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Marketing Strategies for Promoting or Preventing Tobacco Use among Youth

Gençlere Yönelik Tütün Kullanımını Teşvik Eden ve Önleyen Pazarlama Stratejileri

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to examine the marketing efforts that encourage and oppose the consumption of tobacco and tobacco products, especially among young people. The motivational marketing activities for tobacco and tobacco products are based on themes such as freedom, social belonging and aspirational lifestyles, especially to attract young people. On the other hand, counter-marketing efforts for these products focus on public service announcements, legal measures and behavioral change campaigns, or a combination of all of these, to raise public awareness, thus attempting to reduce potential harmful effects from the very beginning. The study examines both-way marketing efforts on the subject with global and regional examples, and emphasizes graphical warnings, increased tax practices, digital promotion activities and other effective policies to prevent people from quitting or starting smoking. In the literature, studies on the subject reveal the critical role of comprehensive and multi-faceted approaches in reducing the use of tobacco and tobacco products and the health risks they may bring. In addition, this study emphasizes that there is a need for continuous innovation in anti-tobacco marketing activities, especially in today's world, in digital and social media areas, in order to counter the strategies developed by the tobacco industry for the sale of their products. The most basic conclusion obtained from the research is that the long-term prevention of tobacco product use will be achieved by the integrated action of the social and legal environment in a broader sense.

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ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı, tütün ve tütün mamullerinin tüketimine yönelik özendirici ve karşıt olan pazarlama çalışmalarını gençler özelinde incelenmektedir. Tütün ve tütün mamullerine yönelik özendirici pazarlama faaliyetlerinin temelinde, özellikle gençleri çekmek için özgürlük, sosyal aidiyet ve istekli yaşam tarzları gibi temalara yer verilmektedir. Diğer yandan bu ürünlere yönelik karşıt pazarlama çabalarında ise, kamuoyunu bilinçlendirmeye yönelik kamu

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spotları, yasal önlemler ve davranış değişikliği kampanyaları ya da bunların tamamının kombinasyonu faaliyetler üzerinde yoğunlaşmakta ve böylelikle muhtemel zararlı etkiler en başından azaltılmaya çalışılmaktadır. Çalışmada konu ile ilgili her iki yönlü pazarlama çabaları küresel ve bölgesel örnekleri ile ele alınmış, sigara kullanımını bıraktırmayı ya da başlamayı önlemek adına grafiksel uyarılar, artırılmış vergi uygulamaları, dijital tutundurma faaliyetleri ve diğer etkili politikalar vurgulanmaktadır. Literatürdeki konu ile ilgili çalışmalarda, tütün ve tütün mamullerinin kullanımını ve beraberinde getirebilecekleri sağlık risklerini azaltmada kapsamlı ve birçok yönden ele alınan yaklaşımların kritik rolü ortaya konulmaktadır. Ayrıca bu çalışmada, tütün endüstrisinin ürünlerinin satışına yönelik geliştirdikleri stratejilere karşı koymak adına özellikle günümüz dünyasında dijital ve sosyal medya alanlarında tütün karşıtı pazarlama çalışmalarında yeniliğin sürekli olmasının bir ihtiyaç olduğu vurgulanmaktadır. Tütün ürünlerin kullanımının uzun vadede önlenmesi, daha geniş anlamda sosyal ve yasal çevrenin bütünlük olarak hareket etmesi ile sağlanacağı araştırmadan elde edilen en temel sonuçtur.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Marketing is a set of activities designed to identify and meet human needs, primarily aiming to satisfy consumers, increase demand, and maximize profits. While traditional marketing strategies typically aim to promote product consumption, an alternative approach demarketing focuses on reducing the demand for products that may harm individuals or society, such as tobacco. Particularly within the health sector, demarketing is applied as a form of social marketing aimed at raising awareness and guiding behavior toward healthier lifestyles (Woodside, 1988; Koçak & Bulduklu, 2010).

Tobacco consumption, especially cigarette smoking, has increased significantly since the Industrial Revolution (Bilir & Özcebe, 2014). This rise is attributed to easier access to tobacco products and targeted marketing strategies, particularly toward youth. Research shows that adolescence is a critical stage for the initiation of smoking due to psychological and social factors (Güleç et al., 2015). In response, governments and health institutions have implemented strategies such as graphic warnings, public service announcements, tax policies, and smoking bans to control tobacco use.

