

Recent *No Brand* advertisements in Slovenia

Promoting and selling new *No Brand* cigarettes as a brand and undermining health warnings on packaging

Introduction

The photographs below show advertising at tobacco stands and samples of cigarette packaging. The advertisements appeared at popular tobacco stands in Ljubljana and the product (*No Brand* cigarettes) is already on sale. The advertisements say *My Brand* and *Be true to yourself, there are already too many others* and also appeared in one widely distributed free newspaper, *Dobro Jutro*. The advertisements were commissioned and the cigarettes produced by a company called Fumus, owned by Igor Marn and Primož Ornik, who both have proven connections to the tobacco industry. It is immediately apparent that the advertisements are associated with tobacco products, as they mimic the design of pack health warnings by using black lettering in black circles on a white background.

Web page messages: The webpage <http://www.fumus.si> links to: Fumus - Who are we?: <http://www.fumus.si/kdo-smo.html> after responding to two questions: 1. I am 18 or over 2. I can think for myself. If you answer yes to both questions, you are automatically redirected to the first page. The web page goes on to state:

We are professionals in the field of tobacco products. We are bold, we despise labelling and branding. Unlike the multinationals we do not impose brands on people by aggressive marketing, as we do not aim to patronise consumers by telling them how they should act and what they should think. We stand by the supreme quality of our products.

What we believe in: We believe that despite the (superfluous) mass of different brands, there is still room for uniqueness. We believe that the people have had enough of others telling them what to be. We believe that each individual has enough creativity to invent his or her own brand. Maybe a new brand every single new day. We believe that honesty and integrity are the most important values, in business as anywhere else. We believe we have created a product that does not need a logo to prove its identity.

The packaging is standard and blank apart from the insert and features compulsory health warnings, albeit in black circles, not rectangles. The pack insert states: *My Brand – Maybe it is a strange feeling to hold a pack of cigarettes that do not have a name. But you are not smoking a brand anyway. You are smoking cigarettes. We prepared them for all people who are independent, individual, think for themselves and prefer a good taste to a brand name. Be an artist of your (bad) habit and create your own brand. The taste will stay and the name can be changed as you wish. Be unique as the package you hold in your hands... **Be true to yourself. There are already too many others.** info@humus.si* There are also German and Italian translations on the reverse.

Conclusion: The advertising, packaging and wording used in the Fumus website suggest that the new brand is aimed at young people, who want to feel smart and individualistic, not following the masses who fall for the big brands. *No Brand* is a good brand to express your

own identity, thus ignoring the health risks in favour of self-expression as smart and individualistic towards friends, colleagues and peers. We also speculate that an additional bonus to this promotion of *No Brand* is to conceal general promotion of smoking behind a specific brand. Slovenia has ratified the FCTC, however advertising at the point of sale is still allowed and it is not certain that this type of advertising will be banned in the near future, as new products can be advertised and brands can be displayed. The tobacco control advocates' legal counsel came to the conclusion that the advertisement would contravene Article 10 of the law on the restriction of the use of tobacco products (known as ZOUTI in Slovenia) if it can be established that it promotes the general use of tobacco products. We believe that this campaign is trying to create a brand as long as advertising is still permitted, however an important indirect effect could be that by advertising *No Brand* (in a way eliminating the brand) smoking in general is being promoted. Smokers immediately associate the imitation of health warnings with tobacco products due to the design and not necessarily the content, thus reducing their sensitivity to health warnings on the packaging. This approach has been used before by the tobacco industry, e.g. branded shirts or mimicking brand packaging in Formula 1 racing, where it is evident that no logo is needed to associate the image with a specific product. We believe that this is a small-scale test by the tobacco industry of customers' reactions to this new approach, which explores continued brand marketing in standardised designs. Industry is also looking for new ways to undermine health warnings by *No Brand*, which is instantly recognisable as a tobacco advertisement. It also uses positive graffiti-like associations, e.g. the Loesje posters sometimes stimulate thought in a positive way and are well accepted among young people. This marketing tool should alert the tobacco control community to the latest strategies of the tobacco industry in order to take swift action.

Luka Solmajer, SCTC

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