

A Content Analysis of Unique Selling Propositions of Tobacco Print Ads

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Objectives: We describe the unique selling propositions (USPs) (propositions used to convince customers to use a particular brand/product by focusing on the unique benefit) of print tobacco ads. **Methods:** A qualitative content analysis was conducted of print tobacco ads (N = 171) selected from August 2012 to August 2013 for cigarettes, moist snuff, e-cigarettes, cigars, and snus to determine the content and themes of USPs for tobacco ads. **Results:** Cigarette ad USP themes focused on portraying the product as attractive; moist snuff ads focused on portraying product as masculine; cigar ads focused on selling a “high end product;” and new and emerging tobacco products (e-cigarette, snus) focused on directly comparing these products to cigarettes. **Conclusions:**

Whereas traditional tobacco product ads used USPs focused on themes of enjoyment and pleasure (eg, attractive for cigarettes, “high end product” for cigars), new and emerging tobacco product ads offered the unique benefit (USP) of their product being a better and “safer” alternative to traditional tobacco products. Snuff’s USPs focused nearly exclusively on the masculinity of their products. Our results provide targets for potential tobacco regulatory actions that could be implemented to reduce demand for tobacco products by reducing their perceived unique benefits.

Key words: tobacco ads; unique selling propositions; content analysis; cigarettes; non-cigarette consumer products
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Although tobacco control efforts in the United States (US) have led to decreased cigarette smoking rates over the past several decades, this progress has slowed.¹ One key factor contributing to this neutralization of tobacco control may be the increased availability and promotion of alternative smokeless tobacco products, including new and emerging products such as e-cigarettes and snus which may have contributed to the dramatic increase in the use and sales of smokeless tobacco products over the last decade.^{2,3} Although

the consumption of traditional combustible cigarettes has decreased by 32.8% over the period of 2000 to 2011, consumption of non-cigarette combustible tobacco (eg, cigars) has increased 123.1% over this same period of time.⁴ The use of other tobacco products, including moist snuff and e-cigarettes has continued to rise as well over the past decade as well.⁵⁻⁷ These data demonstrate that although traditional cigarette use may be in decline, the use of alternative tobacco products is rising.

The increased use of alternative tobacco products may be directly tied to the volume and type of advertising used to promote these products. Each year the tobacco industry spends billions of dollars advertising and promoting its products in the US and abroad. For instance, the spending on advertising of smokeless tobacco rose from \$435.9 million in 2012 to \$503.2 million in 2013, according to the Federal Trade Commission.⁸ The majority of this increased expenditure has focused on the promoting of smokeless tobacco products, such as e-cigarettes (approximately \$8 million) and snus (approximately \$10 million).⁹ Data from 2010 to 2014 indicates that \$796 million in total is spent on mag-

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azine advertising, with the majority going to cigarette ads (55%, followed by e-cigarettes (16%), and snus (10%).¹⁰ The number of these ads grew from 2010 to 2014, indicating that magazine advertising has increased in recent years. Data is more limited on cigars, but indicates that direct-to-consumer advertising is the most common method of advertising.¹¹ This increased expenditure on advertising of tobacco products seems to have improved the sales of tobacco products, which exceeded \$2.94 billion in revenue for smokeless tobacco sales in 2011 alone.¹²

More directly, these increases in advertising spending have been linked with increased use of tobacco products.¹³ For instance, one study reported a significant association between e-cigarette advertisement exposure and current e-cigarette use among US middle and high school students; greater exposure was associated with higher odds of use.¹³ As the amount and number of advertising increases, so may the exposure of individuals to these advertisements. Advertising has been shown to attract new users of products,^{14,15} promote continued use,^{16,17} build brand loyalty,¹⁸ and expand tobacco product markets.^{15,19} Thus, it is critical to understand how these advertisements appeal to and promote their products.

