

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Development, Implementation, and Evaluation of Anti-tobacco Communication Campaigns: The Stoptober Campaign

Deniz Sezgin 

Ankara University, Faculty of Communication, Cebeci, Ankara, Turkey,

ORCID iDs of the authors: D.S. 0000-0002-6136-5244.

Main Points

- The tobacco – media relationship, which started with traditional media, continues in today’s digital media.
- Mass media campaigns prepared for the protection and information of the public generally convey anti-tobacco messages to the public through traditional media, new media, and outdoor channels.
- It is of great importance that the campaigns are long-term and supported by policies.
- While carrying out anti-tobacco campaigns, the practices and strategies of the tobacco industry should also be monitored, and the methods of influencing target audiences should be reviewed.

Abstract

Every year, over seven million people die due to tobacco-related diseases. Tobacco and tobacco product consumption are among the leading causes of preventable deaths. Health communication campaigns can inform the public, raise awareness, and educate people about healthy behaviors. Health communication campaigns are targeted communication efforts, whether short- or long-term, based on a process and strategy designed to raise awareness among individuals on health issues and help them acquire and maintain healthy lifestyle habits. The anti-smoking Stoptober campaign conducted in the United Kingdom since 2012 is a good example of a campaign due to its long-term nature, inclusion of positive and cheerful messages, national and local coverage, and its ability to motivate individuals to quit smoking. Each country should prepare and implement anti-smoking campaigns based on its unique conditions, inform the public, and enhance the effectiveness of their efforts through evaluations.

Keywords: Anti-tobacco, awareness, campaign, health communication, Stoptober

Corresponding author:

Deniz Sezgin

E-mail:

dsezgin@media.ankara.edu.tr

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Introduction

Globally, tobacco and tobacco product consumption continues to rank among the preventable causes of death. Each year, more than eight million people die due to tobacco-related diseases. It is known that not only those who use tobacco and tobacco products but also those exposed to second-hand smoke are affected by the harmful effects of smoking.

Educational efforts and public awareness campaigns regarding the dangers of tobacco use

are fundamental goals of the World Health Organization’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), the first global public health treaty (Ergüder, 2008). Countries that have signed the treaty are considered to have accepted the development and implementation of a series of evidence-based tobacco control measures to reduce demand. Article 12 of the WHO FCTC states that parties should enhance public awareness and education about the harms of tobacco use. To assist the parties in fulfilling these obligations, WHO has developed guidelines and resources to facilitate the implementation of the WHO FCTC, including the

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MPOWER¹ strategy, which covers six evidence-based measures for effective tobacco control (Official Gazette of the Republic of Turkey, 2004; Hamill et al., 2015).

It is known that each country develops and implements its tobacco control policies according to its unique conditions, target audiences, culture, language, economic, and sociological infrastructure. Therefore, countries need to establish communication strategies tailored to their specific circumstances.

This descriptive study aims to explore the role of communication campaigns and the media in public awareness and how the effectiveness of health communication campaigns can be ensured. A case study of a tobacco control health communication campaign is conducted in line with this information.

Media – Tobacco Relations

Historically, the relationship between tobacco and the media dates back to old times. The convergence of media and tobacco, which began in the early 1920s in the United States when the tobacco industry identified women as a new target audience, has taken on a new dimension over time. Communication campaigns designed with attractive messages to influence and persuade women have quickly reached their target audience. In addition to news prepared with content that promotes tobacco use, advertisements included statements from health authorities about the benefits of tobacco. Furthermore, advertisements also featured opinion leaders and artists to create a positive perception of tobacco and promote its use.

In addition to women, who have been the long-term target audience of the tobacco industry, children were also exposed to tobacco-related messages through animated films, and these films were watched by both children and adults for many years. Moreover, films and series targeting all audiences still linger in people's memories.

The persuasive role of the media in promoting tobacco use in the past has taken a different turn over time. Research on the harmful effects of tobacco use has led countries to establish tobacco control policies and impose restrictions on tobacco marketing. Changes in tobacco control policies have also affected the media. As a result of new regulations, advertising bans have been implemented in many countries, effectively closing the door for the tobacco industry to reach the public through the media.

