

Cigarette Pack Color: A Key Design Feature Increasing Likeability and Desire to Try the Product for Mexican City Adolescents

Fact Sheet

Background

Cigarette packs are an important marketing tool since they are carried around with users and are on display at the point-of-sale. Evidence has shown that the tobacco industry uses different design features, such as color and shape, to target specific consumer groups. By restricting the use of design features and brand imagery, plain packaging is a key policy to reduce the appeal of cigarette packs. Plain packaging legislation has already been adopted or passed by 16 countries (including Uruguay in Latin America).

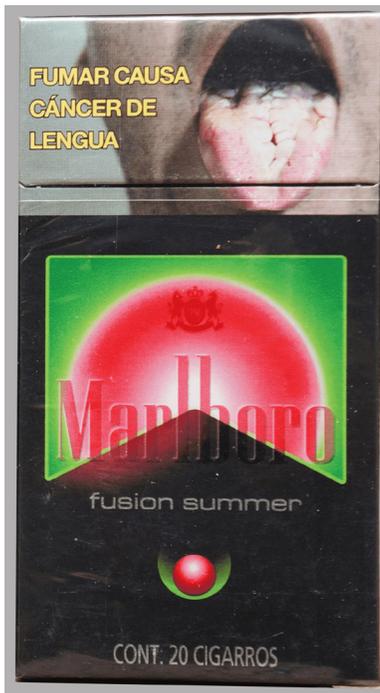
A mixed-methods study was conducted in two phases in Mexico City in collaboration with the National Institute of Public Health (INSP). In November 2018, 10 focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with adolescent smokers (n=21) and non-smokers (n=18) (13-17 years old) to explore which cigarette pack

design features were most appealing and why. Results from the FGDs informed the second phase of the study: a self-administered survey with an experimental exercise to identify which specific features were most appealing. Between January-February 2020, 1,500 Mexican City adolescents were exposed to images of cigarette packs. Three specific features communicating the presence/absence of flavor were assessed: 1) color, 2) a flavor name, and 3) flavor capsule indicator across 3 flavor conditions: 1) “Tropical Burst” (TB), the fruity condition; 2) “Arctic Air” (AA), the cool condition; and 3) “Hazel Rush” (HR), the nutty condition.

Participants were randomized to one of the flavor conditions and rated packs on likability, perception of harm, and desire to try. The mean age for adolescents was 14.9 years (SD=1.44) and 17.6% were smokers.

Main Findings

Findings from this mixed-methods study showed that pack color is a key feature to increase appeal and to communicate the addition of flavor, influencing perceptions of harm among adolescents in Mexico City.



Adolescents frequently described this pack in the FGDs as the “Marlboro Watermelon” because of its color and design.

Color appeals and communicates flavor

Across all FGDs, adolescent smokers and non-smokers discussed how the colors on the pack are appealing to people like themselves. Also, colors are appealing because they communicate the addition of flavor to cigarettes. Adolescent smokers were particularly attracted by the different cigarette flavors. Flavored cigarettes were perceived as smoother than non-flavored ones.

“When buy it [cigarette], you don’t really know what it tastes like, you let yourself be guided by the pack, the color.” (male adolescent smoker, mid/high-SES)

“You can imagine the flavor because of the [pack] colors.” (female smoker, low-SES)

“I prefer the [cigarette with] flavors because they are lighter.” (female smoker, mid/high-SES)

Color increases likeability

Across all 3 flavor conditions, color strongly impacted adolescents’ rating regarding likeability of the packs. For example, while only 11% liked the TB plain pack, 43% said they liked the pack once only color was added (figure 1). Packs with all features (name +color+capsule) were consistently liked more by participants: 49% said they like TB, 46% HR, and 48% AA.

Color increases desire to try the product

Overall, the number of participants reporting desire to try the product was low; nevertheless, participants more frequently indicated they would try the product once any feature was added, but particularly once color was added to the pack. For example, 7% said they would try the plain AA compared to 12% and 22% once name and color was added to AA, respectively (figure 2).