Research indicates that much of the US tobacco market has shifted toward advertising non-cigarette tobacco products.²⁰ This form of advertising seems to be effective in creating habit forming addictions to alternative tobacco product, such as e-cigarettes, due to their promotion of e-cigarettes as having more choices of flavor, less restriction of use, and less documented harmful effects.²⁰ In line with this finding, data indicate that even among US medical school students, there is a belief that alternative tobacco products contribute less than cigarettes to various diseases.²¹ Highlighting the need to understand advertising surrounding alternative tobacco products, a prior study on tobacco advertising from 2009 to 2013 indicated that cigarette magazine advertising did not influence cigarette demand while e-cigarette TV advertising did influence demand.²⁰

Building on work examining the effect of advertising and promoting of traditional and alternative tobacco products on consumption of these tobacco products, there is a new area of advertising research that may shed further light on the increasing use of tobacco products, specifically, use of alternative tobacco products. One reason for this increase in use of alternative tobacco products may be the unique selling propositions (USPs) of tobacco ads that are used to convince consumers to switch products from traditional tobacco products to alternative and emerging forms of tobacco products, such as e-cigarettes. USPs have been utilized in advertising research to describe a proposition made by a product that refers to the superiority claims of the product based on its unique features and/or benefits.²²

Within the context of tobacco ads, USPs would refer to the ways in which tobacco ads market their various tobacco products to consumers by making claims about the unique positive features and benefits of the product (eg, features, benefits, safety, flavors). These benefit claims might influence consumers to try newer tobacco products such as snus and e-cigarettes as the market for traditional tobacco products becomes less appealing to certain tobacco users. With new and emerging tobacco products available, the tobacco advertising industry often has to compete with other tobacco products. As such, studying tobacco ads' USPs could help determine how tobacco products are distinguishing themselves in the competitive tobacco product market. Understanding the USPs of tobacco ads could provide insight for tobacco regulatory actions on how to reduce the demand for tobacco products by targeting the USPs in tobacco ads.

Because the dramatic increase in both the advertising and use of alternative tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, represents a considerable public health concern, it is critical to improve understanding of how they are being effective in advertising and promoting to the US public. Understanding how these products are marketed to consumers may provide insight into how to regulate and improve tobacco control efforts by addressing tobacco companies' claims regarding these products. For instance, data indicate that many smokeless tobacco products market their products as a viable, "clean" alternative to traditional cigarettes.²³⁻²⁵ This form of advertising may indicate the unique features and benefits (USPs) that these tobacco products offer. It also may be providing misleading information about smokeless tobacco products that could reduce the effectiveness of tobacco control efforts.^{23,26,27}

In line with these findings, the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) and the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) provide key policy recommendations while recognizing the potential for these newer tobacco products to alter tobacco use patterns in the US. For instance, they recommend some of the following policy changes: adding warning labels on products and their advertisements, prohibiting youth-directed advertising and sales, and prohibiting child-friendly flavors.²⁸ On May 5, 2016, the US Food and Drug Administration finalized a deeming rule extending its authority to all tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, cigars, hookah tobacco and pipe tobacco, among others. The new rule – in effect since August 8, 2016 – restricts youth access, including not allowing products to be sold to persons under the age of 18 years (both in person and online), requiring age verification by photo ID, not allowing the sale of covered tobacco products in vending machines (unless in an adult-only facility), and not allowing the distribution of free samples.²⁹ This new FDA rule may help improve the clarity of communica-

Table 1
Tobacco Product Ad Unique Selling Propositions (USP) Coding

Category Coded	Operationalization	Example
Number of USPs	Identify the number of unique points (0-5)	Coder records 3 USPs, indicating that there is a total of 3 USPs.
USP	(a) Response to the sentence, “The advertiser is trying to tell the customer that ...” (b) The key point is an independent thought unit or main idea. (c) There can be more than 1 unique point per response (often there are).	XX e-cigarettes endorse a good time with friends (USP #1) XX e-cigarettes provide an alternative to smoking (USP #2)
Evidence of USP	(a) Write the justification (the justification could be based on explicit or implicit factors) (b) Makes sense as response to the sentence, “This point is justified through...”	Friends are laughing and playing (implicit evidence for USP #1) “An alternative to smoking” (explicit evidence for USP #2)