Due to the increase in tobacco use and its becoming a global health threat, as well as the strategies of the tobacco industry

to create markets in developing countries, the first international agreement on tobacco control, WHO FCTC, was adopted at the 56th World Health Assembly on May 21, 2003 (Ergüder, 2008). Article 12 of the WHO FCTC states that the parties should enhance public awareness and education about the harms of tobacco use. With 183 countries having ratified the treaty, countries have imposed full bans on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship, turning these into policy through constitutional restrictions. The primary articles of the treaty regarding measures to reduce tobacco demand involve regulations concerning communication, increasing public awareness, education, advertising, promotion, and sponsorship.

In 2008, WHO developed a new policy package, referred to as MPOWER, aimed at effectively implementing the issues covered by the WHO FCTC (“Dünya Sağlık Örgütü Tütün Kontrolü Çerçeve Sözleşmesi’nin Onaylanması Hakkında Karar,” 2004). Within MPOWER, the tobacco control policy bans advertising, promotion, and sponsorship, focusing on protecting and informing the public through other means. One of the measures recommended in MPOWER is a mass media campaign against tobacco use.

Mass media campaigns designed to protect the public and raise awareness about tobacco use generally convey anti-tobacco messages through traditional media, new media, and outdoor media. Communication programs carried out through traditional media over the years aim to disseminate informative and educational messages about tobacco and tobacco products over a defined period. Given the rapid changes in new communication technologies in recent years and the increasing use of new media and social media, it is possible to say that communication efforts regarding tobacco and tobacco products also take place through these channels. However, it should be noted that new media, which the tobacco industry is using intensively, is used more limitedly to protect individuals from the harmful effects of tobacco use and has received less attention in academic research. Research and applications on new media, often used for tobacco cessation efforts, are limited.

Today, communication campaigns aiming to protect individuals from the harmful effects of tobacco use continue in the media. After the regulations, the tobacco industry seeks to reach its target audiences through new media and different marketing strategies. In these conditions, it is clear that both efforts to inform and raise awareness about the harmful effects of tobacco use on individuals and monitoring the methods and strategies used by the tobacco industry are required. New strategies need to be developed to combat the tobacco industry effectively.

From Traditional Media to New Media

Media, an indispensable part of daily life, continues to be a source of information on various topics. Technological advancements bring new platforms to the field of communication, increasing diversity. While diversity is on the rise, the traditional media is not completely abandoned but evolves to retain its place. Television, for instance, continues to be preferred by various target audiences. Newspapers, on the other hand, are transforming to survive, especially as individuals with internet access are increasingly turning to new media as their source of news

¹ These terms represent the key components of a comprehensive tobacco control strategy. They are part of the MPOWER strategy introduced by the World Health Organization (WHO) to combat tobacco use:

Monitor (M): Monitoring tobacco use and preventive measures.
Protect (P): Protecting the public from the harms of second-hand smoke.

Offer (O): Offering help to quit tobacco use.

Warn (W): Warning about the dangers of tobacco use.

Enforce (E): Enforcing bans on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship.

Raise (R): Raising taxes on tobacco products.

(Yurdagül & Yüksel, 2012). It would not be incorrect to say that new media will continue to expand its presence and strengthen its position in the future. However, it's important to note that, in addition to all its positive contributions, new media also poses some risks to public health. Individuals sometimes struggle to find accurate information amidst the information overload of new media, leading to health problems and financial losses due to deceptive and misleading information.

As new media, and consequently, social media, expand their global presence, the use of social media has increased in integrated communication campaigns. This new media platform allows participants to express their thoughts and share information and ideas and it has the potential to develop more interactive and participatory strategies. In other words, social media enables the simultaneous creation and distribution of messages while allowing followers to quickly access and act on those messages. Considering the dialogic nature, suitability for viral spreading (from friend to friend, family member to family member), low cost, independence from time and place, the prevalence of smartphone usage, and the increasing use of social media as a news channel, it is evident that campaigns conducted through new media will effectively reach the online population. Especially given the high usage of social media by young people, it is clear that social media plays a significant role in reaching young target audiences.