While the health risks associated with tobacco use are well-documented, the marketing techniques employed by the tobacco industry continue to evolve, adapting to legal restrictions by utilizing digital platforms and packaging design. On the other hand, anti-tobacco campaigns increasingly utilize digital tools and fear appeals to counter these strategies and encourage cessation, especially among young individuals who are more susceptible to marketing influence.

However, current literature lacks a comprehensive synthesis of the dual role of marketing in both promoting and preventing tobacco use among youth, particularly from a comparative and strategy-oriented perspective. This study

aims to fill that gap by examining the marketing strategies used to either promote or discourage tobacco consumption, focusing on youth as a vulnerable target group. The study contributes to the literature by providing an integrative perspective on how different marketing tools function in opposing directions and highlighting the need for continuous innovation in anti-tobacco strategies in the digital era.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Pro-Tobacco and Tobacco Industry Marketing Strategies

Despite the well-documented harms of tobacco, the industry has continued to implement strategic marketing campaigns across global markets. Historically, tobacco use evolved significantly during the Industrial Revolution, where it became associated with leisure, calmness, and social connectedness. By the 20th century, campaigns increasingly targeted women, emphasizing themes of empowerment, autonomy, and evolving lifestyle trends (Schivelbusch, 2012; Featherstone, 2005).

Major tobacco brands such as Marlboro and Camel developed distinctive marketing approaches to appeal to various consumer segments. Marlboro, for example, transitioned its messaging from traditional associations like marriage and happiness to visuals rooted in nature and freedom, subtly addressing emerging health concerns. In contrast, Camel initially employed its “Old Joe” character and later embraced themes of adventure and escapism, embedding cigarettes within cultural narratives (Rutherford, 1996; Bourdieu, 2014).

Throughout the 20th century, cigarettes were positioned as lifestyle products, making them among the most heavily marketed consumer goods. Tobacco companies prioritized profitability while navigating legal restrictions. Strategies included maintaining price accessibility, acquiring formerly state-owned enterprises, and deploying tailored advertising to specific markets. These methods allowed companies to

expand consumer reach despite increasing regulations such as advertising bans, tax increases, and public smoking limitations (Pierce et al., 2012; Callard et al., 2005; Gilmore et al., 2011; Holden & Lee, 2009; Yach & Bettcher, 2000).

As traditional advertising channels became limited especially television the tobacco industry pivoted toward digital and indirect promotional strategies. Social media influencers, user-generated content and subtle product placements in films and streaming platforms became instrumental in brand communication (Kaplan, 2018). Research highlights resurgence in on-screen portrayals of smoking, particularly in American media, with studies linking such portrayals to increased youth smoking initiation (Charlesworth & Glantz, 2005; Hanewinkel & Sargent, 2008).

In the Turkish context, regulatory frameworks such as Law No. 4207 and the formation of TAPDK (Tobacco and Alcohol Market Regulation Authority) have introduced restrictions on tobacco advertising and promoted public awareness (Ergin & İpek, 2020). Nevertheless, cigarette packaging remains one of the industry's most powerful marketing tools. Design elements such as color, typography, and imagery continue to signal aspirational values like luxury, elegance, and personal freedom (Doxey & Hammond, 2011; Bansal-Travers et al., 2011; Muñoz et al., 2013).

Tobacco packaging functions as a "silent salesperson," serving both branding and psychological functions. Visual components including logos, shapes, and colors significantly influence consumer perception and brand loyalty (Hoek et al., 2011; Dewhirst & Lee, 2012; Scheffels & Sæbø, 2013). Moreover, colors on packaging can imply product characteristics: lighter tones suggest smoothness, blue implies lower tar, and green denotes menthol flavor (Borland et al., 2013; Meral & Uzel, 2013). Packaging formats such as hard packs vs. soft packs further shape perceived product quality and strength, highlighting the packaging's critical role in influencing consumer behavior and maintaining brand equity.

