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Marketing of Menthol Cigarettes and Consumer Perceptions: A White Paper

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Abstract

Publicly available internal tobacco industry documents were analyzed to answer the following questions regarding menthol cigarette marketing and consumer perception: 1) Are/were menthol cigarettes marketed with health reassurance messages? 2) What other messages come from menthol cigarette advertising? 3) How do smokers view menthol cigarettes? 4) Were menthol cigarettes marketed to specific populations? More than 800 relevant documents were identified on 1) marketing menthol with health assurance messages; 2) user imagery-focused marketing; 3) consumer perceptions of menthol products; and 4) targeting specific populations. Analyses indicated menthol cigarettes were marketed as, and are perceived by consumers to be, healthier than non-menthol cigarettes. Menthol cigarettes are also marketed to specific social and demographic groups, including African Americans, young people, and women, and are perceived by consumers to signal social group belonging. From analyses of these documents, it is concluded that marketing emphasizing menthol may attract consumers who may not otherwise progress to regular smoking, including young, inexperienced users and those who find “regular” cigarettes undesirable.

Marketing of Menthol Cigarettes and Consumer Perceptions: A White Paper

The Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act gave the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulatory authority over tobacco products. On September 22, 2009, the FDA exercised this authority when it announced the ban of some cigarette flavorings. This ban did not include menthol, however, as it was excluded from the list of banned flavorings originally identified in the Act. Menthol's exclusion from the list of prohibited flavor additives in cigarettes has promoted discussion among many in the public health arena.¹ The Act included a requirement to create the Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee (TPSAC) within the FDA's Center for Tobacco Products. TPSAC is charged with advising the FDA Commissioner on the regulation of tobacco products, including the use of menthol as a characterizing cigarette flavor and the impact of mentholated cigarettes on public health, with special attention given to children, African Americans, Hispanics and other racial and ethnic minorities.

The wide use of menthol in cigarettes is due to its minty flavor, aroma, cooling characteristics and physiological effects on the smoker.^{2,3} The isomer l-menthol is the largest component of peppermint oil extracted from the two significant types of peppermint plants, *Mentha piperita* and *Mentha arvensis*. There are significant taste differences among the various isomers. l-menthol imparts the well-known mint-like taste and desired cooling effect.³ The concentration of menthol in tobacco products varies according to the product and the flavor desired, but is present in 90% of all tobacco products, both "mentholated" and "non-mentholated".^{3,4}

The market share of filter-tipped mentholated cigarettes has ranged from 1.1% in 1956 to 27.3% in 1983 to 20% in 2006.^{3,5} Data from 2006 show that past month use of mentholated brands among cigarette smokers aged 12 or older varies by race and ethnicity:

- 82.6% African American
- 53.2% Native Hawaiian
- 32.3% Hispanic
- 31.2% Asian
- 24.8% American Indian/Alaska Native
- 23.8% non-Hispanic white⁶

Although menthol is an FDA-approved food additive, the FDA is now evaluating its use in cigarettes and has requested a review of tobacco industry documents to answer questions regarding a number of menthol-related topics. This paper addresses the following questions on the marketing of menthol cigarettes and consumer perceptions of menthol cigarettes:

1. Are/were menthol cigarettes marketed with health reassurance messages?
2. What other messages come from menthol cigarette advertising?
3. How do smokers tend to view menthol cigarettes?
4. Were menthol cigarettes marketed to specific populations?

Health reassurance messages

Independent academics and government scientists have observed both explicit and implicit health messages in advertisements for menthol cigarettes.^{7,8} In the case of explicit health messages, it is difficult to misinterpret the health messages being communicated, for example, by a 1942 advertisement asking “Throat sore? Time to give it a rest!” and directing the reader to “Change to Spuds. Enjoy their soothing coolness!” It is nevertheless important to examine the intentions behind the creation of such marketing communications in the words of tobacco company executives themselves, particularly as health messages move from explicit to implicit. For example, in the 1970s, Kool brand menthol cigarettes began to emphasize taste

over throat soreness, making statements such as “Kool never tastes harsh or flat. Come up to Kool for the refreshing taste of extra coolness.”

Other marketing messages

With publication of the 1964 U.S. Surgeon General’s Report on smoking and health,⁹ the U.S. tobacco marketers were faced with the challenge of continuing to market a product identified as harmful by health authorities while distracting consumers from those known harms. Shortly after this report, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) issued a trade regulation rule requiring health warnings on cigarette packages and in advertising, which was then superseded in 1965 by the first Cigarette Act.¹⁰ These challenges necessitated a move away from overt health messages and toward other messages that would appeal to different groups of potential consumers of “low tar” or “light” tobacco products. Although research^{11,12} has elucidated many of these alternative marketing messages for “low tar” and “light” cigarettes, less is understood about similar messages for menthol cigarettes; it is therefore necessary to examine what messages other than health reassurance have been communicated in marketing for menthol cigarettes.

Consumer perception of menthol cigarettes

Analyses of advertisements and marketing materials are important in determining what messages appear to be communicated by different campaigns, but it is also important to understand how individuals and groups of viewers perceive the materials and the products advertised by them. Again, research¹³⁻¹⁷ has demonstrated that consumers tend to perceive “low-tar” and “light” cigarettes to be less harmful than “regular” cigarettes. In this case, understanding came both from the industry’s own internal work used to design marketing

campaigns and, later, from public health authorities. Less is known about how consumers perceive menthol products.

Menthol and specific populations

The overrepresentation of African Americans in the menthol cigarette market is widely discussed in the peer-reviewed academic literature,¹⁸⁻²² but in terms of sheer numbers, more non-African American smokers use menthol. It is important to more broadly examine if and how menthol products have been marketed to various other populations (e.g., women, other ethnic/racial minorities).

The goal of this research is to analyze previously confidential publicly available internal tobacco industry documents in order to answer the TPSAC's questions related to information in publicly available tobacco industry documents on menthol cigarette marketing and consumer perceptions.

Method

In this qualitative research study of the digitized repository of previously internal tobacco industry documents, a snowball sampling design²³ was used to search the Legacy Tobacco Documents Library (LTDL) (<http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu>). The LTDL was systematically searched between February 29 and April 27, 2010, utilizing standard documents research techniques. These techniques combine traditional qualitative methods²⁴ with iterative search strategies tailored for the LTDL data set.²⁵

Based on the FDA staff-supplied research questions (see Introduction, above), initial keyword searches combined terms related to: menthol, health/healthy/healthier, cool/cooling/cooler, market/markets/marketing, consumer perception, focus group, creative, ad copy, communication, market research, report, topline, target group, and young adult

smoker/YAS/YAMS/YAFS (industry acronyms for young adult smokers, young adult male smokers and young adult female smokers, respectively). This initial set of keywords resulted in the development of further search terms and combinations of keywords (e.g., menthol cigarette brand names, project names, individuals and companies named in correspondences and on research reports, and specific target groups). Of the approximately 11 million documents available in the LTDL, the iterative searches returned tens of thousands of results (see Appendix). For example, a search of all tobacco industry document collections on the LTDL for the keyword “menthol” alone would yield over 800,000 documents. The results that are returned in the LTDL include multiple copies of many documents, so the researcher must decide which irrelevant and duplicate documents to exclude. Relevance was based on whether, upon electronically searching or reading a document, it included content related to the topic or the specific questions presented by the FDA staff. Tobacco companies investigated issues in order to increase their share of market, rather than to understand public health issues; thus many of the tens of thousands of returned documents with these search terms did not appear to be directly relevant.

