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Smoke Signals: Decoding the Multimodal Strategies of Cigarette Health Warnings in Australia

Abstract:

This study examines the cigarette pack warnings of Australia, focusing on how textual and pictorial elements interact to communicate health risks. It identifies the cigarette companies' promotion adopting warning strategies, examines their functions, and investigates language influence on smokers' perceptions and behaviours within Australia's diverse demographic landscape. It employed a detailed case study approach within its qualitative design to examine warning strategies and semiotic elements (textual and pictorial) used on Australian cigarette packs. Data embraced health warnings given on seven cigarette packs purposively selected from various brands in Australia, then analysed according to Kress and van Leeuwen's model. The findings revealed that a multimodal strategy of warnings on cigarette packs was exploited effectively by incorporating powerful plain texts and pictures to engage the public and smokers in the severe health hazards. The warning strategies found in the data were alerting, threatening, frightening, advising, and suggesting. They were aimed at Australian smokers to help them grasp the health risks of smoking. The use of vivid pictures and symbols in health warnings on cigarette packs accentuated the severe health risks of smoking, making the dangers more tangible and potentially more emotionally compelling for smokers. Recommendations for improving these warnings include enhancing visual impact, modifying messages to specific audiences, and incorporating easily accessible cessation support information. In addition, legislative measures and complementary public health campaigns are suggested as ways to strengthen their effectiveness and contribute to broader tobacco control efforts