout the entire commercial:

*Ladies and Gentlemen, hello and welcome to Crazyworld. In Crazyworld, cigarettes are the only product in the store that kills a third of those who use them. And they don't even have to list ingredients on the label. Cyanide. Arsenic. Benzene. Polonium 210. Sounds like hazardous toxic waste, right? Well in Crazyworld, those are just a few of the 69 poisons in cigarette smoke. Crazyworld is a place where light and ultra light cigarettes can be as dangerous as regular ones. And where some companies recall a product if there's the risk of harming even one customer, well tobacco companies keep on making a product that kills 1200 people a day. Crazyworld is your world folks. Take a look around. It's not funny. It's not fair. It's crazy. Welcome to Crazyworld.*³⁷

The intense irony of this monologue provides viewers with a new way to look at the tobacco industry and presents anti-smoking facts in an entirely fresh light. Telling the viewer that he or she is inhaling poisons – 69 poisons – when they puff on a cigarette is considerably more effective and hard-hitting than stating that cigarettes are deadly. Actually naming the poisons is even more helpful in driving the point home. The facts become tangible through this sardonic presentation of reality versus unreality. Additionally, this approach completely reframes the discussion on smoking and successfully recontextualizes the dangers of smoking in a language that the general public can understand.

This ad and other Crazyworld examples grapple with the tension between facts so shocking and bizarre that it is hard to believe they are genuine truths. As the commercial states: “Crazyworld is your world, folks.” The unsettling reality that is revealed through the equation of Crazyworld with the real world successfully compels audiences to struggle with a major question regarding what is considered “reality.” The effect of leaving viewers with such a large question mark allows the message of this ad to permeate beyond the next round of commercials. Unlike “Your Brain on Drugs,” which offered an initial shock but failed to follow through, Crazyworld frames facts in such a way that audiences are left unsure of the world around them and as such are asked to challenge it.

Lastly, the language and particular aesthetic tone of this commercial once again exhibit Arnold and Crispin’s attentiveness to their main target audience. The sarcasm of the voiceover and the ad’s overall message speak directly to teens in a manner they will both understand and respect. The buildup of the dialogue also helps to intrigue and impassion

teens, instilling a more active interaction with the commercial and its message. Moreover, the visual component mimics the MTV style so ubiquitous in the adolescent world, allowing the commercial to stand out against the classical structure of most other advertisements. Not only does this jarring aesthetic quality appeal to teens, it also perfectly embodies the ad’s goal of highlighting the ridiculous components of the real world. Essentially, “Crazyworld...use[s] surreal imagery and dark humor to underscore the absurdity and health risks of smoking.”³⁸ The double impact provided by both the attitude of the message and the stylistic tone increases the effectiveness of this ad campaign.

Conclusion

The overall truth® campaign, as represented by the 1200 commercial and the Crazyworld example, has effectively pinpointed the language with which to speak to teens. Through irony, reformulated facts, and straightforward attacks on Big Tobacco, truth® has found a means to reposition the argument against smoking while maintaining a youth-friendly aesthetic and tone. By confronting the tobacco industry’s dishonest and manipulative nature, truth® has stumbled upon an innovative way to frame anti-smoking sentiments through a rejection of bureaucracy and an appeal to rebellion.

Additionally, the truth® campaign creators have exhibited a strong understanding of the manner in which teens relate to facts. Tired statements to the effect of “cigarettes cause cancer” or “drugs will mess with your brain” are ineffective in that they fail to permeate to a sufficient degree. Most individuals, particularly adolescents, have difficulty thinking in the long-term and thus need statements that cannot be lightly brushed aside. Forcing people to rethink what they have never even thought to question is the only tool which causes an effective and enduring result. While the shock value is certainly a factor in several truth® ads, these ads do more than merely alarm. The campaign reframes conventional facts so that they contextualize the damage caused by the physical act of inhaling a cigarette’s smoke, not the intangible notion of tobacco’s harm.

Despite these key techniques so adeptly appropriated by truth®, the battle is far from over. The Marlboro Man is still one of the most recognized and lucrative advertising figures in contemporary society, so much so that “even those ad professionals who abhor the tobacco industry will, when pressed, agree that the Marlboro Man has had unprecedented success as a global marketing tool for selling Philip Morris Cos.’ brand.”³⁹ Unfortunately, the iconic status of this figure is no match for even the most effective PSAs. As an image which carries a substantial array of implications and embodies so many attractive traits, the aura of the Marlboro Man is nearly impossible to escape. Consequently, truth® is the David to Big Tobacco’s Goliath in the anti-smoking battle – fighting against a strongly established industry with unparalleled resources. As stated succinctly by Arnold Worldwide: “How do we outbrand Big Tobacco with a fraction of their budget?”⁴⁰

However, there is hope that the underdog will win this struggle. In 1929, Edward Bernays, a brilliant public relations agent, covertly commissioned a group of young New York socialites to march in the city’s Easter parade each confidently smoking a cigarette and wearing a banner which read “torches of freedom.”⁴¹ Aimed to reverse the traditional notion that

the only females who smoked cigarettes were prostitutes, this publicity stunt coincided with the recent emancipation of women and was consequently presented as the women's "gesture of protest for absolute equality with men."⁴² The importance of this anecdote to the current battle against smoking lies in the outcome of Bernays' gimmick. Through this wholly manufactured act, Bernays was successful in "breaking the taboo against female smoking" and causing a rise in cigarette sales.⁴³ This incident proves the complete construction that went into the establishment of cigarettes' status in society and gives hope to the potential ability to deconstruct this position. It took time, effort, and – as the Easter parade proves – manipulation for the tobacco industry to build to its current image, and the increasing awareness of the risks of smoking can do nothing more than dismantle Big Tobacco's precious image. Just as Bernays tapped into public attitudes to discover the best way to present cigarettes as rebellious and liberating for women, the truth® campaign is using the same tools to shed new light on the tobacco industry and reconfigure the positive perception of cigarettes in contemporary society.