For each set of results, the researcher reviewed the first 50-300 documents. If documents did not appear to be relevant to the research questions, or if there was a repetitive pattern of documents, the researcher moved on to the next search term. Among the reports, correspondence, and studies conducted by product development and research departments of the major tobacco companies (American Tobacco, British American Tobacco (BAT), Brown & Williamson, Lorillard, Philip Morris, and RJ Reynolds), relevant documents were found in the following subject areas: 1) marketing menthol using health assurance messages; 2) user imagery-focused marketing; 3) consumer perceptions of menthol products; and 4) targeting specific

populations. A final collection of 953 documents were deemed relevant to one or more of the research questions. Memos were written to summarize the relevant documents to further narrow down to the 81 relevant documents that are cited in this white paper. The Appendix details the results of the searches and the number of documents screened and further reviewed.

Limitations

Tobacco industry document research presents unique challenges,²³ and results should be interpreted within the context of known limitations, such as the vast number of available documents, time restrictions, and the use of code words and acronyms.

The sheer quantity of available documents (over 60 million pages) forces researchers to make decisions about which search terms retrieve the most relevant material. Further, the LTDL is frequently updated as tobacco companies provide additional material and documents become available through litigation. The document searches were conducted over an eight week period. Given the short period of time for conducting this project (LTDL archival research often takes a year or more to complete), the researcher had to strategically screen the documents through the process discussed above.

In analyzing the documents in a limited time frame, context may have been lost and, therefore, this white paper cannot be a comprehensive report of all documents related to menthol marketing and consumer perceptions of menthol. Understanding the time period when a document was written, who wrote a document, why a document was written, or why a study was performed requires time for reviewing and linking documents together. It is also difficult to compare statistics gathered using different methodologies used by numerous companies over several decades.

Even if there had been more time for searching, it is unlikely that a complete picture of the tobacco industry’s research about menthol marketing and consumer perceptions of menthol could be compiled. There is evidence that the industry tried to hide its findings, although it is unclear from whom. For example, in a 1974 BAT memo about a visit to BIBRA, a toxicology consulting firm, it was noted that “Reference to menthol should be omitted from such documents [invoices], which should refer generally to toxicity studies.”²⁶ Brown and Williamson used the code terms, such as “Kintolly,” “Tolkin,” “Harpat,” “Polar Bear,” and “Cenmap” when referring to menthol.²⁷ Acronyms were also commonly used, which are often unclear if the context is unknown.

Research in the LTDL typically involves repeating the iterative search process (including searching all code words and acronyms learned through the process) until saturation of both keywords and documents is reached. Unfortunately, saturation was not reached for this white paper; however, the documentary evidence presented in this paper supports the primary findings.

Results

Table 1 summarizes the research questions and the basic findings.

Table 1: Research questions and basic findings.	
Research Question	Finding
1. Are/were menthol cigarettes marketed with health reassurance messages? Did the messages convey menthol cigarettes were safer or less harmful than “full flavor” or non-menthol cigarettes?	Menthol was first introduced to market in the 1920s with health reassurance messages that conveyed menthol cigarettes were safer than “full flavor” or non-menthol cigarettes.
2. What other messages come from menthol cigarette advertising? Fresh/refreshing/cool/clean/crisp flavor? Ethnic awareness? Youthfulness, silliness, fun?	Other messages in menthol cigarette advertising included refreshing, fresh, cool, and clean; identity and in-group belonging; and fun-loving, sociable, and youthful.
3. How do smokers tend to view menthol cigarettes? Do smokers view menthol cigarettes	Smokers tend to view menthol cigarettes as safer or as less harmful than “full flavor” or non-

<p>as safer or as less harmful than “full flavor” or non-menthol cigarettes? Did this cause brand switching among smokers?</p>	<p>menthol cigarettes. This contributed to brand switching among some smokers.</p>
<p>4. Were menthol cigarettes marketed to specific populations? Have marketing practices led to an increase in menthol use for youth or various US. population sub-groups?</p>	<p>Menthol cigarettes were marketed to specific populations, including African Americans, young people, women, and Asians. This contributed to the popularity of menthol styles in these groups.</p>

i. Are/were menthol cigarettes marketed with health reassurance messages? Did the messages convey menthol cigarettes were safer or less harmful than “full flavor” or non-menthol cigarettes?

Menthol was first introduced to market in the 1920s with health reassurance messages that conveyed menthol cigarettes were safer than “full flavor” or non-menthol cigarettes.

Creation of the first menthol (mentholated) cigarette is credited to a young man, Lloyd "Spud" Hughes, a chronic sufferer of colds, when in the 1920s his mother prescribed a treatment of menthol crystals, which he surreptitiously added to his tin of smoking tobacco.^{28,29} Bearing Hughes’s nickname, Spud cigarettes became the first menthol brand to be marketed in the United States. Brown & Williamson (B&W) followed shortly with first Penguin cigarettes in 1931 and, more importantly, Kool Menthol in 1933. Initially Kool Menthol, and indeed menthol in general, was advertised as being “for occasional use” in order to “rest your throat”³⁰ rather than a regular, daily-use product.

From the beginning, menthol cigarettes were popularized as a remedy to the burn, dryness, and throat irritation that accompany smoking. Menthol cigarette manufacturers such as Brown & Williamson (B&W) and Lorillard marketed menthols with health-indicative slogans such as “Breathe easy, smoke clean”; “When your throat tells you it’s time for a change...”; “Feel extra coolness in your throat”;³¹ and “The beneficial head-clearing qualities of menthol”;³²

and with claims that smoking a menthol brand acts as a “remedy or treatment for coughs”; counteracts “throat irritations due to heavy smoking” and “never make the throat dry or parched”.³³

Tobacco company executives explicitly sought to emphasize health messages in the marketing of menthol products relative to non-menthol products from their market introduction, as the ostensible health benefit of menthol provided a point of difference. For instance, Cunningham & Walsh compiled a report for B&W in 1980 in which they observed that Kool’s “[r]emedial specialty brand image” (i.e., a brand that offers a remedy to the harshness and burn of smoking) in the early 1950s “benefits [the b]rand as smokers perceive menthol as less harmful”.³⁴ In a 1960s brand evaluation, B&W noted that “[e]mphasis on the throat, with its important health implications, has... been an important part of Kool advertising since 1960. In light of the ‘smoking climate’ in recent years this could very well have benefitted the brand”,³⁵ the “‘smoking climate’ in recent years” referring to the climate of growing smoking-related health concerns. In 1968, RJ Reynolds (RJR) considered “it would be advantageous to reduce the TPM [total particulate matter] level of SALEM brands to a point more competitive with other menthol brands” because they suspected “that the menthol smoker tends to be more health conscious and therefore more likely to be influenced by TPM rankings”.³⁶ According to a May 30, 1973 Lorillard meeting agenda to discuss “Kent Menthol 100’s”, the objective of a menthol line extension of Lorillard’s “low-tar” Kent brand was to “convince smokers of competitive menthols (as well as smokers contemplating entering the category) that Kent menthol is the menthol that offers refreshing menthol smoking satisfaction and health reassurance.”³⁷ One of B&W’s major objectives when entering the 1980s decade was to “obtain at least 12% share of market for KOOL by 1985.”³⁸ In delineating steps to achieving that objective, B&W listed as

one of the “key obstacle to overcome” that “KOOL must move into the health reassurance segment so that 45% of KOOL business will be in the perceived product safety arena by 1982”.³⁸

ii. What other messages come from menthol cigarette advertising?