USP = unique selling propositions

tion regarding potential risks of tobacco products and, as a result, potentially prevent or reduce the number of misleading claims presented by tobacco product manufacturers. To communicate tobacco industry’s misleading claims and guide anti-tobacco counter-advertising activities, it is first critical to gain an in-depth understanding of how tobacco ads market their various tobacco products as unique and beneficial. Studying tobacco ads’ USPs could help determine the claims and benefits made by tobacco companies in these advertisements. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to conduct an in-depth qualitative content analysis of the USPs of print tobacco ads to determine how tobacco companies market these various tobacco products to consumers.

METHODS

Sample and Selection of Tobacco Ads

The ad sample used in the present study consisted of 171 unique print tobacco product ads that were placed in the following print materials between August 2012 and August 2013: consumer magazines, Sunday magazines, local magazines, and Hispanic-targeted magazines.

Details regarding the data collection method are detailed in prior publications.³⁰ The final search resulted in a total of 1122 tobacco product ads. Of these, 588 were cigarette ads, 272 were e-cigarette ads, 139 were moist snuff (excluding snus) ads, 87 were cigar ads, 32 were snus ads, and 4 were miscellaneous tobacco-related ads (excluded from analysis). Among the remaining 1118 ads, 171 were determined to be distinct ads as outlined in prior research²⁵ as being “distinct if it differed from other advertisements by text or image and not by color alone.” The final sample consisted of the following content: 70 cigarette ads, 44 snuff ads, 27 e-cigarette ads, 22 cigar ads, and 8 snus ads. All of these ads contained at least one USP per ad.

A database was created in which each ad was identified with a unique ID, the slogan/headline of the ad, and the product name, parent company, brand name, and magazine in which the ad was published. Results summarizing the frequencies of the ads according to product type are published elsewhere.³⁰

Qualitative Content Analysis

Coding procedures. In this study, the unit of analysis was individual tobacco product ads. Two members of the study investigative team coded all the ads for number of USPs and evidence for USPs. USPs were operationalized as, “unique selling propositions to the customer that convince them to try/use the product, or switch brands. These can be both direct and implied.” All coders identified each USP by writing out the specific unique points that the ad made to encourage customers to try or use the product. All key points represented independent thought units or main ideas. Finally, coders recorded evidence for the USP, which consisted of identifying the supportive words or pictures in the ad to back up the USPs listed. The evidence referred to the justification or relationship to the argument made. These judgments could be based on explicit or implicit factors. An example of an implicit USP would be the following: a cigarette ad is selling the idea the “X cigarettes endorse a fun time with friends” (USP), which is backed up by the ad depicting friends laughing and having a good time. An example of an explicit USP would be the following: an e-cigarette ad is selling the idea that “e-cigarettes are a great alternative to traditional cigarettes” (USP), which is justified by the argument, “Smokers finally have a real alternative.” Table 1 presents the operationalization of coded variables and includes a list of coding categories and definitions. It should be noted that the resulting USPs reported in Table 1 include both USPs of specific

