Reviewer's report

Title: The impact of televised tobacco control advertising content on campaign recall: Evidence from the International Tobacco Control (ITC) United Kingdom Survey

Version: 3

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Reviewer: Sarah Durkin

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This examination of recall of campaigns that evoke positive and negative emotions represents an important contribution to the literature. It provides useful evidence about the extent to which different types of campaigns are most likely to cut through the competing clutter of commercial advertising. Cut through is essential to achieve population-wide impact, as campaigns first need to be remembered and understood before they can influence behaviour. This study compiled ad ratings data (GRPs) and collected self-reported ad recall data from the large ITC-UK cohort sample collected over 5 years in a market when there was considerable variety in the type of campaigns (positive & negative emotion) aired, and so provides an ideal opportunity to examine questions about which ad types are most recalled. However, there are a number of areas where the rationale and methods are unclear and some suggestions for inclusion of additional discussion points which I have outlined below:

Major compulsory revisions

1. Can the authors explain why they only included 'recall' as an outcome measure. As discussed above, I acknowledge that recall is important, but the ITC Cohort provides the opportunity to further explore other downstream smoking-related attitudes and quitting behaviours, such as quit attempts close to campaign exposure. I am not persuaded by the argument in the Discussion that the surveying didn’t cover the New Year period when many attempts occur. The previous analyses of the ITC data in Australia referred to in the paper had similar timing of surveys and were able to examine quitting attempts and find important effects of campaigns(1). There are 3,932 observations, so there seems like there should be enough power to examine the effects of campaign exposure (as measured by GRPs &/or ad recall) on firm plans to quit and quit attempts...?

2. In the abstract, introduction and discussion, the authors refer to the Heath & Hyder (2005) paper that indicates recall can underestimate the effectiveness of positive emotive brand campaigns. In contrast, recognition (where the campaign message is described or shown to participants and they are asked whether they remember seeing that ad) has previously been used to examine differences in campaign “recall” between positive (how to quit) and negative (why to quit) campaigns(2, 3). The authors need to clarify that when Heath & Hyder are referring to the problems of using recall to measure the impact of positive emotion campaigns, they are referring to semi-prompted recall. Heath & Hyder
actually suggest using prompted recall or recognition as a better way to assess the impact of positive emotion campaigns. The fact that Neiderdeppe and colleagues (2011) and Dunlop and colleagues (3) found higher prompted recall (ie. recognition) for the ‘negative emotion - why to quit style’ campaigns than ‘positive emotion – how to quit’ campaigns indicates that the issues Heath & Hyder raise are not relevant for these 2 studies. This should be considered in the 2nd paragraph of the Introduction and in final paragraph of the Discussion. The authors’ point in this Discussion paragraph about Heath & Hyder’s findings and that the previous Dunlop & Niederdeepee findings may be misleading needs to be re-visited in light of the information outlined above.

3. The authors should also discuss the differences between previous findings about the relatively short duration of campaign effects on smoking prevalence and quitting-related behaviours (1, 4, 5) and the current findings of longer effects on campaign recall. It seems logical that campaigns will be recalled for a longer time after airing, but that campaign effects on quitting behaviours will be tied more closely to recent campaign exposure—do the authors agree?

4. In the methods/sample characteristics section, can the authors please clarify the composition of the sample. One sentence states that between 1 & 4 observations were available, but in the previous sentence, individuals were included ‘…who had provided data and reported being a smoker in the previous wave of follow-up” – implying that at least 2 waves of data per person were necessary for inclusion.

Minor issues not for publication
1. Abstract, Results, 2nd sentence – insert “likelihood of” before “recall”
2. Methods, Campaign Exposure, 1st para, 2nd sentence – insert “TV viewing” before “frequency”
3. Methods, Campaign Exposure, 2nd para, 3rd sentence – remove ‘theory-driven’ – this is already implied by stating that the coding framework was based on PRIME theory.

References

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

'I declare that I have no competing interests