Fresh/refreshing/cool/clean/crisp flavor? Ethnic awareness? Youthfulness, silliness, fun?

Other messages in menthol cigarette advertising included refreshing, fresh, cool, and clean; identity and in-group belonging; and fun-loving, sociable, and youthful.

For the first few decades of menthol cigarettes in the marketplace, menthol was marketed as a specialty product for occasional use, particularly for when one wanted soothing and protection for the throat. The 1950s, however, marked the beginning of significant public awareness in the US of the health hazards of smoking.³⁹ With the introduction of RJR’s Salem brand in 1956, the ostensible “health” benefit of menthol was overtaken by the “taste” benefit of menthol, and the style moved from the occasional into the regular use arena.⁴⁰ The importance of this shift from overt “health” messages to “taste” messages was neatly explained as follows:

Salem created a whole new meaning for menthol. From the heritage of solves-the-negative-problem-of-smoking, menthol almost instantly became a positive smoking sensation. Menthol in the filter form in the Salem advertising was a “refreshing” taste experience. It can be viewed as very “reassuring” in a personal concern climate. Undoubtedly, the medicinal menthol connotation carried forward in a therapeutic fashion, but as a positive taste benefit. Menthol was positioned as a cigarette for all occasions.⁴⁰

The Newport brand’s entry into the market the following year with the advertising slogan “Rich taste – with a touch of refreshing mint” made menthol “now a positive experience, not just a solver of smoking ‘problems’.”⁴⁰ Not treating menthol outright as medicinal, and yet aware that it continued to carry health connotations, tobacco companies were freed up to market menthol cigarettes as a thing of pleasure and personal preference while still providing health reassurances to menthol smokers.

Refreshing, fresh, cool, and clean

Backing away from overt health messages by the late 1950s, the original big brand stand-alone menthol, Kool, advanced new advertising copy such as, ““What a wonderful difference when you switch to snow fresh KOOL's . Your mouth feels clean and cool, your throat feels soothed and fresh. Enjoy the most refreshing experience smoking”.”⁴¹ By the 1960s Kool advertising favored even less obviously health-related messages in print ads for college, military, and “Negro” publications, such as “Only KOOL gives you real menthol magic” or “Come all the way up to KOOL Filter Kings for the most refreshing coolness you can get in a cigarette”.”⁴¹ Not all menthol smokers use the same descriptors when describing their experience of using menthol cigarettes. Menthol’s “cooling” or “refreshing” effects are described variably as a taste or flavor on the one hand, or a sensation or impact on the other. A 1988 PM study of the menthol market noted that “menthol’s appeal primarily focussed [sic] on the unique feeling or sensation it provides”, and that “menthol taste [is] more difficult to describe than menthol sensation”.”⁴² Nevertheless, in 1974, Shoi Balaban Dickenson Research reported to Lorillard that “[b]y far the most significant reason to smoke menthol cigarettes is that one wants the menthol taste, rather than a tobacco taste”.”⁴³ Describing what that taste is, however, appears difficult; says the report, “Most menthol smokers quarrel with the description of their cigarettes as having ‘a cleaner taste,’ but do say menthol cigarettes have a ‘fresher" taste”.”⁴³ Respondents in the 1988 PM study, “[w]hen forced, describe [menthol] taste as minty, cough drops, mentholypus, wintergreen”, but they only produced these descriptors when pressed.⁴² Greenfield Consulting Group, conducting qualitative research on consumer perceptions of menthol cigarettes for PM in 1992 did, however, receive spontaneous descriptions from participants such as “like Vapo-Rub”,

“cough drop”, “like mouthwash”, and even candy-like with descriptions such as “spearmint gum, Livesavers, Tic Tacs”.⁴⁴

Menthol cigarette marketers have been quick to exploit the perception of menthol as a sensation and an experience in addition to a taste. Major objectives for the Kool brand family from 1979 to 1985 included the necessity “to enhance the perception of the two major menthol buying motivations - satisfaction and refreshment”.³⁸ Satisfaction is a commonly-used word within the tobacco industry meaning nicotine addiction. Similarly, RJR’s efforts in what the company calls the “coolness segment” (its term for the menthol segment of the cigarette market), as described in a 1981 market study, were toward “positioning which conveys superior refreshment (imagery/product)” [emphasis in original].⁴⁵ ADI Research, Inc. advised B&W similarly in a 1984 cigarette smokers study: When study participants were asked what they liked best about their brand, “the most commonly mentioned attribute was menthol”, specifically, that [i]t’s not hot... kind of cool tasting”, or that “[t]hey leave more of a clean taste in the mouth— not a charcoal taste”.⁴⁶ ADI also noted that “[o]ther frequently mentioned positive characteristics of Kool Filter Kings were refreshingness, coolness, smell, sensation, and smoothness”.⁴⁶ That same year, Cunningham and Walsh advised B&W to forge Kool’s popularity worldwide by positioning the brand as “something enjoyable from U.S., most refreshing taste sensation”.⁴⁷

It should be noted that although there was shift away from overt health messages toward less tangible “refreshment” and similar messages in menthol marketing, tobacco companies still wished to maintain the health associations with menthol that were established early on. According to a B&W brand planning document in 1978 (estimated date), a prime Kool objective for 1979-1985 was also to “[p]rovide product safety reassurance while enhanc[ing] the

satisfaction and refreshment perception of the appropriate KOOL styles, through the successful, national launch in 1979 of either: 1 . Low-'tar' parent [or] 2 . Repositioned KOOL Milds".³⁸ This emphasis on "product safety reassurance" points to the explicit role of menthol, like "low-tar" and "mild", in the company's efforts to overcome consumers' perception of the dangers of smoking. Long-time advertising company for PM, Leo Burnett, reported to PM in 1995 that the "[f]our key menthol taste effects that appeal to smokers are: cooling, clean/antiseptic, numbing/anesthetic, refreshing".⁴⁸ As overtly health-oriented marketing messages gave way in the 1960s and 1970s to messages emphasizing refreshment and similar qualities, the health heritage of menthol became secondary but had already been established as part of the conceptual framework for menthol cigarettes.

Identity and in-group belonging

Perhaps most commonly menthol is thought of as an African American cigarette style, and to an extent, evidence from industry documents supports this perception. The evidence is clear, however, that tobacco companies do not intend for menthol to be only or even mostly an African American style, but rather a style strongly associated with group identity for many different sub-groups in the market, including (but not exclusively) African American identity.

