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Tobacco Industry Use of Flavours to Recruit New Users of Little Cigars and Cigarillos

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Abstract

Objective—While flavoured cigarettes were prohibited in the US in 2009, flavoured little cigars and cigarillos (LCCs) remain on the market. We describe the evolving strategies used by tobacco companies to encourage uptake of flavoured little cigars and cigarillos and industry research findings on consumer perceptions of flavoured LCC products.

Methods—Analysis of internal tobacco industry documents was triangulated with data from tobacco advertisement archives, national newspapers, trade press, and the Internet.

Results—Flavoured little cigar and cigarillo products were associated with young and inexperienced tobacco users, women and African Americans. Internal industry studies confirmed that menthol and candy-like flavours (e.g., vanilla, cherry) increased LCC appeal to starters by masking the heavy cigar taste, reducing throat irritation, and making LCC smoke easier to inhale. To appeal to new users, manufacturers also reduced the size of cigars to make them more cigarette-like, introduced filters and flavoured filter tips, emphasized mildness and ease of draw in advertising, and featured actors using little cigars in television commercials. RJ Reynolds tried to capitalize on the popularity of menthol cigarettes among African Americans and marketed a menthol little cigar to African Americans.

Conclusions—Tobacco companies engaged in a calculated effort to blur the line between little cigars and cigarettes to increase appeal to cigarette smokers, and the use of flavours facilitated these efforts. Bans on flavoured cigarettes should be expanded to include flavoured LCCs, and tobacco use prevention initiatives should include LCCs.

Keywords

tobacco; cigars; cigarillos; flavouring agents; marketing

INTRODUCTION

Tobacco companies have used flavours to market their products to new users[1-2] and accordingly, fruit, candy and alcohol characterizing flavours were prohibited in cigarettes by the 2009 Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act (FSPTCA).[3] Declines in cigarette consumption have been accompanied by sharp increases in the consumption of cigarette-like small cigars and pipe tobacco (up 482% from 2000 to 2011), which can be

used for roll-your-own cigarettes.[4] The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposed rule in April 2014 to regulate cigars and little cigars/cigarillos did not include any limitations on flavours.[3]

Little cigars resemble cigarettes but are wrapped in tobacco leaf rather than paper (and weigh less than 3 pounds per 1000 cigars). Cigarillos are longer, slimmer versions of a large cigar (and weigh 3-10 pounds per 1000 cigars). [5] Cigar smoking was the second most common form of tobacco use among youth in 2012: 13.1% of high school students currently smoked cigars (17.8% of boys; 8% of girls).[4] In a 2011 national survey, ever cigar use was reported by 37.9% of young adults, and of the cigar smokers, 21.5% had used little cigars and cigarillos (LCCs).[6] The 2009-2010 National Adult Tobacco Survey revealed that young adults aged 18-24 had the highest use rates, and 57.1% of young adult cigar smokers used flavoured cigars.[7] In 2013 cigars and cigarillos were more available in predominantly African American neighbourhoods.[8] In 2010-2011, youth, young adults, females, blacks, cigarette smokers, and blunt users were significantly more likely to report a usual cigar brand that is flavoured. Flavoured cigar brand preference decreased significantly with age. [9]

We analysed previously secret tobacco industry documents from RJ Reynolds (RJR), Philip Morris (PM), British American Tobacco, Lorillard, U.S. Smokeless Tobacco Company (USST, formerly United States Tobacco Company) on the development and marketing of flavoured non-cigarette combustible products to determine the purpose of flavoured additives in LCCs, and what role flavours played in little cigar and cigarillo product use.

METHODS (see Appendix for details)

We searched the University of California, San Francisco Legacy Tobacco Documents Library (legacy.library.ucsf.edu), between November 2010 and August 2013; cigarette companies produced LCCs and archived research on competing cigar producers, including Consolidated Cigar Corporation and General Cigar Company (GC). Search terms included “flavor,” “flavor*,” “other tobacco products,” “flavored cigar*,” “new users,” “starters,” and “youth.” We reviewed the documents, retained the documents related to flavoured cigars, organized them chronologically and thematically, and identified common themes. This analysis is based on a final set of 251 industry documents. Research memos were reviewed, and questions were resolved by collecting additional data. Information from industry documents was triangulated with data from brand websites between 2012 and 2013 and materials archived at the Rutgers Trinkets and Trash and Stanford University SRITA tobacco advertisement collections, government websites, news stories in trade press and national newspapers.