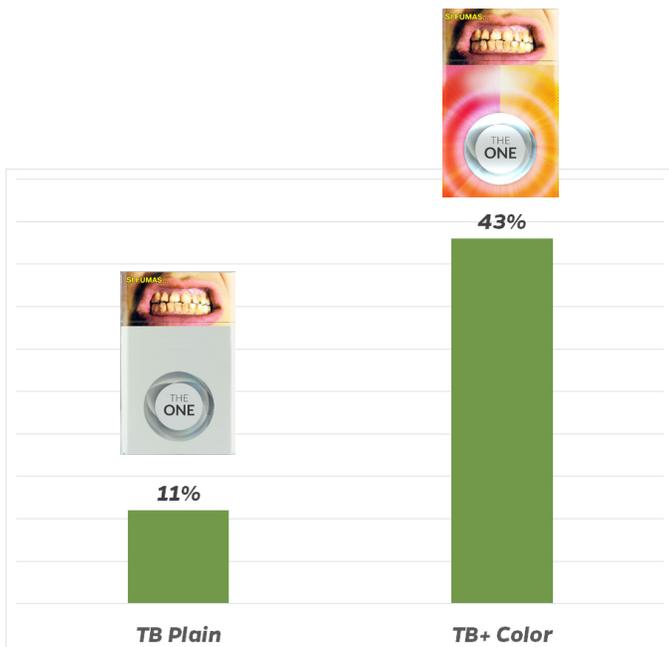


Figure 1. Percentage of adolescents who liked Tropical Burst Cigarette Packs (n=507)

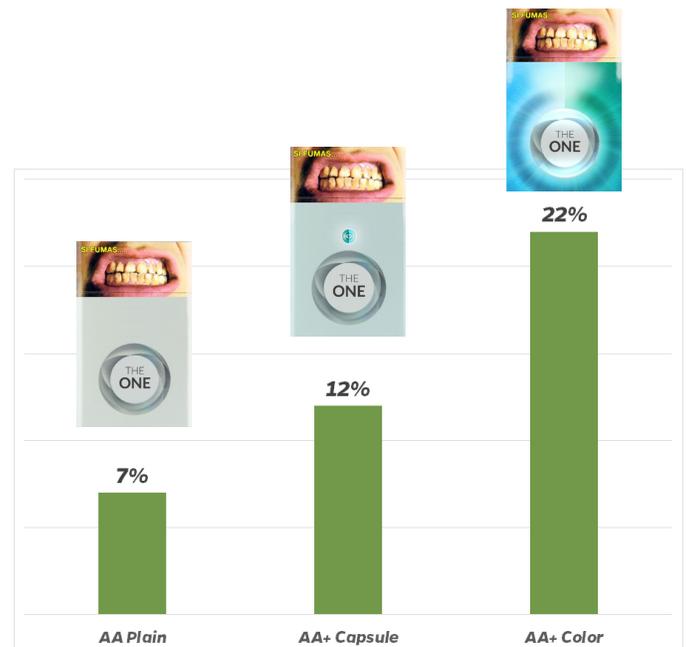


Figure 2. Percentage of adolescents who indicated desire to try Arctic Air Cigarette Packs (n=472)

Conclusion and Recommendations

Color was a key feature described in the FGDs as particularly appealing among adolescents; in addition, color consistently increased adolescents' ratings for pack likeability and desire to try the product in the survey. Nevertheless, results from the survey indicated that the presence of any design feature on the pack increases appeal. These findings reinforce the importance of implementing plain packaging as a critical and first measure to reduce cigarette pack appeal among adolescents by eliminating the use of design features and brand imagery on packs. Currently, a congressional bill to reform the Mexican General Law on Tobacco Control is being discussed; the bill is timely since it includes plain packaging implementation, which could help to prevent initiation among Mexican adolescents.



Plain cigarette packs from New Zealand, Uruguay, Australia, and France.

Restricting branding imagery and color in combination with larger health warning labels and cessation information are measures to reduce pack appeal and increase effectiveness of the warning labels, preventing initiation and promoting cessation