Chapter 11
Tobacco CSR and the Ethics Game Paradox: A Qualitative Approach for Evaluating Tobacco Brand Name Strategy Following Plain Packaging

Anne Morton and Steven J. Greenland

Abstract Smoking is a key driver of the non-communicable disease epidemic and the leading cause of avoidable premature death. Accordingly, governments around the globe have imposed tough regulations on manufacturers' marketing activities in order to reduce tobacco sales and the harmful effects of smoking. Despite these constraints tobacco companies continue to use the available elements of the marketing mix to promote their products, while also engaging in corporate social responsibility activities that seek to offset negative public perceptions of their products. The Australian tobacco market changed in December 2012 when plain packaging of cigarettes became law and this key avenue for branding cigarettes was closed. However, tobacco manufacturers continued to introduce new brand variants and segment the market with highly differentiated offerings. A key dimension of the manufacturer response to plain packaging involved a new brand name strategy. After plain packaging the brand name presented the only means of differentiating tobacco offerings and the structure of these evolved to include an existing brand name and two or more descriptive words. Words used as descriptors are often colour words although more abstract words are also employed, for example Dunhill Infinite White or Winfield Optimum Crush Blue. Preliminary research suggests that these modified tri-component brand names evoke positive connotations in consumers and reduce their negative perceptions regarding the harmful effects of smoking. By understanding the tobacco company's current brand naming strategy recommendations for further effective tobacco controls can be developed. This paper presents a methodology that can be employed to explore the new complex

A. Morton (✉)
Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia
e-mail: aemorton@swin.edu.au

S.J. Greenland
Charles Darwin University, Darwin, Australia
e-mail: steven.greenland@cdu.edu.au

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tobacco brand names. Specific projective and in-depth elicitation techniques are outlined that should facilitate understanding of the connotations that consumers attach to these new brand names. This research contributes to the CSR literature by examining the strategy of an industry that claims to be socially responsible, yet markets products that kill its customers—such paradox has been noted previously in relation to tobacco and manufacturers of other harmful products. The paper also contributes to the Marketing literature on evaluating brand names, specifically in the area of brand name structure and interpretation of word combinations.

Keywords Tobacco · Marketing · Australia · Branding · Packaging

11.1 Introduction

Tobacco companies use corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities to improve their public image. However, they also strive to encourage smoking, which is the key driver of the non-communicable disease epidemic and the leading cause of avoidable premature death (World Health Organization 2014). Tobacco CSR is therefore an obvious contradiction in terms (Hirschhorn 2004; World Health Organization 2004).

Governments and international institutions like the United Nations and the European Union have the power to promote CSR and are duty-bound to protect society by regulating the manufacturers of harmful products. Accordingly, many countries have implemented tough controls on tobacco marketing to reduce sales and the damaging effects of smoking. Yet despite these constraints, tobacco companies continue to promote their products. Indeed, these manufacturers do their utmost to circumvent and undermine regulations by adapting the remaining elements of the marketing mix. Tobacco companies also frequently engage in 'astroturfing' public relations (Davies 2010; Wells 2016) and CSR activities that seek to hoodwink consumers and offset negative perceptions of smoking and the tobacco industry.

The tobacco industry response to regulation falls into the realms of the "ethics game paradox" described by Crowther and Seifi (2012) and can be modelled through Game Theory (e.g. see Seifi and Crowther 2016). This is based on the premise that one party does not act in isolation but is bound by the reaction of the other party. In this regard, regulators should expect tobacco companies to react to any new marketing controls and must take this into account when planning new regulations: merely issuing regulations is therefore unlikely to have the anticipated impact. Evaluating tobacco marketing strategies in times of increasing regulation therefore presents an important avenue for further research (Greenland et al. 2016) and is critical for informing future social policy.

In December 2012 Australia's tobacco market shifted significantly when it became the first country to introduce plain packaging of tobacco products, removing an important branding element. Australia's Tobacco Plain Packaging Act outlaws the use of colours, company logos and brand images, other than the brand name in a standard font. In this regard Australia has become a test market for and a focus of attention from other countries considering introducing similar plain packaging legislation.