RESULTS

“New Cigar Philosophy”

Strategic use of flavours to attract new cigar users followed the release of the 1964 Surgeon General’s Report on Smoking and Health.[10] The report emphasized the harms of cigarette smoking, with cigar smoking having “little significance” compared with cigarettes.[11]

After the report's release, major cigar manufacturers and several cigarette companies planned to take advantage of the fact that cigars were perceived as a safer product. [12-15] In 1969, the President of Consolidated Cigar Corporation (currently Altadis), Ed Kelley, told the trade magazine *Tobacco Reporter*, "We imply cigars are better for your health than are cigarettes and that you'll enjoy them more." [14]

Cigar manufactures planned to target young people, especially young males, with flavoured little cigars. In 1968, the Cigar Institute, an industry trade organization, promoted slimmer cigars as a new trend among youth in a *Life* magazine ad campaign (Figure 1). [16] In 1970, Ted Cott, executive director of the Cigar Institute, described the "new cigar philosophy" in a *Los Angeles Times* article titled "Cherry or Lime. Stogie Gives Way to Mod Cigar Look:"

What this country needs is a good small cigar. It should be thin. It should be the size of a cigarette. It should sometimes have a plastic mouthpiece. It should be mild. It shouldn't emit too much smoke and *it should come in a selection of flavors*. Whenever possible, it should sell for less than a nickel [emphasis added]."[17]

Consistent with this "new philosophy" between the 1960s and 2014, flavour additives in LCCs served *four major functions*: (1) masking the harsh properties of cigar tobacco to make it more palatable to new users; (2) increasing attractiveness to younger users; (3) increasing acceptance among women and recruiting women as new users of LCCs; (4) targeting minorities, specifically African American users. These tactics resulted in altered consumer perceptions of LCCs, including confusing the products with cigarettes.

Product Development and Targeting

Use of Flavours to Make LCC Smoke Milder—Since the 1960s, tobacco industry researchers recognized that flavours could increase the appeal to initiates by helping mask the bitterness of tobacco leaves, throat burn, and the heavy cigar taste. Fruit flavours (e.g., cherry) as well as menthol were particularly popular.[18-19] In 1966, F.J Triest, the President of the Fries & Brother Flavor Specialists Company, stated:

Natural flavoring of non-tobacco origin includes plant materials of aromatic properties. These products ... act as masking agents against objectionable off-flavors. This group of flavoring materials includes: vanilla beans...peach, apricot, licorice, cocoa and many others... Sugar-deficient leaf can be improved through the addition of sucrose, glucose or any other variation of sugar.[20-21]

Since the alkaline smoke from traditional cigars is usually not inhaled, using flavours in LCCs made smoke more tolerable and facilitated inhalation.[37] In addition to adding flavours, tobacco companies reduced the nicotine level,[22] reduced the size of cigars,[23] added plastic or wooden filter tips,[24-26] and charcoal or other types of filters[24, 27] to make cigars more palatable to new users.

Introduction of Flavoured LCCs by Cigar Companies—In the late 1960s numerous flavoured "small cigars" were introduced; these cigars were larger in diameter than cigarettes but shorter than regular cigars. Consolidated introduced one of the first flavoured small cigars, CigarLet, in 1964. [28] Consolidated subsidiary Muriel Cigars's Tipalet

followed with cigars in cherry, burgundy, and natural (tobacco) flavours. The 1968 Tipalet promotional campaign on college campuses targeted young adults.[29] In 1970, Consolidated president Kelley told the *Los Angeles Times* the company was experimenting with cola, root beer, carnation, honey, strawberry and mint flavours to decide which flavours to bring to the marketplace.[17]