Table 2
Unique Selling Propositions for Cigarette Advertisements

USPs: Themes and sub-themes	Explicit quotes/implicit evidence from ad	Brands	Number of ads
Cigarette Ads (N = 70)			
1. Cigarettes with attractive features/characteristics			
1a. Cigarettes come in a variety of flavors	Multiple flavors mentioned or pictured	American Spirit, Camel, Newport	48
1b. Cigarettes are pleasurable	“Pleasure is never far away!” “Pleasure tastes great in red!” “Always rich, always a pleasure”	Newport	37
1c. Cigarettes offer a unique tasting experience	“Taste it all”	Camel	13
1d. Smoking cigarettes provide an “experience”	“Camel crush experience.” “Crush experience: Keep it original or click it fresh”	Camel	11
1e. Cigarettes are natural (implying safe)	100% additive free natural tobacco emphasized in ad	American Spirit	9
1f. Cigarettes create inspiration and creativity	“Inspired,” “Passionate,” and “Original” are focused in the center of the ad with accompanying pictures	Camel	6
1g. Smoking cigarettes provides a “new experience”	“Discover that something different that makes all the difference,” “Discover the unexpected, celebrate the unforgettable,” “Its about embracing what’s now. But always wondering, what’s next?”	Camel	4
2. Cigarette smoking makes you have a good time			
2a. Cigarette smoking is fun in any setting	Images of friends/romantic couples in different settings like in a limousine, at a party, at a beach, while washing car, at a party, in the kitchen, etc.	Newport, Camel	28
2b. Cigarette smoking is Romantic	Images of couples shown laughing and having a good time	Newport	24
2c. Cigarette smoking is fun with friends	Images of friends having fun/laughing/playing together	Newport	11
3. Incentives for buying cigarettes			
3a. Trial offer	“Get your trial offer”	American Spirit	5
3b. Grand prize in an online Contest	“Five lucky winners, \$50,000 each”	Newport	5
3c. Bundle incentives	“Buy 2 packs for \$2”	American Spirit	2

brands (compared to other brands) as well as USPs of tobacco products that might distinguish them from other tobacco products.

process.³¹⁻³³ In Phase 1 of coding, coders read all ads and noted initial reactions to them according to tobacco product type.³⁴ In Phase 2, analysis team members transferred key findings and summary of findings into an analysis template created for all ads, organized by each tobacco product type. In Phase 3, members met to share their individually coded thoughts, reflections, and observations, and collectively determined a set of findings for each tobacco ad. These findings for ad USPs were then organized into major categories as divided by tobacco type. This occurred as an iterative process until full consensus was reached (indicating inter-rater agreement) and all unique ads had been coded and

synthesized into a summary of findings categorized according to tobacco product types. In Phase 4, coders reviewed the findings produced for each tobacco product type and generated higher-order descriptive and interpretive themes that represented prominent findings observed across all ads. The salience of these findings were assessed in the following 2 ways: (1) consideration of whether both analysis team members reached similar conclusions regarding tobacco product type;^{35,36} and (2) the degree to which thematic findings recurred across multiple ads.³⁶

RESULTS

The final sample consisted of 171 unique tobacco product ads including. Qualitative content analysis of the ads revealed several broad USP themes

Table 3
Unique Selling Propositions for Moist Snuff and Snus Advertisements

USPs: Themes and sub-themes	Explicit quotes/implicit evidence from ad	Brands	Number of ads
Moist Snuff Ads (N = 43)			
1. Snuff use is masculine			
1a. Snuff is a no-nonsense Product	“Tellin it like it is”	Grizzly	36
1b. Use of “dry” humor in General	“Can’t fix your brakes. Make your horn louder,” “Don’t ever get caught without a spare” “Drive a hybrid. It leaves more gas for us”	Grizzly	19
1c. Snuff is masculine/meant for male consumers	“Man rule,” “Writin’ the man rules,” “May cause the urge to act like a man,” “Women have shoes. Men have mitter saws,” “Man Rule #1: Make your own rules,” “You don’t need a vacation, you need a mancave”	Grizzly	9
1d. Use of “dry” humor in Sports	“If you can’t be the best golfer, at least be the best swearer,” “Putting America in front of football is redundant,” “Softball is a good excuse for guys to drink beer in the same shirt”	Grizzly	8
1e. Snuff is for outdoor Activities	“You may never go indoors again,” “Here’s a new year resolution: Wear more Camo”	Grizzly	6
2. Incentives for buying snuff products			
2a. Grand prize in an online Contest	“\$50,000 grand prize”	Grizzly	6
Snus Ads (N = 9)			
1. Snus with attractive features/characteristics			
1a. Snus with flavorful tobacco and taste	“...quality, flavor, and full-on tobacco satisfaction,” “... enjoy flavorful tobacco that’s never complicated”	Camel, General	8
1b. Snus as authentic, Swedish snus	“100% authentic, Swedish snus”	General	6
1c. Snus comes in a variety of Flavors	Images of several flavors (mint, frost, winterchill, etc) displayed on ads	Camel, General	5
2. Snus compared with traditional cigarettes/tobacco products			
2a. Snus offers discreet tobacco Pleasure	“Tobacco satisfaction was meant to be enjoyed in life’s moments - not around them,” “discreet tobacco pleasure wherever you are...”	General Snus	5
2b. Snus is smoke-free	“Caveman created fire. We made it unnecessary,” “2013 smoke free resolution”	Camel	2
3. Advertised snus brand better as compared with other snus brands			
3a. (Specific brand) snus is Superior	“Not all snus is created equal”	General	6
4. Endorsement for snus			
4a. Accomplished/distinguished people use snus	Success stories of “Simon Adamsson, a versatile drummer,” “Tom, a nature lover,” “Robert Blumel, a furniture designer”	General	3