Some industry analysts observed a change in the cigarette market, particularly in the menthol market, in the 1960s. A 1984 analysis of Salem, Newport, and Kool conducted by Diane Burrows of the RJR Marketing Development Department stated,

Younger adult Blacks of the 1930's to 1950's had basically gone with whatever brand was big among younger adult [meaning "18-year-old"] White smokers.... In the 1960's, they began to coalesce behind Kool, which only had a 2% share among younger adult Whites. It was time for Blacks to build their own brand in the 1960's, the heyday of Martin Luther King and 'Black pride'.⁴⁹

The strategy for exploiting this social phenomenon was simple:

Kool apparently capitalized on this aspect of the 1960`s by simply advertising to Blacks before its competitors did. Kool ads were in Ebony consistently from at least 1962, when our records start. This was easy for Kool, since its early-60's penguin campaign fit either race, and it was effective. Kool became 'cool' and, by the early 1970's, had a 56% share among younger adult Blacks -- it was the Black Marlboro.⁴⁹

Market Science Associates, Inc. conducted a similar study for B&W in 1977 and pointed to two important trends that contributed to the growth of the menthol market in general and the Kool brand in particular: "1. Black consciousness was growing. 2. Use of marijuana by young people was growing particularly among the children of the post war baby boom. The oldest of these were just beginning to enter college in 1963 – 1965".⁵⁰ These trends were deemed important for the following reasons:

According to a 1972 consumer survey... 52% of marijuana users aged 12-17 also smoked cigarettes compared with only 11% of non-users. No hard data are available on the brands of cigarettes used by smokers of pot but menthols would appear to hold an above average share among such smokers. This would be consistent with Kool's position as the favored cigarette of young smokers. Kools also became the most popular cigarette among blacks, perhaps partially for the same reason, but perhaps also because of the image of the word 'cool' in the blacks' vocabulary.⁵⁰

Thus "the growth in black consciousness... and the development of the counterculture" were considered factors in the growth of the market according to a Market Science Associates report assessing the growth of menthols from 1933 to 1977 for B&W.⁵⁰ By 1979, B&W explicitly planned to "[e]nhance the social acceptance of the entire KOOL line through all creative efforts so that the product is equally acceptable to White smokers-as to Black smokers. This will be realized through smoker image creative management as well as specific media targeting".³⁸ By 1983, M. A. Schreiber, Kool's Senior Brand Manager for B&W, wrote

In January, 1982, KOOL launched its current campaign. Pan-racial music imagery was established as KOOL's strategic property. Executionally, a visual showing a single musician on a black background was chosen to communicate this platform. In early 1983, it was felt that executions to-date had been off-strategy from two respects: Image relevance to young adults and Product benefit. Thus, an advertising exploratory

was started to correct this. The exploratory objective was to specifically address how to communicate... [a]n attractive, contemporary image to young adult Whites.⁵¹

An urban image continued to be important to menthol marketing through the 1990s, and it is noted that such imagery appeals to contemporary young people of many ethnicities. Leo Burnett reported to PM in December of 1995 that among “urban dwellers, ages LA-24 [legal age – 24], African-American and Caucasian, menthol loyalists... [u]rban terminology transcends beyond the African-American community”.⁵² The agency tested marketing creatives (mock-up advertisements for participant feedback), including “[m]enthol approaches tied to identified urban smoker insights” with the theme “Diversity/Community”, and “[m]enthol approaches tied to impacting young adult smokers today”, with the theme “Hip hop culture trend”.⁵² One specific creative in the “Diversity/Community” theme titled “Huze Art” was observed to be “[b]y far the strongest of the approaches, its appeal was driven by the sense of urban multiculturalism expressed through art”.⁵² The appeal of this execution was explained as follows:

- Urban lifestyle crosses ethnic boundaries
- Urban lifestyle appeals outside of urban boundaries
- Highlights African-American communities positively and creatively⁵²

Echoing the interest in an urban cross-cultural message for menthol products, RJR’s goal for Salem in March 1996 was to “increase buyer base among 21-24 trend setting smokers” by aligning the brand with the values of “identity, peer relationship[s], and enjoyment”.⁵³ The brand was to be perceived as “multicultural”, “urban”, and “tribal”, a brand for “connecting across ethnic groups: White, African-American, Hispanic, Asian” by offering a product of “superior taste... at three levels of menthol” with an advertising campaign dubbed “Salem Fresh Expression”.⁵³ By May of 1996, however, tests of creatives (mock-up advertisements for participant feedback) revealed the images failed to appeal enough to young smokers and the effort was abandoned in favor of another campaign titled “Salem MVP”,⁵⁴ which was described

as “fun”, “imaginative”, “hip/cool”, and “humorous”.⁵⁵ Salem Fresh Expression advertisements were to meet evaluation standards of “individuality... [and] enjoyment of life”,⁴⁷ and although its “[o]verall scores were good [they were] not strong enough to move ahead”.⁴⁷ Salem MVP advertisements successfully communicated a “free-spirited and fun” user image.⁴⁸

In other efforts to attach a menthol brand to a specific ingroup identity, Kapuler Marketing Research, Inc. conducted a study of a new campaign for Kool targeting Hawaiians in 1988. The campaign was titled “Kool and Mild Today”. Kapuler concluded “The use of ethnic models is seen as something new and respondents are generally positive about this concept. It could provide an opportunity for KOOL to capitalize on being the first to employ ethnic advertising in Hawaii”.⁵⁶ It was pointed out, however, that the models should not look too Japanese but rather should appear to be local islanders. Preferred models were described as “fun, happy-go-lucky young people in their 20’s [sic]. They have full social calendars and spend a lot of time outdoors at the beach... people who display what islanders call the aloha spirit”.⁵⁶ The brand was perceived by this ethnic group as a sociable brand “that anyone can smoke”.⁵⁶

Fun-loving, sociable, and youthful

RJR noted in 1981 that the “coolness segment” (an RJR term for the menthol segment of the cigarette market) is the youngest of all cigarette market segments as defined by RJR.⁴⁵ RJR stated in 1981 that “[a]dvertising must convince younger adult smokers that SALEM is smoked by natural, unpretentious but interesting people who are social leaders/catalysts (make things happen) whose sense of humor and wit makes them fun and exciting to be with and which delivers the epitome in light menthol refreshment”.⁵⁷ RJR contrasted this user imagery with their main competitors, Newport and Kool. RJR stated Salem would be differentiated “from Newport (i.e., not immature, more self-confident, more forceful personality) and Kool (i.e., more sociable,

natural, gregarious)".⁵⁷ These were the slim points of difference RJR intended to distinguish Salem from the other two stand-alone menthol brands.

Youthfulness and sociability are not images restricted to menthol users. Social interaction is thought by tobacco marketers to be particularly important to young adults in general. RJR observed in 1981 that

Smoking is frequently used in situations when people are trying to make friends, to look more mature, to look more attractive, to look 'cooler,' and to feel more comfortable around others. These aspects of social interaction are especially prevalent among younger adult smokers.... The benefit of smoking which has most frequently and most successfully been exploited by brand families appears to be Social Interaction. For example, some brands, such as Newport, have focused on the younger adult 'peer group' aspect of social interaction.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, these user images appear to carry certain weight within the menthol market.