In 1969, GC introduced Tijuana Smalls little cigars, featuring cherry flavour, using television commercials stating, “you do not have to inhale them to like them,” although the actors were depicted inhaling the smoke.[30] USST introduced Tall N’ Slim menthol cigars in 1969, rum-flavoured Wolf Brothers in 1969 and Zig-Zag Little Cigars in 1971-1972[13, 22] in regular and menthol flavours.[31] In addition to a variety of flavours, USST little cigars had relatively low nicotine content.[32] Tall N’ Slim was advertised as “the cigar for cigarette smokers” with “more flavor” and less nicotine.[22]

Introduction of Flavoured LCCs by Cigarette Companies—In 1970, Philip Morris’s (PM’s) Director of Research Center Operations recommended producing flavoured little cigars, creating a mild smoke utilizing “air dilution” and the “masking effect of the Cherry and Menthol flavors”[23] Another memo to PM’s Director of Development specified that the circumference of the new cigar should be the same as that of Virginia Slims cigarettes: “We are to make a 100 mm product of slim circumference (22.8 mm) using either cigaret or cigar filler and producing a mild smoke. This should be as close to a cigaret as possible.”[23] This decision was made based on prior PM research on Tijuana Smalls which concluded, “the only way to achieve high volume of sales” for small cigar products was to make them similar to cigarettes.[24] Tijuana Smalls and Marlboro were to be “comparison products”.[33] The little cigars were to be packaged in packs of 20 [33] and the company planned to add a “cigarette-type” filter or cork, smooth plastic filters.[24, 27]

Flavours in Filters and Filter Tips—PM evaluated two categories of little cigars: four regular and four aromatic (produced with “cigaret-like” blend of tobacco) in 1970.[25] Flavours such as vanillin, were added “to enhance smoke taste” but did not have any distinctive taste or aroma.[26] The low vanillin flavoured sample differed from the low vanillin regular sample “only by virtue of its flavoured plastic tip.”[25]

In 1971 RJR introduced its first little cigar, Winchester, [34-36], which quickly became the largest-selling brand of little cigars. [37] Winchester was the size and shape of a cigarette, sold in packs of 20, filter-tipped, and could “easily be inhaled.”[37] Product introduction resulted in “the Winchester Little Cigar Controversy” when, in 1972, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) called for additional evidence to determine whether, “in actual use by consumers, small cigars are inhaled in the same manner as cigarettes.”[38] According to Jesse Steinfield, the Surgeon General at the time, it was “conceivable that the design, blend, flavorings, and filters and not least, the advertising support being given the new little cigars, is resulting in more smokers inhaling than formerly.”[39] In 1973 health advocates called for warning label and advertisement regulation.[37, 40] In 1973, the US Congress extended the broadcast ban on cigarette advertising to include little cigars.[41] The FTC did not add warning labels to cigars until 2001.[42]

In 1965, Lorillard introduced Omega filter-tipped little cigars,[41], in 1971, Lorillard launched Stag tipped menthol and cherry-flavoured little cigars [43-44] and in 1972, cherry and menthol Omega Slim 100s.[43, 45] A 1972 Lorillard market research report noted that “about the most important single factor in placing [smoked] product types and brands on [a product] continuum is perception of the strength of flavor” and that mildness was crucial in attracting new users to the category.[46]

According to a 1992 Euromonitor Market Direction Report on Cigars, Cigarillos, and Tobacco, the “bad publicity” of cigarettes and the shift towards milder cigar types helped create a “mini-boom” in cigar sales by the mid-1980s.[42] In the early 1990s, however, cigar sales started to decline due to restrictions on advertising, growing prices, and younger people not taking up the “old-fashioned habit.”[47-48]

Between 2000 and 2014, tobacco companies continued to increase use of sweet flavours, resulting in a proliferation of flavoured line extensions. In 2011 a senior manager for cigar manufacturer Swedish Match explained the flavour trend “took off” in the early 2000s because flavours helped make smoke smoother, tasting and smelling better.[49] In 2014, Black and Mild cigars produced by Middleton (Altria subsidiary) and mild White Owl cigarillos produced by White Owl came in a variety of fruit and candy flavours.[49]

Flavoured Cigars Facilitated Targeted Marketing to Youth, Women and Minorities

Using Flavours in LCCs to Appeal to Youth and Young Adults—In the 1960s, the major tobacco companies started to explore the potential of flavoured LCCs to expand their youth consumer base.[50] The trend toward milder, smaller, more inexpensive cigars was consistent with the cigar companies’ emphasis on youth.[51-52] A 1969 ABC Television news report stated:

Consolidated Cigar has introduced two new cigars aimed directly at youth. Elite Cigars “for today’s young, contemporary smokers” and Tipalets, a burgundy flavored “new thing in smoking.”...Both Consolidated and Bayuk Cigars are complementing their youth-oriented campaigns with record albums and other premium offers.[51]

USST internal memos in 1972 [50] and its internal magazine in 1973[53] discussed the importance of the youth market to tobacco industry growth. In 1975 the USST president explored having its subsidiary, House of Windsor, develop a new cigar product “designed to invade the youth, pipe and cigarette smokers markets” with 100% Borkum Riff (Bourbon) tobacco filler and sweetened wrapper,[54] and a smaller, slimmer “panatela” shape than regular cigars. We were unable to determine if this plan was implemented, but House of Windsor produced Javelin Candela panatela-shaped cigars [55] and rum-flavoured little cigars, including Wolf Brothers Little Nippers in 1968 [56] and Wolf Brothers Crooks and Crookettes in 1968.[57]

In 1969 RJR’s marketing research found that describing menthol Winchester Little Cigars as having a “frosty-new taste” would intrigue younger respondents.[49] RJR expected Winchester to appeal to young smokers, women, those accustomed to cigarette brands with a

stronger tobacco taste and menthol cigarette smokers. The mint and menthol flavours appealed to novices, and were “not appealing to cigar connoisseurs.”[58]

Raising Acceptance among Women and Targeting Women as New Users—

Cigar companies tried to achieve female acceptance with flavours, slimmer cigar shapes, and milder tobaccos.[11] In 1966, GC launched the “Should a gentleman offer a lady a Tiparillo?” campaign to win “female acceptance rather than female consumption” of Tiparillos and maintain the cigar as a symbol of masculinity.[51, 59] The advertisements did not depict women smoking the product (Figure 2).[60] In 1969, GC’s Tipalet (cherry and burgundy flavours) advertising emphasized mildness and acceptability among women to appeal to young men: “Blow in her face and she’ll follow you anywhere. Hit her with tangy Tipalet Cherry, Or rich, grape-y Tipalet Burgundy... It’s new. Different. Delicious in taste and aroma. A puff in her direction and she’ll follow you, anywhere..”[61]

However, women also began to be portrayed as cigar smokers: an advertisement for Wolf Brothers Cherry-Flavoured Little Cigars, introduced in 1969, claimed, “She’ll like them too” [18], and in 1974, women were shown smoking Tiparillo cigars (Figure 2). [60] In 1970, the vice-president of the Cigar Institute gave *The Financial Post* the following reasons for the steady cigar sales growth since 1967:

The market is responding to longer, thinner, more elegant cigars and new flavors, such as rum, sherry, burgundy, coffee, mint, wild berry, and natural. Greater demand among young people helped along by greater acceptance among women. [62]

In the 1970s celebrity actresses and singers were used as spokespeople; Susan Anton, an actress and singer, sang in Muriel commercials, “Muriel air-tips drive me mild, with the easiest taste they could’ve found.”[63] RJR’s internal research also found that a menthol and mint combination little cigar would appear to have the best chances of success by appealing to women as well as to men and the younger cigarette smokers.[58]

Targeting Minority Groups—In 1972, RJR researchers interviewed Salem and Kool cigarette smokers, testing Winchester Menthol, and found that use of menthol increased perceptions of mildness and coolness.[58] RJR introduced Winchester Menthol nationally in 1974.[64] RJR’s marketing plan anticipated menthol growth especially among low-to-middle-income 18-34 year old African American males.[64] The company planned to run “special Negro advertising” for two months in those areas which had “high Negro concentrations.” [65-66]

In 1975, American Tobacco planned to publish promotions for menthol-flavoured little cigars branded Long Johns[67-68] in “Negro” newspapers:

It is proposed that a special advertising ... campaign be directed at the Black Market to generate awareness and trial of Long Johns Filter and Menthol 120s in this important segment of the market. We recommend a 13-week campaign consisting of one 500 line Black and White insertion each week in the Negro

newspapers located in open areas... The newspaper campaign will effectively supplement our Outdoor and Transit schedules in these markets[67]