for each of the categories of tobacco product (Table 2). When discussing prevalence of themes, more than one USP theme and sub-theme could be coded for a single ad, providing for totals that sum to over 100% in some instances. As such, frequency data (rather than percentage) are provided below.

Cigarette Ads

Three USP themes emerged for cigarette ads (Table 2, N = 70 ads). The first and most common theme (occurring 128 times) was presenting the attractive features/characteristics of cigarettes. In this theme, cigarettes were presented as having many attrac-

Table 4
Unique Selling Propositions for E-cigarette Advertisements

USPs: Themes and sub-themes	Explicit quotes/implicit evidence from ad	Brands	Number of ads
E-cigarette Ads (N = 27)			
1. E-cigs compared with traditional cigarettes			
1a. E-cigs are a great alternative to traditional cigarettes	“Smokers finally have a real alternative;” “Cigarettes, you’ve met your match;” “The future of smoking is here”	Njoy, Cigirex	12
1b. E-cigs produce no smoke, no odor, no ash	“No Tobacco Smoke, Only Vapor”	blu	11
1c. E-cigs provide freedom to smoke anywhere	“Freedom to smoke anywhere;” “Smoke virtually anywhere”	blu	8
1d. E-cigs are great for quitting traditional cigarettes	“Rise from the ashes;” “Start a new relationship”	blu, Njoy	7
1e. E-cigs are empowering and helps you assert independence	“Rewrite the rules;” “Take back your freedom”	FIN, blu	5
1f. E-cigs provide a superior taste experience compared to traditional cigarettes	“No other brand delivers the great taste and experience...”	Mistic	4
1g. E-cigs are cheaper than traditional cigarettes	“...will save you over 80% compared to the cost of traditional cigarettes”	Cigirex	1
2. Advertised e-cig brand better as compared with other e-cig brands			
2a. (Specific brand) e-cigs are the easy choice	Difficulty of choosing cupcake (shoe, etc) contrasted with ease of choosing brand of e-cigarette; “You’ll kick yourself for trying any other brand”	Mistic	10
2b. (Specific brand) e-cigs are cost-effective	“Don’t break your budget trying different e-cigs that don’t fit your taste;” “The best value”	Mistic	10
2c. (Specific brand) e-cigs are made in the USA, and are therefore superior	“Flavors made in the USA;” “authentic flavor developed in the USA by our Master Flavorist”	blu, Njoy	9
3. E-cigs with attractive features/characteristics			
3a. E-cigs come in a variety of flavors	Images of several flavors (menthol, traditional, gold, bold) displayed on ads	Mistic, Njoy	8
3b. E-cigs are pleasurable	“Cigirex makes you feel so good!” “keep the conversation fresh;” “smell as good as you feel”	blu, Cigirex	2
4. Endorsement for e-cigs			
4a. You can be like a celebrity if you smoke e-cigs	Stephen Dorff in ads promoting e-cigs	blu	5
4b. American women like to smoke e-cigs	Re-creation of Rosie the Riveter	Fin	3

