

# Example of tobacco advertising argumentative essay

[Business](#), [Marketing](#)



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In the literal sense, tobacco is an agricultural product. In the social sense, tobacco is the devil incarnate (or so the society at large and government want us to believe).

Tobacco is obtained from the leaves of the plants belonging to the genus Nicotiana. It can be used a pesticide, can be consumed and used to make a couple of medicines.

The issue at hand is if tobacco advertising can increase consumption of tobacco or if there isn't any relation after all between advertising and consumption of the same. Through this paper an attempt shall be made to understand the relation between the two and a logical conclusion shall be reached.

## **The Tobacco Products**

India holds the second position when it comes to production of tobacco in the world.

Cigarettes are just one form of tobacco consumption. The other is 'gutka', a mix of chewing tobacco made from crushed betel leaves and nicotine. The consumption of this smokeless tobacco has steadily gone up, rising to 35% in the last decade. The reason for this is its easy availability, handy packaging and cheap cost.

## **Tobacco Advertising: Before 2004**

Tobacco was consumed in India even in 18th century! This is known because an advertisement, belonging to that century, urging people to smoke has been unearthed. The ad calls for Indians to buy cigarettes that are 'Made in India! By Indians! For Indians!'

(18 century ad for Vazeer Cigarettes)

In the early 20th century, cigarettes were advertised for women (Maspero) as they were for men (Pradhan Specials). While the early ads got their message across, they were not high on copy or imagery. It was the Wills Filter ads that changed this norm and took cigarette advertising from bland to beautiful.

Right from the time it started advertising, to the time it stopped due to government intervention Will Filter (later changed to Wills Navy Cut) followed one concept and used one tagline - 'Made For Each Other'. Over time the models changed and so did the nuances of the copy, but the message remained the same; just like couples are made for each other, in a Wills cigarette, the filter and tobacco are made for each other.

(Wills Filter/Navy Cut ads; different times, similar images, same copy)

Of course other cigarette brands, like Godfrey Phillips, Charminar, Gold Flake

advertised too. Each brand has its own proposition and positioning. While Wills went for the emotional factor, Four Square chose for the aspirational, slightly seductive genre.

(Four Square -The Man with the Smooth Edge)

(Godfrey Phillips: There can be no fire without passion) (Charminar)

As you can see, the ads carried statutory warnings but were direct in their message. Even as companies spent on advertising, there is no conclusive data from that time that proves that advertising impacted or boosted consumption. Like mentioned earlier, it was the cheap costs and easy availability of the products that got people to consume them.

## **After 2004**

The Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003 (COPTA) is the principle act governing all tobacco and associated control laws in the country. In 2004, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare started to exercise the rights granted to it under Section 31 of COPTA.

It was then that advertising of tobacco products was completely banned in the country!

Here are the specifics of the ban:

- Domestic internet, print, radio, TV, ads are banned
- International internet, print, radio, TV ads are allowed
- Outdoor and point of sale ads are allowed

Along with advertising, the government also banned smoking in public places.

The increasing health awareness among urban Indians and the rise of tobacco caused cancer prompted the government to take these decisions. But then these were too harsh and too extreme. While cigarette quitting is still largely a personal choice, the number of tobacco caused patients hasn't gone down. Statistically, 80, 000 cases of oral cancer and similar problems are reported each year and the country still spends money on the treatment and cure of such tobacco-related diseases than the excise revenue that it earns from the sale of tobacco. Clearly, the government's policies have hardly managed to create a dent in the market.

## **Gutka**

After the ban, gutka companies started to advertise (via TV, print, radio, etc mediums) 'paan masala'. Now, the packaging and look of this paan masala is almost identical to the gutka. So in a way, the gutka companies have found a clever way to circumvent the government restriction. However, the government of some states like Maharashtra and Kerala have come down heavily on the gutka industry and banned the public sale of the product. Nonetheless, gutka products are being manufactured and they can be purchased. Just that the products are not publicly displayed, you have to ask to buy one.

**Conclusion:**

I think, the allowing of point of sale advertising and not adopting plain packaging (where in no branding is allowed, only images of cancer patients and a statutory warning is published) are decisions that need to be reversed. While one may not be bombarded by cigarette ads on TV, but then one too many are visible at the local tapri shop, which is where people head to smoke anyway, works against the whole no-smoke campaign.

Also, instead of focussing too much on banning advertising, there should be an increased focus on generating awareness about the hazards of consuming tobacco and if need be, of banning the distribution and availability of the products. Only the latter can effectively and massively reduce tobacco consumption in the country.

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