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2. Richard Campbell, *Media and Culture*, 5th ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006), 291.
3. Julie Bosmon, "For Tobacco, Stealth Marketing is the Norm," *New York Times*, March 10, 2006, sec. C4. This rise in marketing expenditure excludes ads in the television and radio markets, since ads for tobacco products in these media formats were banned in 1971. Even so, this regulation failed to hinder the public visibility of tobacco products as exemplified by the prominence of cigarettes in contemporary society and the extreme amounts of money the industry allocates for advertising in other areas.
4. Yumiko Ono, "Advertising: Teenagers Tell Which Antismoking Ads Work," *Wall Street Journal*, August 30, 1995, sec. B1.
5. "Truth in advertising," – camel cigarettes, 1934, <http://www.chickenhead.com/truth/camel2.html>.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Ad Age, Top 10 Advertising Icons of the Century, http://www.adage.com/century/ad_icons.html.
8. Ad Age, Icons: The Marlboro Man, <http://www.adage.com/century/icon01.html>.
9. Marlboro.jpg, <http://www.southdakotamagazine.com/word/wp-content/marlboro.jpg>.
10. Ono, "Teenagers tell which antismoking ads work," sec. B1.
11. Ad Council, About Ad Council, <http://adcouncil.org/default.aspx?id=68>.
12. Retro Junk, Just Say No - Commercial, http://www.retrojunk.com/details_commercial/367/.
13. This version's frank mention of a specific drug is important. It indicates a decade's worth of change that occurred between 1987 and 1998 – change that allowed anti-drug commercials, and society as a whole, to be more open about discussing and acknowledging the more detailed elements of drug use.
14. Partnership for a Drug-Free America, Fried Egg, History of the Partnership, This is Your Brain On Drugs, Multimedia sidebar: "Frying Pan," http://www.drugfree.org/Portal/About/NewsReleases/Fried_Egg_Message.
15. Ron Martz, "Anti-drug campaign gathering momentum," *The Atlanta Constitution*, January 21, 1998, sec. C1.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. Ono, "Teenagers Tell Which Antismoking Ads Work," sec. B1.
20. The remaining states – Florida, Minnesota, Texas, and Mississippi – had already reached individual agreements with the Tobacco industry.
21. The American Legacy Foundation, Master Settlement Agreement <http://www.americanlegacy.org/82.htm>
22. The American Legacy Foundation, Overview, http://www.americanlegacy.org/americanlegacy/skins/alf/display.aspx?Action=display_page&mode=User &ModuleID=8cde2e88-3052-448c-893d-d0b4b14b31c4&ObjectID=e203e4bd-d5ac-4d5b-90ce-cbfaf0e3db8.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Cheryl Heaton, "Who's Afraid of the Truth?" *American Journal of Public Health* 91, no. 4 (2001): 557.
25. The American Legacy Foundation, truth, http://www.americanlegacy.org/americanlegacy/skins/alf/display.aspx?Action=display_page&mode=User&ModuleID=8cde2e88-3052-448c-893d-d0b4b14b31c4&ObjectID=5441ae49-f8bb-4a52-9c7c-fed6a573fe48.
26. Matthew C. Farrelly and others, "Evidence of a Dose-Response Relationship Between 'truth' Antismoking Ads and Youth Smoking Prevalence," *American Journal of Public Health* 95, no. 3 (2005): 425.
27. Sheila K. Dewan, "The New Public Service Ad: Just Say 'Deal With It,'" *New York Times*, January 11, 2004, 4-5.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Arnold Worldwide, <http://www.arnoldworldwide.com/arn.cfm>.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*
35. Matthew C. Farrelly and others, "Getting to the Truth: Evaluating National Tobacco Countermarketing Campaigns," *American Journal of Public Health* 92, no. 6 (2002): 901.
36. For example, one Crazyworld ad from 2003 reveals that the discovery of small traces of cyanide found in two grapes caused tons of fruit to be banned in 1989. Yet one cigarette contains 33 times the cyanide found in those two grapes. Source: The American Legacy Foundation, truth Launches New TV and Print Creative <http://consideryoursource.com/388.html>.
37. truth, Crazyworld, <http://www.thetruth.com/issues/crazyworld/index.cfm>.
38. Lisa van der Pool, "'Crazyworld' Out, Jabs at Tobacco Marketing Back In," *Adweek*, November 1, 2004, 10.
39. Ad Age, Icons: The Marlboro Man, <http://www.adage.com/century/icon01.html>.
40. Arnold Worldwide, <http://www.arnoldworldwide.com/arn.cfm>.
41. Larry Tye, *The Father of Spin* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1998), 28.
42. The Museum of Public Relations, Edward L. Bernays, http://www.prmuseum.com/bernays/bernays_1929.html.
43. Mark Dowie, introduction to John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton, *Toxic Sludge is Good For You* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1995), 1.