Speaking specifically about target users of a new Salem Lights 100mm product, RJR observed in 1982 that "user imagery reflects aspirations of the Personal Experience segment identified by Yankelovich.... The lifestyle of the Personal Experience segment is defined as seeking direct experience and excitement ; money is only a means to an end, and social interaction is a key element to personal fulfillment".⁵⁹ The emphasis on sociability and fun is particularly evident in Newport advertising campaigns such as the long-running "Alive with Pleasure" campaign. Specific messages of this campaign interpreted by consumers are "fun/happiness", "pleasurable/enjoyable", and "relaxing".⁶⁰ This proved such a popular and effective set of messages for young audiences that RJR created their "Salem Spirit" campaign to communicate the values "sociable" and "have a good time",⁶¹ though they noted problems with consumers confusing the campaign with similar Newport campaigns. PM observed in 1995 that Newport's "[c]onsistent theme ('Alive with Pleasure') and strategy ('Friends having fun') have given

Newport a clear identity in smokers minds”, that Newport was “[t]he only brand to capitalize on important ‘sociability’ aspect of category”.⁴⁸

Sociability, youth, and fun messages among younger populations also appear to help define an ingroup of some menthol brand smokers. RJR noted in 1984, “Newport users are the main source of Newport perceptions. It is seen as the alternative younger adult brand -- for Blacks an alternative to Kool, for Whites an alternative to Marlboro. It's for those who don't want to follow the crowd”.⁴⁹ In 1990, the company noted that “Newport and Marlboro Lights smokers want to be perceived as different, while Salem smokers are conformists”.⁶² The brand with the youngest demographic profile is Newport, so this understanding of how the brand can signal a social group for young people is important. It is perhaps menthol’s younger profile relative to non-menthol that makes youthfulness and fun particularly important to many menthol smokers.

iii. How do smokers tend to view menthol cigarettes? Do smokers view menthol cigarettes as safer or less harmful than “full flavor” or non-menthol cigarettes? Did this cause brand switching among smokers?

Smokers tend to view menthol cigarettes as safer or less harmful than “full flavor” or non-menthol cigarettes. This contributed to brand switching among some smokers.

Smokers do view menthol cigarettes as “safer.” As shown above, menthol smokers sometimes identified this perception explicitly (directly) and sometimes implicitly (indirectly), with terms such as “mild”, “light”, “cooling”, or “soothing”: terms that appear to indicate relative safety or suggest health benefits.

A focus group study conducted for American Tobacco in 1969 tested, in part, perceptions of a new menthol product. It was observed that

Menthol smokers indicated that they smoked menthol cigarettes because they were "mild", "cooling", "refreshing", and "soothing to the throat". They considered non-menthol cigarettes to be irritating and-strong.... There were indications that the menthol smokers subconsciously perceived menthol cigarettes as being healthier. There was somewhat of a "health image" associated with menthol, related to its masking of the tobacco taste, and its association with medicine, colds, and sore throats.⁶³

Demonstrating the health connotations of the "mildness" of menthol products, a 1973 report by William Esty, Inc. for RJ Reynolds summarized menthol users' perceptions as follows:

Generally the menthol cigarette satisfied a need for a "milder" cigarette, a cigarette that was less harsh on the throat. This is true whether the respondent prefers a menthol cigarette which is "strong" or one which is "mild." Even a strong mentholated brand is generally seen as milder than most unmentholated brands.⁶⁴

In 1976, B&W noted that "evidence indicates that a pseudo-health image has accrued to mentholated cigarettes".⁶⁵ Two years later, B&W explicitly acknowledged its Kool franchise "[r]ides on the connotation that menthol has health overtones",⁶⁶ and that the Kool Super Lights line extension's "menthol and tar delivery has synergistic therapeutic implications".⁶⁶ An example of this belief is evidenced by the statement of a respondent in a marketing study for the company in 1980, "that menthol cigarettes are better for you".⁶⁷

As Leo Burnett advised PM in 1995, menthol taste is implicated in the primary consumer perceptions about the style. The agency stated,

Four key menthol taste effects that appeal to smokers are:

- Cooling
- Clean/antiseptic
- Numbing/anesthetic
- Refreshing⁴⁸

The emphasis on perceived health benefits of menthol over non-menthol has become global. In a 1991 study by a market research company in Japan, ASI Market Research Inc., for Philip Morris, it was noted that men in particular "[t]ried them [menthol cigarettes] when not in good physical condition/when throat was feeling sore, and found them enjoyable".⁶⁸ This report

also noted that “[m]enthol cigarettes were also felt to be somehow better for the health than nonmenthol cigarettes (i.e., gentler on the throat)”.⁶⁸ Marketing Decision Research (Pacific) Ltd. found similar results in a 1992 study of Hong Kong for PM. The report states that

Overall, menthol cigarettes are seen to be lighter in strength [more like “light” cigarettes] and cigarette taste than non-menthol and full-flavoured cigarettes. The “cooling” and “refreshing” abilities of menthol have the following advantages:

- make smokers feel comfortable
- less easy to cause throat discomfort
- won't give bad breath
- has no/less cigarette smell & won't stink the environment

can also elate one's spirit but is much better than strong stimulation of nicotine in full-flavoured cigarettes. It is relatively healthier.⁶⁹

A 1979 study by PACC Information Systems showed B&W that in Kuwait

menthol cigarettes are thought to present many good aspects ; they are usually

- light
- refreshing
- pleasant flavour
- relieving
- help to expell [sic] catharr [inflammation of the mucous membranes]
- help in the case of colds...

[M]enthol cigarettes are thought to be less harmful to health than ordinary cigarettes.⁷⁰

Due in part to the consumer perception that menthol is a solution to sore throats caused by smoking, some marketers have assumed menthol smokers were more health-oriented. In 1975, RJR stated “[m]enthol 85 smokers are more concerned about the alleged hazards of smoking than other smokers (except low flavor)”.⁷¹ The evidence shown here suggests, however, that it may be more often the case that menthol smokers are convinced of the soothing throat sensation menthol imparts and are not necessarily likely to seek “light” or “low-tar” products. Noted a 1972 Lorillard study of the menthol market,

[w]hile health is an important reason for switching, health in terms of throat irritation is more important to Menthol, Lo Fi [low filtration] and taste conscious people.... Menthol smokers are attracted by taste with mildness appealing to the health oriented and with the lack of throat irritation appealing to the taste oriented.⁷²

Lorillard recognized the boon to their company the general perception of protection against throat irritation:

Overall, menthol smokers appear to be a prime target for a low-irritation story because they seem to be very conscious of irritation. It is highly identifiable by them, and they already view menthol cigarettes as the best route to diminish irritation. Therefore, they would not have to be "sold" on the idea that a menthol cigarette and diminished irritation are compatible.⁷³

Ferris and Connolly's 2004 review of tobacco industry documents demonstrated the association of menthol's reduction of throat irritation with its increased popularity.⁷⁴ Indeed, as RJR stated in a 1997 analysis of the potential for share growth with "high filtration" menthol products, "[t]he health concern was perhaps the primary motive for switching to menthol in the first place. In the hierarchy of product benefits/attributes desired by menthol filter smokers, throat concerns rank just behind generic taste and satisfaction."⁷⁵

Marketers knew, however, that the perceived protection against throat irritation was cosmetic—that throat harm was not eliminated but rather covered up like concealer make up over a facial blemish. A 1974 William Esty and Company, Inc. report for RJR inquired into how consumers categorize the role of menthol. The report asserted,

Smokers seem to implicitly divide cigarettes into three types, each of which is different in handling the "threat of smoking.... First, there are the "regular cigarettes". These...offer no or little symbolic escape from "threat" other than whatever - smoking strategies the smoker may use.... Second, at the other extreme there are what may be called the "sanitized" cigarettes. These are cigarettes in which some of the "threat" has been taken out. They are the low tar/nicotine variety.... Somewhere in the middle of these two extremes, are what deserve to be called the "cosmetized" cigarettes. These primarily are the menthol variety.... Cosmetized cigarettes are ones [that]... in some degree, make up for or disguise what is disliked in "regular" cigarettes." [emphasis in original]⁷⁶

British American Tobacco Co. echoed this in an undated summary of a marketing conference:

Menthol does deliver these "cosmetic" improvements and can develop a market position as a result of them.