Following the introduction of plain packaging in Australia tobacco companies have continued to introduce new brand variants and segment the market with highly differentiated product offerings (Greenland 2016; Greenland et al. 2016). An important dimension of the industry response to plain packaging has involved changing the brand variant name, which presents the key remaining means for differentiating tobacco offerings. The structure of the variant names has evolved to include the existing brand name as well as two or more descriptive words. Preliminary research suggests that these modified or tri-component brand names evoke positive connotations in Australian consumers, reducing negative perceptions towards the harmful effects of smoking.

Research examining tobacco brand naming following plain packaging has been highlighted as an important area for future investigation (Greenland 2016). While the volume of plain packaging research has grown significantly over the past twenty years, there has been only limited work that investigates its impact upon tobacco brand portfolios. In response, this chapter discusses how best to investigate consumers' perceptions of the tobacco tri-component brand names. Such understanding is vital for evaluating why this particular tobacco brand naming strategy has been adopted and appears to be successful, and should facilitate recommendations for further effective tobacco controls, including the design of plain packaging legislation for other countries.

This chapter initially describes the plain packaging debate, the context of Australia's regulations and the tobacco industry's branding response to plain packaging. An interpretivist research methodology, for exploring the newly evolving tobacco brand names, is then presented and specific in-depth elicitation and projective techniques are outlined. The chapter contributes to the CSR literature by proposing a method for examining the strategy of an industry that claims to be socially responsible yet markets products that kill its consumers. The outcomes of such research will also contribute to literature on branding, specifically in the area of brand name structure and consumer interpretation of word combinations. The proposed approach will subsequently be used to evaluate the evolution of tobacco brand names in Australia. The proposed method is also applicable for similar research into the impact of plain packaging following its introduction to other markets, such as the UK.

11.2 Tobacco Regulation and Plain Packaging

Many governments have longstanding restrictions on tobacco marketing, as well as public health education programmes. These reduce public acceptance of smoking and have been effective in reducing tobacco sales and smoking prevalence in many markets.

Australia's tobacco controls (already among some of the toughest in the world) were strengthened in 2012 with the introduction of plain packaging. This legislation was widely viewed as closing an important avenue for promoting and differentiating tobacco products, cigarettes in particular. The Asia Pacific community, as well as other countries considering strengthening their tobacco regulation, are therefore closely watching the impact of Australia's plain packaging upon public health to inform their deliberations over whether to implement similar legislation.

11.2.1 The Plain Packaging Debate

Support for tobacco plain packaging regulation comes from government and non-government health groups. Numerous researchers and academics also write in this area and expound the importance of packaging in tobacco marketing and promotion (e.g. Cunningham 1996). Packaging is particularly important for differentiating homogenous product categories (Underwood 2003) and with tobacco it has become a fundamental part of brand differentiation, particularly so as other forms of promotion and advertising have been increasingly restricted (Henriksen 2012).

Considerable plain packaging primary research has been published in journals for healthcare professionals and those involved specifically with tobacco control (e.g. Ford et al. 2012; Hammond et al. 2009; Hoek et al. 2011; Wakefield et al. 2008, 2012). A smaller number of papers appear in marketing and business-related journals (e.g. Binesh 2011; Hoek et al. 2010; Moodie and Ford 2011). Moodie et al. (2012) provide a comprehensive review of the earlier plain packaging primary research, which confirms that plain packaging:

- Reduces the appeal of smoking, as well as tobacco brands
- Enhances warning label salience in terms of recall, attention paid and believability
- Improves awareness of product harm
- Deters non-smokers from taking up smoking and encourages existing smokers to quit.

Research following the introduction of plain packaging in Australia has confirmed these conclusions (e.g. Hoek et al. 2016; Scollo et al. 2015; Zacher et al. 2014).