The rapid evolution of the media landscape can be considered a potential challenge to the regulation and control of tobacco product marketing activities. With the rapid increase in internet usage and the prevalence of social media platforms, it becomes apparent that new approaches are necessary to regulate the tobacco industry's new marketing activities. Therefore, it is advisable to evaluate the use of social media in the context of the harmful effects of tobacco and tobacco products (Allen et al., 2015; Anderson & Ling, 2008; Brinn et al., 2012; Nogueira et al., 2018; Rohde et al., 2020). New media has focused on long-term tobacco control and smoking cessation programs. While internet-based smoking cessation incentive programs attempted through new media are encouraging, they have not been successful in the long term. The tobacco industry, on the other hand, has been using social media to target young audiences, especially in countries where restrictions on advertising, promotion, and sponsorship related to tobacco policies have been implemented (Freeman & Chapman, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The tobacco industry makes intensive efforts to understand and measure consumer perceptions and uses social media to analyze the target audience correctly and reach young people with different strategies through "stealth marketing." Viral marketing techniques, widely used in recent years, are being used as a method against tobacco bans, among other areas. Buzz marketing, which encourages individuals and news media to talk about a particular topic/product/company/service, is another strategy used by the tobacco industry (Wang & Struthers, 2018). It is not wrong to say that the tobacco industry will continue to reach its target audiences through various different strategies, trying new and alternative approaches. It is important to emphasize that new media should be used effectively with a well-thought-out strategy to protect society from the harmful effects of tobacco and to combat the tobacco industry.

In addition to the campaigns prepared regarding the harmful effects of tobacco and tobacco products, developing new approaches with the support of social networking sites for voluntary measures can be suggested. Most sites have policies regarding acceptable and admissible types of advertising. Similar policies banning tobacco and cigarette promotion exist on Facebook and Google. However, there are still gaps in these policies that allow advertisements to be published using keywords such as "smoking accessories" and "smoking." Collaboration can be planned to address these gaps. Filtering tobacco-related content may be recommended as another solution. However, due to current shortcomings in filters, it is essential to accurately label content. With filtering, especially children can be protected from tobacco-related content.

Health Communication Campaign Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation

Planning and implementing health-related communication campaigns do not differ significantly from other communication campaigns. However, the sensitivity of health issues and the impact of health-related behavior patterns on quality of life place health communication campaigns in a different position.

Health communication campaigns aim to create positive behaviors and prevent or hinder negative behaviors. It is possible to say that communication campaigns reach their target audiences through both direct and indirect efforts (Bekalu et al., 2019; Lee & Chen, 2017; Niederdeppe, 2005; Perrault, 2017). Campaigns that aim to create cognitive and emotional responses in the target audience follow a direct path, targeting individuals expected to encounter the campaign message. They aim to remove barriers to change the individual's personal plan, make them aware of negative behaviors or social norms, promote healthy behaviors, and ensure positive feelings at the end of the change. Indirectly, these campaigns initiate repeated discussions and conversations within the individual's social environment, thereby expecting behavioral change in the individual. Additionally, positive behaviors in a person's environment can create a new social norm, indirectly influencing that individual as well (Allen et al., 2015; Gould et al., 2013; Namkoong et al., 2018; van den Heerik et al., 2017). In short, even if an individual is not the direct target of the campaign, they can adopt positive behavior through their social circle. Furthermore, when health communication campaigns are applied through mass communication channels in the long term and repeatedly, they can encourage policymakers and authorities to take measures and make regulations by ensuring that health issues are discussed among large sections of society.

All communication efforts should start with a clear and specific goal. Sometimes, communication campaigns are initiated with expressions like "let's make a film" or "let's make a public service announcement." Ignoring the communication campaign cycle is the most significant obstacle to the success of a campaign. In the preparations for the campaign, it is essential to clearly state the fundamental problem. Previous studies and research on the topic are crucial for conducting a situation analysis and defining the problem. Campaign goals should be based on evidence revealed during the formative pre-evaluation, and must be specific, measurable, realistic, and achievable. After identifying the problem, the target audience for the campaign needs to be specifically

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defined. Research should be conducted on the target audience to understand their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and tendencies regarding the identified issue, as this is essential for the success of the campaign.

Once the target audience analysis is complete, a creative strategy should be determined. It is known that communication campaigns without the right strategy often fail. Skipping certain stages can prevent the campaign from achieving the desired impact on the target audience. After determining the strategy, the next step is to create messages. Then, the specific channels the campaign will use and the concrete objectives it aims to achieve must be defined. Radio, television, newspapers, brochures, posters, printed or digital infographics, social media messages, and outdoor advertisements are just a few of the tools that can be used.