2.2. Anti-Tobacco Campaigns and Strategies

Tobacco use remains a major global health issue, primarily due to the highly addictive nature of nicotine, which has been described as comparable to substances such as cocaine (Russell, 1971; Shiffman et al., 1994; Herbert et al., 1974). Tobacco smoke contains more than 4,000 toxic substances, and its use has been linked to cardiovascular diseases, various cancers, ulcers, and psychological disorders (Boyle & Maisonneuve, 1995; Heishman, 1999; Sloan et al., 2010; Wack & Rodin, 1982).

The initiation of smoking habits often occurs during adolescence, with peer influence emerging as one of the strongest predictors (Göksel et al., 2001; Akfert et al., 2009). Studies have consistently shown that education plays a protective role; individuals with higher levels of education are less likely to smoke, particularly in developed nations where awareness of tobacco's health impacts is widespread (Maralani, 2014; Dikmen, 2005; Yalın & Uysal, 2021; Graham et al., 2014).

In response to the growing evidence on the harms of tobacco, a variety of policy measures have been implemented globally. These include advertising bans, graphic health warnings on packaging, and the establishment of smoke-free public spaces (WHO, 2019). In Turkey, regulations such as Law No. 4207 (1996) and Law No. 5326 (2005) aimed to reduce smoking by banning tobacco advertising, restricting smoking in public areas, and prohibiting sales to minors.

International institutions have played a critical role in encouraging policy development. For example, WHO reports from 2008 and 2016 promoted legislative changes, including raising tobacco taxes and enforcing stricter regulations on sales and marketing. Oettingen et al. (2010) emphasized the importance of civil society involvement in pressuring governments for broader reforms. Economic measures like tax increases have also been shown to effectively reduce tobacco consumption, especially among low-income groups (Wasserman et al., 1991; Karagöz et al., 2010).

Packaging regulations represent another cornerstone of modern tobacco control. In Turkey, the Ministry of Health's framework for tobacco control, supported by WHO, introduced graphic warning visuals that cover 65% of the package surface, as of 2010 (Beşer & Aşkan, 2019; İleri & Özkara, 2021). These disturbing images are designed to trigger subconscious reactions, making smoking less appealing.

Recent studies have focused on the psychological and behavioral impact of packaging visuals. For example, Fathelrahman et al. (2010) found that photo-based warnings are more effective than text-only labels in encouraging cessation. Similarly, Hall et al. (2015) reported that health messages on cigarette packs can initiate conversations about quitting among smokers. Experimental studies by Brewer et al. (2019) and Noar et al. (2015) further confirmed that exposure to graphic warnings increased smokers' intentions to quit.

Cross-cultural findings also highlight the effectiveness of these interventions. In South Korea, Kim and Khang (2020) found that frequent smokers reduced or quit smoking following tax hikes and new packaging regulations. In Turkey, İleri and Özkara (2021) observed that the level of fear induced by visual warnings significantly influenced smokers' willingness to quit.

Educational attainment continues to be a key determinant in tobacco-related behavior. Higher levels of education correlate with increased knowledge of tobacco's harms and reduced smoking prevalence (Eide & Showalter, 2011; Zazacova & Lawrence, 2018). Studies by Haddad et al. (2020) and Dawood et al. (2016) suggest that health literacy enhances receptiveness to packaging warnings, while Brewer et al. (2016) confirm that repulsive images can prompt behavioral change.

In summary, contemporary anti-tobacco strategies are multifaceted, combining price-based interventions, packaging regulations, and education campaigns. These measures not only address behavioral drivers of tobacco use but also contribute to creating an environment where smoking is less socially acceptable and increasingly discouraged.

2.3. Social Media and Digital Campaigns in Tobacco Control

The emergence of digital communication channels has significantly reshaped the landscape of tobacco control strategies worldwide. Traditional forms of anti-smoking advocacy such as television campaigns and printed materials have been increasingly complemented by digital media, social networks, and interactive communication platforms. These channels provide governments and health organizations with powerful tools to raise awareness, encourage cessation, and counteract tobacco industry marketing.

In Turkey, the increasing penetration of social media has created new opportunities for public health messaging, especially among younger demographics. The National Tobacco Control Action Plan (2015–2018), published by the Turkish Ministry of Health, explicitly acknowledged the potential of educational programs and digital tools to combat tobacco use. The plan emphasized the importance of early prevention, cessation support, and efforts to limit passive smoking exposure through communication-based interventions.