Evidence from the tobacco industry further illustrates packaging's significant role in marketing. Millions of pages of tobacco company papers and reports are publicly available as result of the Masters Settlement Agreement between US States and tobacco companies in relation to health law suits (Redhead 1999). While most of these documents date from the 1990s and the preceding decades, they nevertheless provide insights into contemporary tobacco packaging strategy. Reviews of these industry archives (e.g. Greenland 2011; Wakefield et al. 2002) consistently illustrate how tobacco companies use packaging to communicate and advertise tobacco, indicate perceived strength to promote the idea of healthier cigarette options and maximise brand appeal to carefully targeted consumer segments.

In documents submitted to the Australian government in opposition to the proposed plain packaging legislation, the industry also expressed concern with regard to the likely impact of plain packaging in relation to decreased ability to differentiate products and introduce new ones (British American Tobacco Australia Limited 2011; Tobacco Station Group 2011).

Tobacco companies are fully aware of the importance of packaging and therefore do everything they can to resist plain packaging regulation. In the courts tobacco companies have fought the plain packaging legislation with claims that plain packaging represents acquisition of valuable intellectual property without due compensation (Rimmer 2012).

In the media tobacco companies steadfastly deny the relevance of packaging in promoting smoking. Indeed, the industry has funded and published its own research that disputes the findings of researchers who support plain packaging (e.g. Padilla 2010).

Industry attempts to overcome criticism about selling a product that kills include public relations campaigns that highlight the thousands of jobs provided around the globe, as well as the significant government revenues generated, along with the major investment in developing markets where socioeconomic development is a critical issue. All the major manufacturers also engage in extensive corporate social responsibility initiatives, which seek to further sway public opinion. In addition the industry funds media campaigns and activities that further undermine regulation. These frequently berate the nanny state mentality and depict control as draconian and impinging upon freedom of choice and personal responsibility.

In Australia following the plain packaging bill proposal the industry engaged in astroturfing public relations activities to try and undermine support (Wells 2016). Australia's three main cigarette companies (British American Tobacco—BAT, Philip Morris—PM and Imperial Tobacco Australia—ITA) bankrolled the Alliance of Australian Retailers' (AAR) high-profile anti-plain packaging media campaign (Greenland 2012). This ran on TV, radio and billboards the year before the legislation was introduced. It claimed that plain packaging was unnecessary, confusing and inconvenient for small retailers and smokers alike. The key message was that there was no evidence that plain packaging would reduce smoking.

The industry efforts have had some success in influencing public opinion about plain packaging. This is in part due to consumer ignorance about the role that packaging plays in marketing. While consumers easily appreciate the functional

role of packaging, they are less aware of its branding and communication purpose. This lack of understanding is typical with the more aesthetic design elements of the marketing mix, such as packaging and retail outlet design (e.g. Greenland 1994), which act predominantly at subliminal levels. This lack of understanding on the part of consumers explains the apparently marginal public support for plain packaging that has been observed (Moodie et al. 2012).

Given the strong emotions invoked by tobacco-related illnesses and public mistrust of big business it is difficult to accurately gauge levels of opposition to plain packaging. More input to this debate might be expected from expert communication and marketing practitioners. However, in recent years the potential for tobacco-like regulations being imposed on other potentially harmful products has increased—affected brands might include Budweiser, Cadbury, Coca Cola, McDonalds, Nokia and Shell, to name but a few. Tobacco alone generates huge global revenues for advertising, market research, marketing, public relations and media agencies. Silence from marketing practitioners in relation to the plain packaging debate should therefore be expected given the obvious conflict of interest.

Up to 2012 a major shortcoming in the case for plain packaging was that it had not actually been introduced to any market and so no 'real' assessment of its impact could be made. This situation changed with the introduction of tobacco plain packaging in Australia. This is why studying its impact in Australia, as well as the industry's response to the regulation, is so important.

11.3 Tobacco Brand Name Evolution and Branding's Significance After Plain Packaging

Following plain packaging in Australia, industry concerns about plain packaging inhibiting product differentiation and new product development were soon dispelled. Tobacco manufacturers continued to introduce numerous new cigarette brand variants and differentiate their ranges by adapting and extending brand lines. Since plain packaging the brand name has become the key means for differentiating tobacco products and an unprecedented rate of brand name modification has occurred, with more variant name modifications occurring in the year following the legislation than in the previous 4 years combined (Greenland 2016).