tive features. For instance, ads claimed that: (1) cigarettes come in a variety of flavors; (2) cigarettes are pleasurable; (3) cigarettes offer a unique tasting experience; (4) smoking cigarettes provides an “experience;” (5) cigarettes are natural (implying safe); (6) cigarettes create inspiration and creativity; and (7) smoking cigarettes provides a “new experience.” The second USP theme of cigarettes was, “Cigarette smoking makes you have a good time,” occurring 63 times across cigarette ads, and highlighted the social benefits of smoking. Specifically, cigarettes

were shown to be: (1) fun in any setting, (2) romantic, and (3) fun with friends. Thus, cigarettes were portrayed as not only desirable but connected to having a good time. The final theme of cigarette ad USPs was providing incentives for buying cigarettes; this theme occurred 12 times and provided monetary prizes and bundle incentives.

Moist Snuff Ads

For moist snuff ads, 2 major USP themes emerged (Table 3, N = 43 ads). First, the most prevalent

Table 5
Unique Selling Propositions for Cigar Advertisements

USPs: Themes and sub-themes	Explicit quotes/implicit evidence from ad	Brands	Number of ads
Cigar Ads (N = 22)			
1. Cigars are a premium product			
1a. Cigars come in a variety of premium brands	“First class premium cigar sampler”	Cigars International, General Cigar Inc., J.R. Cigar Store	8
1b. Top local stores sell cigars	“The world’s largest cigar store;” “Where the locals smoke”	J.R. Cigar Store, Cigar Cigars, Signature Cigars	6
1c. Cigars are handmade; thus premium	“If you like handmade cigars...”	Cigars International	6
1d. Cigars are elegant and Classy	Ads depict cigars in an artistic/elegant way	General Cigar Inc., My Father Cigars	4
1e. Cigars are reputable and family owned	“The reigning family of premium cigars;” “...This too, is how we in the Padron family love our lives”	Arturo Fuente, Padron	3
1f. Cigars are American	Uncle Sam Pictured	Cigar Cigars	1
2. Incentives for buying cigars			
2a. Bundle incentives	“Introductory offer...8 top cigars for \$10;” “10 top cigars”	Cigars International, JR Cigar Store	6
2b. Free gift	“Includes free glasstop humidor;” “free cut-glass ashtray”	Cigars International, JR Cigar Store	3
3. Cigars are for special occasions			
3a. Cigars are for celebrating important life events (marriage, success, golf, and other life events)	“When you remember life’s important events, you’ll remember a Padron”/images of cigar smoking at golf, wedding	Padron, Arturo Fuente, Macanudo, Partagas	6
4. Cigars are used by sophisticated people			
4a. Endorsement by sophisticated men and women	“Your beautiful bride, your wilder side, your cigar”	Partagas, Cohiba	2
4b. Endorsement by founders of cigar companies	Endorsement by Jon “Pepin” Garcia, Jorge Padron	My Father Cigars, Padron	2
4c. Endorsement by celebrities/famous people	Endorsement by Bill Paley	La Palina	1

theme (occurring 78 times) of moist snuff was, “Snuff use is masculine.” Sub-themes included: (1) snuff is a no-nonsense product; (2) use of “dry” humor in general; (3) snuff is masculine/meant for male consumers; (4) use of “dry” humor in sports; and (5) snuff is for outdoor activities. The second USP theme to emerge from moist snuff ads was incentivizing the purchase of moist snuff products in which monetary awards were offered; this theme occurred a total of 6 times. Only one brand of moist snuff was included in the present analyses (“Grizzly”), limiting generalizability across brands.