Consumer Response Studies

Consumer research on flavoured LCCs conducted by RJR and Lorillard in the 1970s and, more recently, in 2000, confirmed that the tobacco companies were able to achieve several of their objectives to increase appeal to younger users, and initiates when designing or advertising flavoured cigars. Consumers perceived mint and menthol cigars to be less harsh and more acceptable to smokers. RJR's 1969 focus groups on cigars [58, 69-72] found that:

Most men (and women) inhaled their first puffs of [the] new product...because the product seemed like a cigarette in terms of size and shape and because the filter suggested that it could be smoked just like a cigarette. (... many said they could not imagine giving up inhaling under any circumstances.)[69]

Focus group results also demonstrated that these little cigars "seemed surprisingly 'mild;' it wasn't thought to be as strong or rough as a small cigar... It even compared favorably in this respect to a cigarette."[69]

In 1972, RJR researchers conducted interviews with Salem and Kool (both RJR brands) cigarette smokers to test Winchester Menthols, and confirmed that consumers perceived menthol cigars as acceptable, milder and cooler than non-menthol cigars.[58]

Tobacco companies also found consumers confused little cigars and cigarettes. Focus group research conducted by RJR in 1971 evaluating a television commercial for Winchester little cigars found that it successfully evoked cigarette associations, "Almost everyone recalls and comments on the fact that the girl smokes the product. Additionally, many seem to remember that she actually inhales it... In a more subtle way, the whole mode of execution suggests the traditional cigarette commercial."[73]

The researchers identified the following elements of the commercial that appeared to evoke cigarette associations:

"Copy ("It's not a cigar" "It's a whole 'nother smoke" "It's somethin' else"); Girl seems to inhale product which communicates cigarette-like mildness; The feminine way girl handles product as she "tries it on", Packaged like cigarettes. Twenty in a pack; Has filter and looks like a cigarette (except for brown "paper"); "Subconscious slips of the tongue" (Several refer to Winchester as "cigarettes")."

[73]

They recommended that Winchester marketing emphasize mild flavours and a "frosty new taste" to increase trial among younger smokers.[58, 66]

Lorillard internal research on cigars in 1971 confirmed that flavour was the prime factor for cigar product preference and concluded that any flavour could mask out cigar-like taste characteristics. [74] In 1970, Lorillard conducted consumer research on little cigars[75-77] including male and female cigar, LCC, and cigarette smokers, including recent quitters for several reasons:

Although it is felt that current female cigarette smokers may represent a potential for new product development, the recent quitters may be even better prospects and should be included... We feel the attitudes of women toward cigar smoking, not simply as possible consumers of little cigars, but, as strong influences upon male smoking of all types of cigars is important. Inclusion of cigarette quitters is also important because, to some extent the current trend away from cigarette smoking represents a potentially profitable void which, properly positioned, little cigars can fill very well.[75]

Children above 16 years of age were included in the study.[78] The study led to the 1971 “Cigar Segmentation Study,” which classified cigar smokers into five segments based on smoking attitudes or needs: Social Smokers; Casual Smokers; Inveterate Smokers; Worried Inhalers; Adjusted Inhalers.[79] The researchers identified 7 benefits of cigarillos, including being inoffensive, mild/refreshing, flavour, male success.[79]

In 1972, Lorillard used these five segments in a national study to determine product perceptions among male LCC non-users and users.[80] They found consumers perceived little cigars and tipped cigarillos as “positioned” closer to cigarettes than cigars. Furthermore, tipped LCCs excited more purchase interest and offered similar perceived benefits: health, change of pace, easy draw, good taste, lack of irritation, relaxing, pleasing aroma, enjoyable without inhaling, pleasant in the mouth, helped cut down smoking, and low in tar and nicotine.[80] LCCs also tended to be held by participants in a similar manner as cigarettes.[80]