The marketing literature recognises the inherent duality of brands (Aaker 2006; Bengtsson and Ostberg 2006; De Chernatony and Riley 1998). Brands frequently communicate both functional and symbolic qualities (Combe et al. 2003), which shape how the market interprets the overall brand proposition. That is, how the brand is presented in terms of colours, wording, packaging, and pricing determines how consumers react to and perceive the brand. Each individual branding element is therefore important and is manipulated to provoke a particular response from consumers. For example, developing a recognisable and appropriate brand name

can contribute positive consumer responses (Kohli and LaBahn 1997; Shipley et al. 1988), which may result in enhanced brand appeal and higher sales.

Brand strategy relates to the number and nature of both common and distinctive brand elements that a company applies to the products it sells (Kotler et al. 2009). For example, family or umbrella branding is a common strategy in fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) markets, whereby the same overarching name is used for all or many of the organisation's products. This approach increases the success rate for new products because consumers assume they offer the same values as the existing familiar brand, and costs associated with building awareness of the new offering are also reduced. As an illustration, within the tobacco industry manufacturers use a family brand name (e.g. Marlboro, Winfield, Benson and Hedges), and then differentiate individual brand variants by adding a descriptor (e.g. Marlboro Red, Winfield Blue).

During the 1970s and 1980s, tobacco companies regularly experimented with their brand names, frequently introducing ambiguous terms such as 'mild' and 'lite', which reduced negative consumer perceptions regarding the perceived harmfulness of the product. Subsequent regulation banned the use of these terms, which the manufacturers were swift to replace with colours such as blue, gold and silver. These colours were sometimes included in the brand names (colour words), but most commonly appeared in the packaging colour (colour hues). Smokers quickly began interpreting colour as a tobacco strength indicator (darker colours—more harmful; lighter colours—less harmful), which perpetuated the myth of 'healthier' cigarette options (Bansal-Travers et al. 2011; Moodie and Ford 2011).

The importance of colour in branding is acknowledged in the marketing literature (e.g. see Baxter and Ilicic 2015; Greenland 2015). Colours enable consumers to more easily identify brands, and in the case of tobacco a product's strength. Brand colours also convey other associations and elicit particular responses from consumers (Labrecque and Milne 2012; Romaniuk and Nenycz-Thiel 2014). For example, blue is perceived as competent and trustworthy, red is viewed as exciting and stimulating, black is seen as expensive, powerful and high status, while brown is often associated with ruggedness and earthiness (Labrecque and Milne 2012; Madden et al. 2000).

11.4 Proposed Research Approach for Investigating Tobacco Brand Names

In Australia, since plain packaging was introduced in 2012, tobacco brand names have evolved to generally include the existing family brand name plus two or more descriptive words. These are most often a colour as well as a more abstract descriptor, such as Dunhill Infinite White or Winfield Optimum Crush Blue (Greenland 2016). Preliminary research suggests that these modified tri-component brand names evoke positive connotations, which raise product appeal and reduce

negative perceptions regarding the harmful effects of smoking (Hoek et al. 2016). The remainder of this chapter describes a qualitative approach that can be used to investigate how consumers interpret these tri-component cigarette brand names. The proposed approach will subsequently be tested, evaluated and refined.

11.4.1 The Qualitative Rationale

Focus groups are recommended for the data collection, as they are particularly useful for exploring brands and their underlying meanings (e.g. Supphellen 2000). Group participants share information as the group environment builds a sense of support and anonymity. The group atmosphere also allows the researcher to gain deeper insights into the ideas, feelings, attitudes, experiences, beliefs and opinions towards the discussed topic (Bristol and Fern 1996). Furthermore, the focus group cultivates conversations between group members, enabling individuals to "explore and clarify their views… in their own vocabulary" (Kitzinger 1995, p.299). The data generated is therefore in the form of words, which provides rich, insightful description (Merriam 2009).