E-cigarette Ads

A total of 4 USP themes emerged for e-cigarette ads (Table 4, N = 27 ads). The first, which was also the most frequent to occur (a total of 48 times),

compared e-cigarettes to traditional cigarettes and highlighted the positive characteristics of e-cigarettes that make them superior to and a better alternative to conventional cigarettes. Sub-themes included: (1) e-cigarettes are a great alternative to traditional cigarettes; (2) e-cigarettes produce no smoke, odor, or ash; (3) e-cigarettes provide freedom to smoke anywhere; (4) e-cigarettes are great for quitting traditional cigarettes; (5) e-cigarettes are empowering and help you assert independence; (6) e-cigarettes provide a superior taste experience compared to traditional cigarettes; and (7) e-cigarettes are cheaper than traditional cigarettes. The second USP theme advertised e-cigarettes as being, “better compared with other e-cigarette brands,” and occurred 29 times in e-cigarette ads. This USP theme indicated that e-cigarette ads of-

ten attempt to set themselves apart from the competition as unique and superior to other e-cigarette brands. The third USP theme of e-cigarettes was, “e-cigarettes have attractive features/characteristics,” and focused on highlighting the variety of flavors and pleasurable experience of e-cigarettes (this theme occurred 10 times). Finally, the fourth USP theme of e-cigarettes was endorsement of e-cigarettes, mostly by celebrities, and this theme occurred a total of 8 times in e-cigarette ads.

Cigar Ads

Four distinct USP themes emerged from the qualitative content analysis of cigar ads (Table 5, N = 22 ads). The most prevalent (occurring 28 times) theme to emerge for USPs in cigar ads was, “Cigars are a premium product,” highlighting the prestige, class, and premium nature of cigar products. This USP consisted of the following 6 sub-themes: (1) Cigars come in a variety of premium brands; (2) Top local stores sell cigars; (3) Cigars are handmade, thus premium; (4) cigars are elegant and classy; (5) cigars are reputable and family owned; and (6) Cigars are American. The second USP theme (occurring 9 times) of cigar ads included providing incentives for buying cigars, where potential consumers were offered free gifts or bundles to encourage purchasing of cigars. The third USP theme of cigar ads was, “Cigars are for special occasions,” occurring 6 times in cigar ads, and highlighted cigar use for celebrating special life events such as marriage, retirement, and golfing. Finally, the fourth USP theme of cigar ads was, “Cigars are used by sophisticated people,” occurring 5 times in cigar ads, and included endorsement by sophisticated men and women, founders of cigar companies, and celebrities/famous people.

Snus Ads

Three distinct USP themes emerged from the qualitative content analysis of snus ads (Table 3, N = 9 ads). The first USP theme (occurring 19 times) of snus ads portrayed snus as having “attractive features/characteristics” such as coming in multiple flavors, being authentic, and being flavorful (Table 2). The second USP theme (occurring 7 times) of snus ads was “comparing snus with traditional cigarettes/tobacco products,” highlighting features of snus such as being smoke-free and an enjoyable alternative to cigarettes as well as snus being spit-free and a great alternative to chew or moist snuff. Additionally, it highlighted the mobility available with snus because it can be used both indoors and outdoors. The third USP theme was advertising snus brands as better compared to other snus brands and occurred 6 times. Finally, the fourth USP theme to emerge was endorsement of snus by celebrities and occurred 3 times.