One of the most prominent tools in Turkey's digital strategy is the ALO 171 Smoking Cessation Helpline, established in 2010. Operating 24/7 with professional support staff, this service provides counseling, follow-up tracking, and, when necessary, referral to cessation clinics and access to free medications. This initiative reflects the government's commitment to combining behavioral support with structural services for smoking cessation.

In addition to helplines, public service announcements (PSAs) have become a key element in tobacco control messaging. PSAs often utilize emotional appeals, fear-based imagery, and personal stories to raise public awareness. According to Aydın (2016), PSAs are expected to educate and engage the public by promoting health-conscious behavior. Similarly, Becerikli (2012) identifies PSAs as a form of social marketing, especially when used to influence behaviors in areas like smoking, traffic safety, and pandemic response.

The concept of “demarketing” has also gained traction in public health literature. Originally developed for industries managing excess demand, demarketing refers to strategies aimed at reducing the consumption of harmful products (Altınay & Sert, 2012). Applied to tobacco control, demarketing involves raising prices, restricting access, and portraying the product negatively. Beeton and Benfield (2002) argue that demarketing strategies have been successfully adapted for tobacco regulation to address broader social and economic concerns.

From a broader marketing perspective, governments have adapted the four Ps of marketing product, price, promotion, and place to serve public health goals. “Product” refers to alternatives to cigarettes, such as nicotine replacement therapies. “Price” involves taxation as a deterrent, while “promotion” includes anti-smoking advertisements and warning labels. Finally, “place” is addressed through smoking bans in public areas and transport systems, limiting the availability and visibility of tobacco (Wall, 2005;

Chilievich & Kostusev, 2021).

Digital campaigns also reflect these principles. For example, targeted online advertisements, social media engagement, and the use of influencers by health institutions mimic commercial marketing tactics but with a reverse objective: discouraging consumption and encouraging cessation. Countries such as New Zealand have adopted comprehensive approaches, including banning cigarette sales to individuals born after a certain year, leveraging digital platforms to explain the rationale behind such bold policy measures (BBC Turkish, 2022).

In addition to digital messaging, statistical reporting plays an important role in contextualizing the urgency of tobacco control. According to WHO (2010), global cigarette consumption more than doubled from 1980 to 2008, despite economic crises and awareness campaigns. In Turkey, male smoking rates reached 50%, while female rates were approximately 18%. TÜİK (2022) data revealed that 28.3% of individuals over age 15 used tobacco daily, underscoring the ongoing relevance of anti-smoking policies and campaigns.

Overall, the integration of social media, helplines, PSAs, and demarketing principles within tobacco control reflects a shift from traditional to modern public health communication. These tools not only extend the reach of anti-smoking messages but also enable governments to engage with specific demographics more effectively, especially youth and digital natives.

2.4. Anti-Tobacco Activities Targeting the Youth

Youth populations represent one of the most vulnerable and strategically significant groups in global tobacco control efforts. Research consistently indicates that tobacco use often begins during adolescence, with initiation commonly occurring before the age of 15 (Global Adult Tobacco Survey Turkey Report, 2012). Early exposure increases the risk of long-term nicotine dependence, making this demographic a primary focus of public health policies (Curry et al., 2009). In the 1990s, increasing awareness of tobacco's health risks led to more assertive global action. Turkey implemented its first indoor smoking ban in 1996, marking the beginning of a broader national effort. Over time, additional legislative measures—such as Law No. 4733 (2002), which privatized the state tobacco monopoly TEKEL, and Law No. 4207, which banned advertising and mandated health warnings were enacted to protect the public, particularly youth (Şahin, 2014; Tobacco Report, 2018).

Despite regulatory progress, the effectiveness of anti-smoking measures targeting youth has been challenged by inconsistent implementation and political factors. In response, researchers have advocated for multi-level interventions, including school-based programs, family engagement, and community-based education, to counteract peer pressure and misinformation among adolescents (Thomas et al., 2013; Wiehe et al., 2005). Preventive programs aimed at adolescents must begin before behavioral patterns solidify. Studies have shown that age-appropriate interven-

tions—especially before or during early adolescence—are more effective in delaying or preventing smoking initiation (Sussman, 2005; Cote et al., 2004). These programs should not rely solely on didactic education but instead focus on interactive learning, critical thinking, and self-efficacy development.

The WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), which Turkey joined in 2004, introduced the MPOWER framework in 2008, providing governments with practical tools for tobacco prevention. However, the lack of youth-specific guidelines has led individual countries to develop creative outreach strategies, including digital toolkits, video campaigns, and e-learning materials targeting younger users (WHO, 2003; WHO, 2008). Psychological vulnerability during adolescence—such as emotional volatility and susceptibility to social influence—heightens the risk of tobacco use. Research suggests that even minimal experimentation with cigarettes can result in early nicotine dependency, reinforcing the need for tailored cessation programs for youth (Curry et al., 2009). Furthermore, environments that normalize smoking, whether through family, friends, or media, increase the likelihood of early initiation.

Legislative enforcement also plays a key role in youth tobacco control. Measures such as age restrictions on sales, bans on smoking in indoor public spaces, and graphic warnings on packaging are crucial for shaping young people's perceptions. These policies help reinforce anti-smoking norms and increase cognitive dissonance regarding tobacco consumption. Research has also questioned the standalone effectiveness of school-based interventions. Backinger et al. (2003) found that education alone is insufficient unless reinforced by mass media efforts and smoking bans. Similarly, behavior-focused programs that emphasize non-smoking identity in youth populations have been linked to reduced initiation rates (Patnode et al., 2013).

Pharmacological interventions for smoking cessation remain limited among youth, as most treatments are not approved for individuals under 18. As a result, preventive strategies, social norm shifting, and consistent policy enforcement remain the most practical and ethically viable tools in this context. In conclusion, protecting youth from tobacco requires a multi-dimensional strategy that includes preventive education, targeted communication campaigns, and strict enforcement of age-related tobacco laws. Coordinated international frameworks and country-specific programs alike have highlighted that intervening early and across multiple contexts offers the greatest potential for reducing youth smoking initiation and promoting long-term public health.

5. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the effects of smoking particularly cigarette consumption on tobacco use among young people by synthesizing current literature. The review highlighted key themes related to the initiation, normalization, and prevention of tobacco use within youth popula-

tions. Smoking, first and foremost, should be recognized as a form of addiction, rather than merely a behavioral choice. Therefore, public health interventions must prioritize the prevention of initiation, as it is considerably more effective than cessation efforts after dependency develops.

The early onset of smoking, sometimes beginning in childhood or early adolescence, underscores the urgency of targeted interventions. Factors influencing smoking initiation among youth include the emotional instability of adolescence, the perceived social benefits of smoking, and various psychological or familial stressors. These dynamics are often amplified by media messages that associate smoking with freedom, maturity, or rebellion.

In response, governments and civil society organizations have increasingly invested in counter-advertising campaigns, social marketing strategies, and public health policies. International institutions such as the World Health Organization have also played a crucial role in encouraging regulatory frameworks, tax increases, and packaging reforms. However, it is important to note that pro-tobacco marketing has historically dominated the narrative, and anti-tobacco efforts, despite their growing impact, often began later and faced resistance from industry stakeholders.

The findings indicate that schools, digital environments, and peer groups are central spaces where smoking behaviors among youth are formed and reinforced. Social media, in particular, has emerged as both a risk factor and a potential tool for intervention. Given the unregulated nature of some digital platforms, youth are frequently exposed to tobacco-positive content, making it essential for governments to monitor and regulate online messaging more proactively.

Recent public health measures—such as banning indoor smoking, establishing smoke-free zones, increasing tobacco taxes, and launching emotionally resonant public service announcements—have contributed to a decline in smoking rates. These efforts demonstrate the important role of governmental policies in protecting public health and reshaping societal attitudes toward smoking.

In conclusion, while substantial progress has been made in reducing tobacco consumption among youth, ongoing efforts are necessary to sustain and amplify these gains. A multi-pronged approach that includes early education, regulatory oversight of digital spaces, taxation, and targeted awareness campaigns remains essential. Moreover, future studies should aim to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of current interventions and provide comparative analyses using updated data. Such research will be valuable in developing adaptive, evidence-based policies that address the evolving landscape of tobacco use in youth populations.

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