How consumers interpret brand elements to arrive at an overall image perception is a complex process and a skilled focus group moderator is required to elicit this information. Brand meanings accumulate over time and are influenced by exposure to various cues, including multiple marketing inputs from the manufacturer such as logo, name, packaging, pricing and distribution. These are all strategically designed to influence how the consumer perceives the brand. Thus, considerable work is involved in developing appropriate branding elements that achieve the desired consumer comprehension of the brand. In addition, over time consumers gain multiple brand experiences, including purchase and consumption within a social context, which also contribute to the overall brand perception and may be stored as sensory or emotional impressions at the subconscious level (Hofstede et al. 2007; Supphellen 2000). Thus, asking direct questions about brand meaning is unlikely to be effective for uncovering detailed insights and the focus group moderator must employ a more oblique approach using in-depth interviewing techniques.

To access consumers' unacknowledged memories, a range of elicitation and projective techniques is therefore proposed in this chapter. These will help the focus group participants articulate how they feel about a brand and ensure that all memories—visual, sensory and emotional—and situation-based memories are uncovered by the group moderator (Supphellen 2000).

Projective techniques extract underlying meanings (Boddy 2005) and are useful in relation to understanding brands. They are also particularly relevant for contentious products such as cigarettes, which are often considered as socially unacceptable; thus, focus group participants may feel uncomfortable sharing their true feelings. Hofstede et al. (2007) defined five broad projective technique categories: association, completion, construction choice ordering; and expressive. In this context, focus group participants completing association tasks suggest words,

images or thoughts which connect with the phenomenon being researched, while completion tasks require participants to finish sentences or narratives. In construction exercises, participants respond to questions about the attitudes, beliefs, emotions and behaviours of other people; thus projecting their impressions of that person. Choice ordering or ranking of products based on specific criteria indicates not only brand awareness, but can also convey other brand attributes. Role-playing, story-telling and other creative activities fall within the expressive category.

In the context of conducting focus groups relating to tobacco branding, a range of elicitation and projective techniques are recommended to ensure that the full gamut of brand name associations is uncovered.

11.4.2 Proposed Areas of Evaluation

Four distinct areas of investigation are proposed for the focus groups, to facilitate exploration of each deconstructed element of tri-component tobacco brand variant names (colour, descriptor, family brand name), as well as the overall impression created. Each element can therefore be explored individually in terms of association and meaning, as well as in combination by also evaluating the complete tri-component brand variant name.

11.4.2.1 Colour Words

The proposed colour word evaluation initially involves sorting colour word cards into categories that participants view as being similar in some way. At this point no mention would be made of cigarettes or tobacco, so participants will simply be exposed to the colour word connotations. Card sorting has long been used in commercial market research branding exercises, and more recently in relation to website design (e.g. Righi et al. 2013). The approach is also often used in academic branding and website studies (e.g. Hepburn and Lewis 2008; Huang and Ku 2016). In this proposed research, the cards would include the numerous colours used in cigarette brand names such as red, blue, gold, silver, purple, amber, black and orange. Once the cards are sorted participants will then be probed about the rationale behind their grouping, as well as their general associations with each colour.

Choice ordering activities such as this word sort exercise allow participants to actively demonstrate their feelings about brand name elements, which can be difficult to verbalise via direct questioning alone. By ranking and sorting the brand name components in this manner, participants are automatically displaying their own perceptions about the stimulus and unconscious brand perceptions and associations are revealed.

To further explore how the participants interpret the colours, personification will be used, whereby participants relate the type of person they believe the colour

represents. Participants will be asked to provide their thoughts on various dimensions such as gender, age, nationality, social class, income, residence, occupation, interests, life stage and appearance, and perceived relationship to them. This personification technique enables participants to create metaphors for their associations and so their unconscious associations surface (Supphellen 2000).