DISCUSSION

Our results indicate that a common theme for advertising tobacco products was to highlight the

attractive features and characteristics of the product (eg, pleasurable). This theme was prominent among cigarette, e-cigarette, and snus ads. Cigar and moist snuff ads contained more targeted USP themes. Cigar ads, for instance, focused on promoting cigars as “premium,” “sophisticated,” and “for special occasions” whereas moist snuff ads marketed their product almost exclusively by appealing to the masculinity of the product. A key finding of the present study is that most newer, smokeless tobacco products (eg, e-cigarettes and snus) were marketed as good harm reduction alternatives to conventional combustible tobacco products (predominately cigarettes). This finding is consistent with prior research suggesting that smokeless tobacco products may represent harm reduction alternatives to traditional cigarettes.^{9,23-25} In the present study, e-cigarettes were promoted as good alternatives to traditional cigarettes (“Smokers finally have a real alternative”) and as helpful for quitting cigarettes (“Rise from the ashes”). Both e-cigarettes and snus were marketed as potential smoke-free alternatives to cigarettes, highlighting the “freedom” that comes from use of these products. This distinct advertising difference between smokeless tobacco products and traditional cigarettes has been shown in prior research to reduce the effectiveness of tobacco control efforts by promoting false claims about the “clean” nature of these tobacco products.^{23,26,27,37} Additional USP themes that emerged from the present analyses were promoting new, smokeless tobacco product brands of e-cigarettes and snus as better compared to other brands of the same product. This form of advertising may be especially effective at gaining new consumers by targeting advertising which is likely people’s first exposure to the product.³⁸

As evidenced by results from the current study, the USPs of smokeless tobacco products could be potentially misleading. By making claims that these alternative tobacco products allow one to “Rise from the ashes” of traditional smoking or offer a “real alternative” for smokers, the current advertising practices may potentially reduce the likelihood that current smokers quit using tobacco.²⁸ The fear of dual use is mounting, and scholars have cautioned about the rise of snus and e-cigarettes to promote dual use and inhibit cessation.^{9,39} Alternately, the rising voice in the tobacco research community supports e-cigarettes as an effective smoking cessation tool and dual use as a way to reduce tobacco consumption.⁴⁰ However, research is still inconclusive about the effectiveness or harmfulness of e-cigarettes, and such a conclusion is beyond the scope of this study.

Policy efforts could target these USP advertising claims by requiring warning labels on products and their advertisements (of health risks) and prohibiting advertising and flavors directed to youth and children.²⁸ These recommendations in policy change targeting advertising could complement the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA)

deeming rule not only to prohibit sale of all tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, cigars, and pipe tobacco to minors under 18 years, but also to prevent misleading claims by tobacco product manufacturers, evaluate the ingredients of tobacco products, and communicate their potential risks.²⁹

Despite the strengths of this study, there are some limitations to the conclusions that can be drawn. First, only print ads appearing in magazines were included in the present analyses. As such, the present findings cannot be generalized to all promotion and advertising strategies of tobacco companies (online, direct to consumer, etc). Future studies should examine if these themes are consistent across other advertising mediums (eg, online, etc). A second limitation of the present study is that it did not examine whether there were differences in advertising targeting older adults versus youth and young adults or men versus women. As indicated by the themes emerging for moist snuff, for example, it appears that there may be differences in the USPs according to the target audience. Future research should examine how these advertisements differ based on target audience of the readership for each magazine to illuminate differences in USPs utilized according to the target audience. A third limitation is that although we included both explicit and implicit claims in our coding, we did not distinguish between these 2 types of claims. As such, we cannot determine which claims were made most frequently for each tobacco product type. Future research should examine this to determine which claims are of the highest priority to target. Finally, the present study is descriptive in nature. As such, we could not determine which themes are most effective at increasing sales and consumption of particular tobacco products.

Despite these limitations, the present study highlights similarities and differences between the USPs of print advertising for smokeless tobacco products and traditional cigarettes. Due to the volume and variety of advertising for various tobacco products, future research should examine the effectiveness of each strategy as well as their influence on whether individuals believe products are safer than cigarettes or are more willing to try them. Findings from the present study do highlight some of the unique selling propositions of tobacco ads, which could provide a framework for which components of ads tobacco regulatory policies might benefit most from targeting.

Human Subjects Statement

All necessary ethical safeguards have been met to ensure the confidentiality and proper informed consent of all patients involved in the research. All institutions' IRBs have approved the methods used to collect data reported in the present manuscript.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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