The campaign implementation stages should be followed, and any shortcomings should be quickly assessed and changed. Campaign evaluation is a crucial stage and should not be considered as an additional application to the campaign. Evaluation should be integrated into all stages of campaign development. To enable healthy evaluations during the campaign process, the success measurement criteria should be defined during the planning phase, and key performance indicators should be identified. The timeframe for the campaign, the level of access to the target audience, and numerical goals should be determined. The rate of the target audience's engagement with the campaign content and messages, such as liking, sharing, and commenting, should be measured and analyzed. The campaign's recall rate, behavior change rate, and similar information should be presented. Without process evaluation and outcome evaluation, it will not be possible to determine the effects and success of a campaign.

The campaign process, by its nature, is a cyclical process. It should be emphasized that communication campaigns are dynamic structures and communication should be sustained as a cycle. Throughout the process, the participation and feedback of the audience should be closely monitored, and the campaign should be continually updated with new ideas and content. Not only numerical values such as data and reports but also the emotional content generated by the campaign should be monitored. In short, a communication strategy should target both emotion and reason.

Methods

The population of this study consists of all anti-smoking campaigns. The sample, on the other hand, was determined through purposive sampling (Yıldız, 2017). The Stoptober campaign, initiated by Public Health England in the UK in 2012 and ongoing for 11 years, was examined as an exemplary campaign. The criteria for selecting this campaign as a case study include its long-term nature, the presence of positive and cheerful messages, the existence of strategies to reach different target audiences, and support from both national and local entities.

In this descriptive qualitative study, a case study analysis has been conducted. A case study examination is a qualitative approach in which one or more incidents are investigated in detail over time through multiple sources of information and in-depth data collection. In case analysis, questions such as how, why, and who are

addressed, and for each situation, several different data sources, either primary or secondary, are used (Creswell, 2007; Houghton et al., 2015).

Results

Stoptober Anti-smoking Campaign

The Stoptober is the Department of Health and Social Care's annual "stop smoking" campaign, coming under the umbrella brand Better Health. Launched in October 2012 and entering its 11th year in 2023, the campaign aims to inspire as many tobacco users as possible (Office for Health Improvement & Disparities, 2021). It consists of the words "October" and "stop." The campaign encourages its target audience to abstain from smoking for 28 days starting from October 1, 2012, conveying the message that they can achieve a lasting quitting goal (Kuipers et al., 2020). This message is supported by scientific evidence, indicating that reaching the goal is five times more likely. Since 2012, Stoptober has successfully assisted 2.5 million smokers in quitting. Quitting smoking not only provides short-term and long-term health benefits but also brings significant economic gains. In the early stages of the campaign, promotional tours and roadshows were organized to introduce the campaign and directly reach smokers.

The campaign utilizes the pressure of a collective environment to motivate individuals to support each other. In other words, it encourages them with a collectively achievable goal. While emphasizing the ease of trying for just 1 month for those who fear failure, it invites the target audience to quit smoking for a specific date, against the likelihood of procrastination and abandonment (Tieks et al., 2019; Troelstra et al., 2019).

The Stoptober campaign continues in 2023 with a new theme due to the fact that more than five million adults in the UK still smoke, and smoking remains the single largest behavioral cause of preventable diseases and deaths, causing 80,000 deaths per year. The year 2023's slogan of the campaign is, "Good things start happening when you quit smoking." The campaign design highlights the immediate benefits that smokers can expect when they quit smoking. The campaign aims to generate rapid awareness and encourage participation with content across all channels this year. To increase visibility, there is an advertising slot in a Premier League football match (Office for Health Improvement & Disparities, 2023; *Stoptober Campaign 2023*, 2023).

The tone of the campaign is cheerful and positive, focusing on the collective effort and the importance of support. The colors used in the printed and digital materials prepared for the campaign are positive, motivational, and action-oriented in nature (Figure 1 and 2). They are in harmony with the fun campaign tone. These communication actions are supported across all channels (Djian et al., 2019; National Health Service, 2023). The foundation of the campaign lies in creating SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound) goals. Campaigns designed with such goals aim to provide their target audiences with specific, defined, realistic objectives (Brown et al., 2014; Troelstra et al., 2019).

