

## FDA'S *THE REAL COST: SMOKELESS* CAMPAIGN: DEVELOPING AUTHENTIC SMOKELESS TOBACCO PREVENTION MESSAGES

*Maria Roditis<sup>1</sup>, Nasi Dineva<sup>1</sup>, Caitlin Moynihan<sup>2</sup>, Matt Walker<sup>1</sup>, Nikkita Sarna<sup>2</sup>, Shay Abagat<sup>1</sup>*

*<sup>1</sup>FDA Center for Tobacco Products, <sup>2</sup>Fors Marsh Group*

*Disclaimer: This is not a formal dissemination of information by FDA and does not represent Agency position or policy.*

- FDA's *The Real Cost: Smokeless* public education campaign targets rural male youth 12-17 years of age who are at risk for using smokeless tobacco.
- To support FDA's *The Real Cost: Smokeless* campaign, the study assessed reactions to messages designed to educate rural youth about the risks of smokeless tobacco use.

# METHODS: CAMPAIGN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



- Perform extensive literature review
- Conduct early strategic research to identify salient message themes
- Consult experts in tobacco public health education and the rural community



- Use focus groups to identify promising creative concepts
- Consult experts in tobacco public health education and the rural community



- Conduct copy testing of final rough cut ads to measure perceived effectiveness, level of engagement, and message comprehension

Between February and March 2018, 25 focus groups with 137 rural male youth aged 12-17 were held to assess reactions to public health education messages:

- Inclusion criteria included being either an experimenter of or at risk for using smokeless tobacco
- Teens were randomly assigned to view 4 of 5 creative concepts (out of 7 concepts total) in the form of animatics with voiceover
- After focus groups, transcripts were analyzed to assess:
  - Overall main message comprehension
  - Whether the concepts are compelling, believable, attention-grabbing, and memorable
  - Which concepts are promising to develop into ads

- 25 focus groups of 6–8 teens for a total of 137 teens from the following states:
  - Montana
  - Arkansas
  - Kentucky
  - Pennsylvania
- Groups were segmented by:
  - School Level (Middle School; High School)
  - Tobacco Use Status (At risk; Experimenter)
  - Race/Ethnicity (Non-Hispanic White; Other Race)

# METHODOLOGY: 90-MINUTE FOCUS GROUPS FLOW

- Introduction/Warm-up
- Reactions to Creative Concepts:
  - Review of up to 5 creative concepts
  - Rating worksheet
  - Discussion
  - Ranking worksheet
- Conclusion

# AREAS OF CREATIVE CONCEPTS TESTED

ADDICTION

HEALTH  
CONSEQUENCES

HPHCs

"COUNTRY"  
CULTURE

## Addiction concepts:

- Youth felt that addiction was not enough on its own:

*“Yeah. It only mentioned nicotine as addicting. It didn't really mention any other health risks in general.”* —High School, Experimenter

[On whether addiction is a bad thing] *“Depends on what you're addicted to.”* —High School, Experimenter

- Some youth felt that addiction messages worked when they were able to tie them to other consequences like the financial cost of being addicted:

*“You're always spending money on it and you're slowly losing money that you could have for other things.”* —Middle School, At-Risk

- Ultimately, youth wanted a concrete link between addiction and health consequences:

*“I think that if they were to put the effects of dip .... that would probably help.”* —High School, At-Risk



## Health messaging concepts:

- Participants liked concepts that depicted a strong, graphic depiction of the harms of smokeless:

*“Because I always knew my whole life that dip was dangerous. I just didn’t know there are so many bad chemicals. I always, up until practically now, I always thought there could be two or three horrible chemicals in there.”*

- High School, At-Risk

*“Telling you that it can cause jaw, mouth cancer and we’ll have to remove your jaw, it makes you want to—it makes you not want to do dip, and it makes you want to look up how they do that and what will happen to you.”*

- High School, At-Risk

## Country identity concepts:

- Youth responded well to imagery that was reflective of their lives and environment (e.g., truck and school environment, small town setting, being outdoors):

[What they liked about the ad] *“Just the sunset views and just saying what you can do without dip.”* —Middle School, At-Risk

- Youth especially liked the depiction of activities they were personally familiar with and like (e.g., sports, fishing, four-wheeling) or perceived to be impressive/aspirational:

*“I liked it because it had something for everybody... so everybody can relate to sports. A kid fishing, I can relate to that.”*  
—High School, Experimenter

- Participants did not like depictions of country life that felt heavy handed or felt like they were portraying what others thought it meant to be country:

*“As a whole, I feel they’re kind of stereotyping country... jam out to those songs that are all about country or just doing stupid things or driving big pickup trucks.” —High School, Experimenter*

*“They were acting like every country person is some redneck that works on cars, goes hunting every day —”  
“Wears really crappy polos [laughter] and—” “Sits next to the barn for his picture.” —High School, At-Risk*

*“It’s just putting together **a bunch of random pictures of what the people who made the ad think they look like**, or whatever, and stuff that they say, or I don’t even know.” —High School, Experimenter*

- When asked if they identify with “country”, some participants rejected the label:

*“I mean, there is a lot of country out here. And I mean country as in land, farms, and stuff. And a lot of people would consider themselves to be country. But there are also people who don’t consider themselves country, and they just live out here.”* —High School, Experimenter

[When asked if they identify with country] *“I hunt and everything but no.”* —High School, Experimenter

*“Maybe the reason [it] doesn’t connect for me as much, because...I personally don’t identify too much with country. Despite living in Montana, I just don’t identify much with [it].”* —High School, At-Risk

- On the challenge of portraying “country”:

*“Well, I don’t think there really is any correct way to portray [“country”] exactly. But, I think, people should just try and stop portraying it unless they understand... Everybody thinks of it in a different way, and it’s just—I feel like they could offend people easily...”* —High School, Experimenter

*“Well, and I mean, it’s like we were just saying how we didn’t like how stereotypical it was, but then you [another participant] said it was good for our area because we all drive trucks. There’s no really in between.”* —High School, Experimenter

*“We probably feel it’s stereotypical but at the same time, it’s kind of true.”* —Middle School, At-Risk

- Very preliminary work done to assess how multicultural youth (3 focus groups) responded to these concepts:
  - The concepts resonated
  - While some multicultural youth identified as country others did not, similar to non-Hispanic White youth:

[On why some participants identify as country] *“Oh, the town we live in.” “We live out in the country.”* —Other Race, Middle School, At-Risk

*“I disliked how it was more of a highlight reel of rednecks and stuff.”* —Other Race, Middle School, At-Risk
  - Some youth felt that the characters portrayed were not representative enough:

*“I feel like it's directed to a specific race.” “White people.” “There's actually not one Black person in the [ad].”*— Other Race, High School, Experimenter
  - Sports and sports figures seem to cut across demographics and across youth who identify as country and those who do not.

- Addiction messages may not be enough on their own to prevent initiation. They seem to be more effective when tied to other negative consequences, particularly health effects.
- Concepts with a strong, graphic depiction of the harms of smokeless seem to perform better.
- Developing concepts that feel authentic with this target audience is not an easy task. Using familiar settings (e.g., small town community) and positive, lifestyle imagery that the audience can relate to is helpful, but practitioners should be careful not to rely on stereotypes of what it means to be “country”.
  - Sports imagery and sports figures appear to be a promising messaging vehicle that can cut across demographics and reach youth who may not identify as “country”.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



The authors would like to acknowledge staff at FDA's Center for Tobacco Products as well as FCB New York and Fors Marsh Group for their contributions to this research.