In 1972, Lorillard conducted research to determine consumer perceptions of their Stag Tipped Little Cigar and response to a television commercial promoting Stag[44, 81] as masculine, active, and youthful.[44] Respondents found Stag less irritating and milder than the comparison product, Tiparillo.[44] In 2000, Roper Starch conducted qualitative interviews with cigarette and LCC users for Lorillard, which showed that flavoured LCCs were popular among younger women and those trying to quit cigarettes, and that LCC users inhaled cigar smoke:

A. Cigars are booming. You don’t even know how many women are smoking cigars. It’s insane.

Q. Oh, really? They’re going for the flavored cigars?

A. Flavored cigars, yeah. I just got both my sisters hooked, which is terrible. They won’t quit smoking cigarettes, but they’re hooked on cigars. They like the vanillas and the cherries. They’re smoking the filtered ones.“... ”My sisters both started smoking them because the[y] quit smoking cigarettes“... ”My goofy sisters are inhaling cigars... They probably think they are less addicted. They probably think it’s a temporary thing..”[82]

Another interviewee was not able to differentiate between little cigars and cigarettes and called little cigars “little flavor-tip cigarettes.”[83]

In 2005, PM conducted “Project Door” to explore cigar smokers’ perceptions of the leading mass market cigar brands (including Swisher Sweets, Phillies, Black & Mild, Dutch

Masters, White Owl, Garcia Y Vega) and brand selection criteria.[84-85] Most of the Project Door documents are withheld due to claims of confidentiality.[84-90]

DISCUSSION

The marketing of flavoured LCCs began 50 years ago, and in 2014, a variety of fruit and candy flavours, including chocolate, cherry, vanilla, were still available,[91] including flavours tobacco companies identified as attractive to youth. These flavours, both characterizing and non-characterizing, in combination with colourful and stylish packaging, mask the harsh and toxic properties of tobacco. Cigar manufacturers (many now owned by cigarette companies) continue to use flavours and media channels accessible to youth. For example, underage visitors of the splitarillos.com website are redirected to the Splitarillos Facebook page,[92] circumventing the website age restrictions. Furthermore, the company uses models, music, and flavours appealing to youth (Figure 3). [60, 92-93]

Characterizing flavours are banned in cigarettes, but in 2014 flavoured LCCs remain available and unregulated in the US with a few local exceptions. We found that like flavoured cigarettes, flavoured LCCs appeal to youth. In addition, flavours facilitated handling cigars in the same manner as cigarettes, evoking mildness, masking the strong cigar taste, and making it easier to inhale the smoke.

Furthermore, to appeal to new users, little cigar manufacturers reduced the size of cigars to make them more cigarette-like, introduced filters and flavoured filter tips, emphasized mildness and ease of draw, evoked associations with cigarettes, and featured actors inhaling little cigar smoke in television commercials. Flavoured products enhanced tobacco companies' calculated efforts to blur the line between little cigars and cigarettes to appeal to cigarette smokers. In addition, RJR tried to capitalize on the menthol cigarettes success among African Americans to market menthol little cigars. In 2014, LCCs are promoted by hip-hop and rap singers, DJs, and in music videos.

For example, the Executive Branch cigarillo was endorsed by famous singer Snoop Lion (aka Snoop Dogg) in 2012. The singer placed cigarillo advertisements in his music videos on Youtube; one video featuring the ad had over 51 million views as of 2014.[94] This strategy is similar to cigarette campaigns targeting African American youth, such as the 2004 Kool Mixx cigarette campaign by Brown & Williamson (Figure 4) [60, 92, 95-96], which resulted in protests[97-98] and an eventual recall.[99]

Cigar manufacturers targeted women by reducing cigar size and using flavours, "purse" packs, decorative tips, and celebrities in advertising. This targeting continues (Appendix). In a January 2014 news article, Avanti cigar company spokeswoman Elaine Ferri stated that Avanti began selling its new cafe mocha Estilo cigar in three-pack pouches which "women like to slip into a purse or pocket." [100] Avanti was also launching a new line of decorative tips and flavours in February 2014, and Ferri commented, "Women absolutely are a growing market in the cigar industry and they prefer flavoured and small cigars." [100]

There have been few studies on promotion of little cigars and cigarillos. A 2001 content analysis of two cigar "lifestyle" magazines found that cigar promotions helped promote the

industry, normalize smoking, and positioned cigar use as a socially welcome relief from restrictions.[101] Our study extends the findings to LCCs. Our findings also confirm a content analysis of Youtube user videos promoting LCCs, which showed that candy flavours were one of the most common themes.[102] Prior research showed that celebrities and women were used in cigar advertising to appeal to young men; we found similar tactics were used to increase appeal to LCCs.[103] Delnevo and Hrywna[104] discussed RJR efforts to make little cigars as close to cigarettes as legally possible, including consumer perceptions of non-flavoured little cigars. Our study adds the role of flavours in promotion of little cigars and cigarillos.