The campaign primarily includes a media campaign that encourages individuals to register using relevant helplines and



Figure 1 and 2. Stoptober 2023 Better Health Quit Smoking.

websites. Stoptober offers various free quitting tools, such as the NHS Quit Smoking app, a Facebook messaging bot, Stoptober Facebook online communities, daily e-mails, and an online Personal Quit Plan tool. The NHS Quit Smoking app, which is free, helps individuals track their progress, see how much they're saving, and receive daily support. The Facebook Smokefree online community aims to facilitate interaction among members in a friendly and supportive environment. Daily NHS email support provides 28 days of advice and tips for quitting smoking. A mobile application (regular notifications are sent), printed communication materials, quitline, websites, and other tools have been developed to support smoking cessation. Additionally, the prepared quitting kit has been enriched with content that highlights health improvements during the smoking cessation process, savings, various tips, a calendar, stress balls, and more (Office for Health Improvement & Disparities, 2023; *Stoptober Campaign*, 2023).

In the UK, significant efforts have been made at various times to promote smoking cessation. Smoking cessation services are widespread across the country and available in various settings such as hospitals, clinics, dental practices, pharmacies, schools, workplaces, and prisons. Support, advice, and encouragement for smoking cessation are provided through individual or group meetings. Stoptober collaborates with local authorities, clinicians, and academics to be recognized both nationally and locally. Associations, healthcare professionals, companies, a TV channel, universities, and various services also provide support.

Stoptober 2023 focuses on helping smokers quit smoking, including electronic cigarette use. The campaign also emphasizes the harms of e-cigarettes as much as combustible tobacco cigarettes. Stoptober supports the government's new and bold measures, such as financial incentives for all pregnant women who smoke to quit smoking, in order to achieve the important goal of being smoke-free by 2030.

Discussion

It is known that worldwide, many health problems are experienced due to the use of tobacco and tobacco products, and millions of people lose their lives every day due to the harmful effects of tobacco. This situation has led countries to develop various policies, regulations, and restrictions in the fight against the use of tobacco and tobacco products.

The intersection of media and the tobacco industry dates back to old times. In the past, the media supported and endorsed the tobacco industry, but nowadays it is known that the media supports anti-tobacco discourse and campaigns. While campaigns to inform the public and create awareness about the harmful effects of tobacco continue, they also have to deal with the tobacco industry's misleading and manipulative marketing strategies.

In the context of the fight against tobacco use, drawing on health communication research and theories, as well as utilizing scientific knowledge and practical experience, can help reach the target audience effectively. The theoretical background reveals that individuals learn many health-related behaviors from their social environments, and both peers and role models play a crucial role. Individuals do not take action unless they believe they can achieve the desired results with new behaviors. Individuals tend to avoid behaviors that make them uncomfortable while adopting behaviors that satisfy them and enhance their self-esteem. Individuals are more sensitive to messages when they believe that their behaviors harm them; otherwise, they do not change harmful or negative behaviors. Individuals do not take the long-term effects of negative health behaviors seriously. Without believing that health risks are significant, health communication campaigns cannot achieve the desired success.

Analyzing the target audience thoroughly, establishing emotional and rational connections with the target audience, determining

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the right strategy, and managing the process with ongoing evaluations are of great importance when preparing a campaign.

While conducting campaigns against tobacco use, it is also crucial to monitor the practices and strategies of the tobacco industry and review the methods of influencing the target audience. Developing and using creative methods as effective as those of the tobacco industry can help protect society from tobacco marketing and the harmful effects of tobacco use. In the context of anti-tobacco communication campaigns in recent years, greater use of social media, which has seen increasing usage rates, is essential.

In addition to everything mentioned, it should be noted that in-depth analyses of the sociological, psychological, and economic factors that lead to tobacco use are also necessary to protect society from tobacco and its harms.

In summary, the ongoing Stoptober anti-smoking campaign conducted by the UK possesses all the essential characteristics that a campaign should have. It provides positive messages to its target audience, directs them toward behavior change, and conducts interim assessments to plan how the campaign can be improved. By delivering positive messages that promote health behavior adoption, the campaign stands as an exemplary instance of a successful campaign.

Limitations and Directions

The study has some limitations. The limitations of this study include its focus on a single campaign and the inability to generalize the findings to all anti-smoking campaigns and countries.

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