- The basic value of mentholation is its ability to moderate or soften certain aspects of the smoking experience. It reduces the oral and upper respiratory drawbacks of

cigarette smoking, according to R & D and according to qualitative responses from Canadian smokers.

- It appears that this reduction of "cosmetic" problems is the primary motivation for the use of menthol cigarettes in the market today.⁷⁷

Smokers perceive "mild" cigarettes as healthier than regular (non-"light") cigarettes.⁷⁸⁻⁸¹

Menthol's ability to mask the pain and burn of smoking, and its perception as a milder and therefore safer product as compared to "regular" cigarettes, has caused switching from non-menthol to menthol brands and styles. Tobacco company executives assert that "Menthols and particularly Hi-Fi's [high filtration cigarettes] have a net gain from brand switching".⁶⁵ This appears particularly among young people who start with popular youth brands. For instance, The Sherman Group Inc. conducted a reconnaissance study of Newport for RJR in 1976 and found,

In rejecting the "regular" cigarette taste, the smokers are referring back to their own experiences. These young smokers began smoking the "popular" brands, Winston, Marlboro, Tareyton and Kents, etc., and moved to menthols for a variety of reasons or circumstances; the rejection of tobacco taste, the search for a "milder" cigarette, personal influence, or the circumstances of having a cold and wanting to continue smoking, but being unable to "handle" the hot taste of cigarettes in an already irritated throat.⁸²

Lorillard itself observed in 1972 that "[b]rand-switching has resulted in a 13% gain for Menthols which is larger than the 8% for Hi Fi brands, the only types gaining from claimed switching", and cited a research participant's explanation that "I started smoking Kools when I had a cold. It felt good so I kept on smoking them".⁷² Such beliefs about the protectiveness of menthol against colds probably prevented some of the smokers from quitting.

Some internal documents suggest that such beliefs about the health benefits of mentholated cigarettes prevent potential quitters from quitting in favor of switching to a mentholated brand or style. For instance, a William Esty study for RJR in 1973 stated,

Generally when a respondent reported that he made a conscious decision to switch to a mentholated brand it was because of some problem, minor or major. For instance, many switched to mentholated cigarettes because of throat irritation, colds, coughs or chronic

bronchitis. Sometimes respondents saw smoking a mentholated brand as the only alternative to giving up smoking altogether.⁸³

Similarly, J.D. Woods, B&W Research Manager, presented the results of a 1984 smoker study, saying,

When asked what brand they would switch to if Kool Filter Kings were no longer available, most respondents said they would change to Newport, Salem and Kool Lights in that order. Other brands mentioned were Benson & Hedges Menthol, Winston Lights, Belair, and Marlboro Menthol.⁴⁶

Roper Organization prepared a study for PM in 1979 on the attitudes of menthol smokers and found the same thing. They reported that “[m]enthol smokers express slightly less desire to quit smoking than do non-menthol smokers--39 % would like to quit, versus 43 % of non-menthol smokers”.⁸⁴ B&W’s analysis of key market trends in the 1960s concluded the tendency to switch from non-menthol to menthol rather than quit was important for Kool’s rise in this decade:

The key trend for Kool was the emerging importance of younger adult Black smokers in the market . In the health-concerned 1960's, younger adult Blacks didn't back off from smoking to the extent that Whites did. Because of this, their importance surged from 6% of 18-year-old smokers in the 1950's, to 10% in the 1960's.⁴⁹

iv. Were menthol cigarettes marketed to specific populations? Have marketing practices led to an increase in menthol use for youth or various US. population sub-groups?

Menthol cigarettes were marketed to specific populations, including African Americans, young people, women, and Asians. This contributed to the popularity of menthol styles in these groups.

African Americans

It is well documented that advertisements for menthol cigarettes have been overrepresented in popular African American magazines relative to non-African American

magazines^{8,20,85} and in predominantly African American urban neighborhoods.²¹ RJ Reynolds stated in an in-house presentation on the “US cigarette market in the 1990s [that] 95% of black younger adult smokers now choose menthol, and Newport has a 73 [sic] share-of-smoker among this group”.⁸⁶

A 1991 shareholder request to Loews, then parent company of Lorillard, manufacturer of Newport, expressed shareholder concern over the apparent disproportionate targeting of African Americans with the Newport brand. Loews Targeting African Americans:

80% of Loews ad dollars go for Newport. From July-September, 1986 \$4.7 million of the \$6.5 million spent advertising went to billboards.... Studies show that the poorest neighborhoods – ones where most billboards are placed – have the highest incidence of health-related problems associated with tobacco.... More black males (41%) than white males (31%) and more black females (32%) than white females (28%) smoke; black men have a 20% higher death rate from heart disease than white men, while black women have a 50% higher death rate than white women.⁸⁷

The shareholders recommended that a Voluntary Code Review Committee be established to review the company’s marketing practices and to report on the results of the review by September 1993. The current research found no such report in the documents databases.

Indeed, as an assessment of the menthol market from PM in 1986 recognized, “Relative to all smokers, menthol smokers tend to be: women, young (mainly 25-34), Black, light smokers (<20 cigarettes a day), lower income earners, pack buyers, [and] 100mm smokers.”⁸⁸ PM had stated 18 years earlier, in 1968, that menthol “was a product which by some virtue was especially suited to the needs, desires and tastes of Negro consumers”, speculating that the “great enthusiasm for menthol cigarettes... was based both on dynamic sensory and on psychological gratifications.”⁸⁹

Wishing to exploit the “potential opportunity sector” represented by Black smokers, RJR produced a “Black Opportunity Analysis” in 1985.⁹⁰ Assessing “Key differences between Blacks and Whites”, RJR stated those differences

revolve around socioeconomic status – education, work, and money. The net pattern to all of these differences can be summed up in terms of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Black needs focus on Survival, Security, and Social Acceptance [the lower levels of Maslow’s hierarchy]. For Whites, these lower levels are usually taken for granted, and any “upward striving” focus is on gaining Esteem from others and Self-Actualization.⁹⁰

Further, noted RJR, “[t]here are also gaps within Blacks. Several studies have suggested that Blacks are becoming polarized into an “elite” and an “underclass”.... It is the “underclass” who are smokers.”⁹⁰ Observing many of the disadvantages that accompany underclass status, RJR concluded that, although health may be a concern, “Blacks simply have more pressing concerns than smoking issues.”⁹⁰ The implication is that this market, with its myriad socioeconomic pressures, should reliably continue smokers even if they are aware of some health risks.