11.4.2.2 Abstract Descriptor Words

The more abstract brand name components, such as infinite, distinct, bright, rich, nano, cool, refined and premier, will also be presented to the focus group participants on cards for sorting. Participants will initially be asked to sort the cards into groups that are similar in some manner, and then be probed for associations that the grouped words conjure. The personification exercise will also be conducted for the more commonly used brand descriptor words. As with the colour word responses, descriptor words will be evaluated without reference to tobacco.

11.4.2.3 Family Brand Names

After the sorting of colour and abstract descriptor words, the actual cigarette family brand names will be introduced to participants. The selected brand names will include those currently available in Australia sold by each of the three leading manufacturers (e.g. BAT—Dunhill, PM—Marlboro, and ITS—Peter Stuyvesant). It is at this stage that the focus of the research on the tobacco industry will become evident to the participants. Participants will again be asked to sort the brand names and for the basis of their groupings. They will also be questioned in relation to brand associations, as well as personification.

11.4.2.4 Specific Brand Variant Names

The final focus group exercise will take the form of an in-depth evaluation of the full brand variant name, such as Dunhill Infinite White. Variants will be selected by the researcher to ensure a range of high-priced and low-priced products, as well as those with perceived strength variations (e.g. light and dark colour names), are evaluated. Participants will be asked their overall impression of each name and what type of person they believe uses this product. An additional technique, in this case a sentence completion exercise, will also be used where participants complete a sentence about each brand variant. The sentences will relate to perceived health risks to tap into what the whole brand name conveys to consumers in relation to healthiness versus harmfulness.

Any additional meaning of the different colours and abstract descriptor components, specifically in the context of tobacco, will also be elicited. Furthermore, group discussion of the names used for the same products or variants before and

after plain packaging will provide insights as to what additional associations the new tri-component names convey.

11.4.3 Data Analysis

The data produced by the research will comprise transcripts of the audio-recorded focus group discussions. Even though transcription may sometimes be viewed as contributing little to the overall research results, it does enable the researcher to increase their familiarity with the data; it also often informs early analysis. Thematic content analysis offers a flexible approach to analysing qualitative data (Braun and Clarke 2006), and will be used here. It involves initially reading through all of the discussions to identify similar comments to facilitate the emergence of common themes within the data. After several iterations and re-sorting, the core themes can be identified.

11.5 Chapter Discussion and Conclusion

Despite the tobacco industry's considerable media, public relations and CSR efforts, the societal context of consuming its highly addictive products is overwhelmingly negative—smoking remains the world's leading cause of avoidable premature death (World Health Organization 2014). Tobacco regulations like plain packaging seek to improve public health by impeding tobacco marketing and reducing the appeal of smoking. Yet tobacco manufacturers continually seek to undermine the impact of such legislation. In Australia following plain packaging, the tri-component brand name has emerged as an increasingly significant element in tobacco marketing, with numerous new and innovative brand variant names appearing. Understanding the rationale behind this evolving brand name strategy is therefore an important avenue for future investigation, which can inform legislation in Australia, as well as other countries considering similar legislation.

This chapter describes a qualitative research approach for evaluating newly evolving tobacco brand names that appeared following plain packaging. This approach provides the opportunity for exploring and making sense of the business strategy of an industry that claims to be socially responsible, yet markets products that kill its customers, and does all it can to minimise the impact of regulation designed to improve public health.

The use of elicitation and projective techniques within a focus group setting has been recommended, since this is particularly effective for extending knowledge of how consumers interpret the tri-component cigarette brand names. This proposed method should generate further insights of how tobacco companies seek to circumvent socially responsible tobacco regulation. The outcome of such research should also help in the development of further controls on tobacco marketing.

The methodology proposed in this chapter does however present some research challenges, not least because the very richness and complexity of the qualitative data produced requires considerable skill to initially obtain and then analyse and interpret. Furthermore, the small number of respondents involved in qualitative research means that findings cannot be deemed representative of the whole market. Despite these challenges, qualitative research is widely recognised as being particularly useful for exploratory investigation, and particularly so for understanding the complex phenomenon of tobacco branding.

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