Study limitations are that the archives of the industry documents are incomplete and some relevant documents may not have been found or were not available. However the consistency of these findings over time and across multiple tobacco companies, and the continuation of these strategies in 2014 increases our confidence in the findings.

Because marketing of flavoured products adversely affects the public health by promoting youth initiation, FDA and authorities in other countries should prohibit flavoured LCCs. In addition, use of flavoured products may contribute to dual use of cigarettes and other tobacco products among those who are trying to quit smoking and those who do not differentiate among cigarettes and little cigar products.[3] FDA should immediately establish a product standard prohibiting flavours in LCCs, e-cigarettes, and all other covered tobacco products. Elimination of all flavoured tobacco products would benefit public health by helping reduce youth initiation of tobacco and dual use of tobacco products.[9]

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

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WHAT THIS PAPER ADDS

What is known about this topic?

- While cigarette use is declining, cigar use has been increasing. Prior studies demonstrated that tobacco companies have undertaken marketing tactics to increase cigars' appeal to young men, to normalize smoking, and to portray cigar use as socially acceptable. However, prior studies have not specifically addressed little cigars and cigarillos, and the role of flavour additives in these efforts.

What does this paper add?

- This is the first study addressing the role of flavouring in the marketing of little cigars and cigarillos. We found that flavour additives were used to more make LCCs palatable to new users; make LCC products more attractive to younger users; increase acceptance for LCCs among women, and to target minorities, specifically African American users.
- The promotion of flavoured little cigars and cigarillos resulted in altered consumer perceptions; LCCs were perceived as milder, easier to smoke, more appealing to non-users, and more similar to cigarettes than to traditional (large) cigars. Consumers referred to LCCs as cigarettes, and handled LCCs like cigarettes, including inhaling the smoke.
- These findings suggest that restrictions on cigarette marketing strategies and the use of fruit, candy, and alcohol flavours should be applied similarly to LCCs. Menthol and mint flavours serve the same function as other flavours, and should similarly be prohibited.

Figure 1.

Life Magazine Print Advertisement by the Cigar Institute highlighting cigar use among younger smokers, emphasizing the slimmer (smaller) size as a driver of this trend. 1968. The text includes, "If you think you've noticed that cigars are getting slimmer these days, it isn't your imagination at work. It's today's younger smokers at work. Maybe it's because slimmed down cigars look better with slimmed down clothes. Maybe it's because slim cigars are easier to carry around. Maybe it's because slim cigars are simply more casual. We don't really know but these gentlemen may be on to something. Maybe you ought to see what it's all about. The Cigar Institute" [16]

Figure 2.

Role of Women in Little Cigar Advertisement Campaign. The goal of the earlier advertisements (top row) was female acceptance, “Should a gentleman offer a Tiparillo to a lady?” (1968) campaign by General Cigar. did not feature women handling the cigars; the goal of the subsequent advertisement (bottom row) was recruiting women as users: Winchester (1974) campaign by RJR featured women holding or smoking cigars. [60]

Figure 3.

Splitarillo (2012-2014) promotion of flavoured cigarillos targeting youth, prominently featuring sweet, grape and wine flavours, candy-like packaging, a youthful models, sex appeal, and the peer oriented slogan “split it with your friends.” [60, 92, 93]

Figure 4.

African American Musicians featured in advertising for Executive Brand Cigarillos (2014) and Hunid Racks Cigarillos, showing imagery similar to the 2004 Kool Cigarettes Promotion that was withdrawn after public health and African American groups raised concerns about the campaign's youth appeal. [95, 96, 97, 98]