Heavy targeting of largely African American urban populations has resulted in menthol brands and styles accounting for the bulk of African American urban smoking. A 1983 “Cigarette Attitude Study (Among low income Black smokers)” for Newport revealed “[t]he use of menthol cigarettes among the 18 - 34 lower income Black segment is almost universal. Nearly 9 out of 10 smokers currently smoke a menthol brand”.⁹¹ Noting changes from data in 1979, the study observed that “[o]verall, black smokers have better recall of advertising for specific menthol brands than in 1979” and “showed a lower frequency of purchasing secondary brands, and more longevity with regard to the length of time current brand was smoked”.⁹¹ B&W found in 1993 that “Blacks are three times as likely to smoke menthol and four times as likely to smoke full revenue menthol compared to non-Blacks”.⁹² It is perhaps not surprising

that menthol advertising is disproportionately present in magazines²⁰ and on billboards²² targeted to and seen by African Americans.

Other populations: young people, women, and Asians

Although much discussion has taken place regarding menthol's appeal to African Americans, the vast majority of the menthol market has always been drawn from non-Black populations. B&W's 1993 study found that although 72.3% of Black smokers were using menthol compared to 25.3% of non-Black smokers, the total menthol market was 73.5% non-black and only 26.4% Black.⁹²

The evidence suggests menthol smokers discriminate between menthol brands, with some making sharp distinctions between the brands, based upon both user imagery in marketing materials and the actual levels of menthol in different brands.⁴³ In a 1995 "Review of New Menthol Brands" for PM, Leo Burnett asserted "[m]enthol smokers can be segmented on their reasons for choosing menthol: 1. Non-menthol rejectors: Non-menthols are too harsh and dry. 2. Mildness seekers: Appreciate mild, smooth taste. 3. Menthol fanatics: Love strong, very cool menthol taste/experience".⁴⁸ This echoes the findings of a study Hawkins, McCain & Blumenthal Advertising conducted for B&W in 1977: the menthol smoker "judges this menthol feeling in terms of intensity.... He probably started smoking menthols because of a negative non-menthol taste experience.... He moved quickly from an occasional menthol smoker to a full time menthol smoker".⁹³ In terms of who may fit into which of Leo Burnett's three categories, a 1983 study conducted on the Newport market found that

The three leading menthol brands exhibit distinct user profiles. Newport smokers tend to be younger (18 – 21), single and less educated. Kool is smoked more by men, those over 25 years of age and those with even slightly lower incomes. Salem users are more often female, over age 25, more likely to be married, and more often employed. Peer pressure is the most popular reason offered for selecting a first regular brand. Younger smokers

(18'- 24) were most concerned with brand(s) smoked by family members and/or friends, and women were more frequently interested in a mild tasting product.⁹¹

Menthol styles are often lumped together by tobacco marketers in marketing language such as RJR's "Coolness Segment" used to identify the menthol market. Consumers in this segment "are the youngest, the most economically disadvantaged, and the most likely to be in minority and ethnic groups".⁵⁸ RJR noted that Coolness Segment smokers "tend, more than average, to desire their brand of cigarettes to symbolize personal qualities such as youth; modern womanhood; romance; career orientation; and success".⁵⁸ Recognizing the brand-specific image consciousness of the segment, RJR stated, "brands in the Coolness Segment gain little or no imagery directly from the fact of their mentholation. Rather, they are able to develop a wide diversity of images".⁵⁸

The three largest stand-alone menthol brands, Kool, Newport, and Salem, have different brand identities in the minds of both the manufacturers and the consumers. Salem is thought to be "refreshing and milder, lower in tar than Kool/Newport",⁴⁵ and the brand's user perceptions are generally "average person, sociable, slightly older".⁴⁵ Indeed, RJR noted in 1977 that Salem is characterized by "'worried' smokers" and smokers who are "passive, feminine".⁹⁴ Salem's target market in the late 1970s was "males & females, ages 18-34" in "small city/rural" areas" and in the "middle income" bracket, though it was noted that the "brand has feminine user imagery".⁹⁵ RJR appears to have embraced this image particularly with its Salem Slim Lights line extension, positioning it for consumers "who desire a refreshing, low tar cigarette with [a] stylish, unpretentious, feminine image".⁴⁵ Recognizing Newport's continued dominance over Salem in influential (i.e., young) markets, by 1998 RJR wanted to balance the old Salem image with a new take on the brand. "New Salem" was considered in the hopes of reinventing itself by taking a brand whose current perception by the general public is a brand that is:

- Predominantly older (50+), female, suburban, light tasting highly mentholated product

And changing that perception to:

- Current, modern, multicultural, dual male and female, smokers 21-34 years old, urban, relevant, balanced menthol taste.⁹⁶

Though the menthol segment “skews female” (i.e., female consumers are overrepresented in the segment),⁹⁷⁻⁹⁹ Kool has a more masculine image than the other stand-alone brands.

Lorillard noted in 1994 that “Kool is viewed as a strong tasting, "tough guy" cigarette which is illustrated by the respondents with clouds and gloom”.¹⁰⁰ Kool’s appeal to men is, in part, attributed to the brand’s strength and harshness relative to the other stand-alone menthol brands; B&W said of Kool’s strength, “KOOL is to cigarettes as Listerine is to mouthwash”.¹⁰¹

This is particularly evident in studies of Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Asian Americans. For example, PM analyzed the four Asian countries most important to PM Asia’s growth: Japan, Hong Kong, Korea, and Singapore, and noted that

Salem King Size and Salem Lights are attracting a high proportion of young adult smokers under 25, traditionally the stronghold of the Marlboro franchise. The Salem franchise is also attracting a high proportion of young adult women, in markets where the incidence of young adult female smokers is growing as women become more emancipated”.¹⁰²

A 1985 study for B&W on menthol in Japan showed that “menthol cigarettes tended to be considered as ‘fashionable’” and that “those who smoke menthol brands are somewhat ‘different’ people, if they were not young women”.¹⁰³ The study report advised that these aspects “should be seriously considered by a marketer of menthol cigarettes since the primary target segment is younger women, i.e. female students and office girls”.¹⁰³ Supporting the perception of Salem as lighter and Kool as harsher, “Kool Super Lights... tended to be purchased by male respondents. Evaluations of Kool Super Lights by younger female respondents tended to be negative both for the product and the image”.¹⁰³

Of the major menthol brands, Lorillard's Newport is "the brand with the youngest demographics in the industry" according to a 1992 Lorillard report.¹⁰⁴ Newport's marketing strategy through much of the 1990s was to "continue to improve Newport's appeal as the 'peer' brand among younger adult smokers".^{105,106} Part of the strategy for achieving this was to "develop an 'attack plan' to establish an offensive posture in the general market to more aggressively compete with Marlboro Menthol in select markets".¹⁰⁷ "General market", a term pointing to the overall cigarette market, is contrasted here with "urban center",¹⁰⁷ the term for young inner city African Americans. This attack plan included marketing initiatives to "continue to define 'Newport Pleasure' in a variety of different ways: social interactions, 'zany' fun, smoking situations, intimate moments, and refreshment".¹⁰⁷

In spite of PM's dominance with young people via the popularity of its Marlboro brand, the company monitors the success of its competitors in this crucial segment of potential consumers. A PM five year plan for business, beginning in 1990, observed that

Newport maintains the youngest profile of any brand in the industry. This brand may be showing a slowdown in its share growth within [the young adult] segment, in part due to its own changing profile and also due to Marlboro Menthol. Newport is aggressively defending its business with marketing support.¹⁰⁸

The recommended response was to "[d]eliver the greatest number of advertising impressions to [the young adult] smoker audience", including "32 markets selected for 1990 based on strong growth and uphill potential, Marlboro Menthol development, Newport vulnerability and Camel inroads".¹⁰⁸ PM's 1992 Marlboro Promotion Plan included "special programs to menthol Hispanic and Asian smokers" to accelerate share growth among its core group of "young adult smokers".¹⁰⁹ The desired result of these marketing activities was for Marlboro to "increase national Menthol share by + .14 and deliver a 741 million unit gain behind Menthol".¹⁰⁸ AB Research Associates informed Lorillard in a 1996 report that Marlboro Menthol performed best

in menthol's "low development" areas, meaning socio-demographic and geographic areas where menthol claims a low proportion of the total cigarette market (e.g., rural, white areas rather than urban, black areas).¹¹⁰ Although both Marlboro menthol and Newport skewed young and male, said AB Research Associates, "consistent with Newport's higher penetration among African-Americans, it maintains the highest urban/lowest rural presence of all menthol brands",¹¹⁰ the opposite of Marlboro menthol's performance. This points to the importance of the sustained targeting of the specific market by stand-alone brands such as Newport; Marlboro menthol's intended foray into the ethnic markets according to the 1992 plan was not enough to compete with Marlboro's overall young, white market profile. Further, as RJR noted as early as 1978, "solo brands dominate the menthol category" and "generate much higher awareness among menthol smokers than do the menthol styles of dual brands"¹¹¹ (i.e., brands primarily known for their non-menthol styles but that offer a menthol line extension, such as Marlboro).

Discussion

Menthol cigarettes were originally marketed on a health platform, and health messages successfully convinced consumers that menthol cigarettes were "better for" them than non-menthol cigarettes. Associations of menthol with health continue to this day, although marketing for menthol cigarettes has shifted to issues of taste, pleasure, and user imagery.^{43,57,59,60,107}

To a large extent, user imagery for various menthol brands is brand-specific; there is not a single, identifiable menthol user image across all mentholated products. The association of mentholated products with African Americans is broadly perceived, and menthol is aggressively marketed to various sub-populations, including African Americans.^{18,20,22,85,90} Much the way Virginia Slims targeted women in the second wave of the feminist movement with a product superficially designed with them in mind and an aggressive marketing campaign,¹¹² menthol

products, particularly Kool and Newport, aggressively targeted young Black populations with socially relevant messages of ingroup identity.^{49,50,53,56}

Menthol is also targeted to young people in the US and is strongly represented among young women in Asian countries. Although different menthol brands are associated with different “brand identities”, menthol in general is perceived to be for females, for younger people, and for lighter smokers. This perception is consistent internationally. Marketing that emphasizes coolness, refreshing sensations, mildness, soothing taste, and youthful, fun-loving imagery contributes to these perceptions.^{45,48,58,91,94,96,97-99,103}

A marketing emphasis on sensation and cool menthol taste attracts and retains people who may not otherwise progress to regular smoking, including young inexperienced users and those who do not enjoy smoking “regular” cigarettes.^{49,65,103} Given menthol’s associations with mildness, refreshment, and cosmetic considerations such as minty breath and aroma, menthol products may be particularly attractive in newer markets abroad where women represent a strong growth opportunity for tobacco companies, as well as with new generations of inexperienced young consumers in the US.

Menthol products have been marketed as, and are often perceived as, milder than “regular” cigarettes and therefore less of a threat to health, similar to perceptions of low-tar and “light” products. Whereas menthol users often appear less interested in low-tar than traditional “health-concerned smokers” who seek “light” and “ultralight” styles, the perception of a health-protective effect of menthol^{34,35,63,65,66,72} makes menthol products function in the same way as traditional low-tar and “light” products. The products both attract consumers who may otherwise quit smoking and provide psychological health assurances without providing any real health protection.

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Appendix

Appendix: Legacy Tobacco Documents Library search terms and results.

Legacy Tobacco Documents Library Search Terms and Results			
Search terms: initial searches	# of Results	# of docs screened	# of docs retrieved
Menthol AND market*	457,712	300	54
Menthol AND “consumer perception”	4,493	200	67
Menthol AND health*	107,854	200	53
Menthol AND cool*	91,215	150	14
Menthol AND “focus group”	13,876	200	44
Menthol AND creative	52,757	200	62
Menthol AND “ad copy”	1,886	100	8
Menthol AND communication	59,078	200	26
Menthol AND “market research”	85,417	150	19
Menthol AND report	405,323	100	3
Menthol AND topline	26,397	50	1
Menthol AND “target group”	10,172	200	27
Menthol AND “young adult smoker”	2,203	250	38
Menthol AND YAS	9,650	250	41
Menthol AND YAMS	1,788	200	9
Menthol AND YAFS	1,078	200	6
Search terms: iterative searches	# of Results	# of docs screened	# of docs retrieved
Newport AND target AND market AND perce*	28,521	250	34
Salem AND target AND market AND perce*	52,555	300	26
Kool AND target AND market AND perce*	31,437	200	21
Menthol AND Udow	2,271	100	9
Menthol AND Burrows	2,811	200	11
Menthol AND Woods	1,625	100	12
Menthol AND Schreiber	2,403	200	8
Menthol AND “Market Science Associates”	171	171	4
Menthol AND “Kapuler Marketing Research”	521	100	7
Menthol AND “Yankelovich”	491	100	3

Menthol AND “William Esty”	60	60	5
Menthol AND “Leo Burnett”	166	166	9
Menthol AND “Roper Organization”	1,244	60	5
“Project Salem HC”	3	3	1
“Project Y” AND menthol	768	200	21
“Project Fresh Start”	26	26	6
“Project SB”	1393	75	14
“Project NFL”	49	49	8
“Project Jazz”	29	29	3
“Project Crawford”	80	25	3
Menthol AND black	128,384	300	68
Menthol AND African*	13,917	200	49
Menthol AND Asian*	13,223	200	39
Menthol AND women	83,810	300	54
Menthol AND females	62,382	200	32
Menthol AND Hispanic*	32,710	200	29

Notes: 1. An asterisk (*) indicates a “wildcard” search, such that the stem of the word indicated will yield results containing that stem. For instance, “menthol*” will yield “menthol”, “mentholated”, “mentholation”, etc.

2. A string of words in quotation marks (“”) indicates a “phrase” search, such that the string included in order within the quotation marks will be searched. For instance, “consumer perception” as a single phrase will be searched.