Premium

How creative anti-tobacco ads on OTT can engage viewers without shock tactics

Instead of scaring people into giving up smoking, we should empathise with them by going deeper into the reasons they are smoking.

Written by Geetika Srivastava

October 2, 2024 09:00 IST

By adopting these strategies, we can create anti-tobacco ads that are not only watchable but also effective in reducing tobacco consumption.

Agnello Dias

Co-founder, Spinach Experience Design

A recent proposal by regulatory authorities to introduce non-skippable anti-tobacco advertisements on OTT platforms seems to have caught everyone's eye. Obviously, the powers that be have decided that the only skip button on OTT exists on the remote. Nothing could be further than the truth.

The real skip button exists in the mind and heart of the viewers. If the quality of engagement in the content does not strike a chord there, they can easily tune out even while the said advertisement is playing.

They may watch but not necessarily see. Hear but not listen. Receive but not retain. A cursory glance through the kind of anti-tobacco advertisements that are being put out proves this. They state the point, yes. But do they make it? Unfortunately, not.

Come to think of it, believing that the cause for harmful tobacco usage is because people skip the anti-tobacco ads being run is quite ludicrous. If only we focused instead on making anti-tobacco communication with a genuine insight, creative that drives home the point and a powerful message that nails residual impact, we would have advertising that no one would want to skip in the first place.

It's an age-old advertising truth that frequency does not mean engagement. Some of the most successful ads in history worked not because viewers were not allowed to skip them but because they simply could not.

As GK Chesterton once said, "Television is sometimes just chewing gum for the eyes. And while the authorities may have the power to deactivate the plastic skip button, what will they do about the one in the viewer's hearts?"

Shock tactics, gory imagery alienate viewers

Yorick Pinto
Senior Creative Director, BC Web Wise

While the intention to curb tobacco consumption through non-skippable ads on OTT platforms is commendable, the current approach seems to be counterproductive. The use of shock tactics and gory imagery, while well-meaning, is likely to alienate viewers and diminish the ad's effectiveness.

To create more impactful anti-tobacco ads, I would recommend a shift in strategy that focuses on:

Positive stories: Instead of scaring people into giving up smoking, we should empathise with them by going deeper into the reasons they are smoking. We could craft a series of testimonial-based films showing people who have quit smoking by overcoming the underlying need.

Tailored content: By tailoring ad films to specific audiences or affinities on the OTT platform, their effectiveness can be increased while making them more relevant.

Positive reinforcement: Very few anti-tobacco ads focus on the benefits of quitting smoking. There's a huge opportunity to spark conversations of those who've quit smoking and gone on to focus on fitness or hobbies.

Advocacy: This one's a no-brainer. Authentic stories of celebrities and other influential figures who have overcome tobacco addiction can inspire viewers.

Creative storytelling: Invest in high-quality production values and innovative storytelling. Use compelling visuals, music, and voiceovers to create ads that are visually appealing and impactful.

By adopting these strategies, we can create anti-tobacco ads that are not only watchable but also effective in reducing tobacco consumption.

Yorick Pinto
Senior Creative Director, BC Web Wise

Highlight the benefits of quitting instead of spreading negativity

Chandan Bagwe
Founder & director, C Com Digital

There are many ways to deliver a message, and it doesn't have to rely solely on shock and awe. I would suggest the following ways to make the ads more watchable:

Use storytelling formats: Share personal stories of individuals impacted by tobacco-related illnesses or those who have lost loved ones to it. These can evoke empathy and create a stronger emotional connection with the audience. For example, the Akshay Kumar ad that plays in theatres.

Highlight the benefits of quitting: Instead of emphasising the negative consequences, showcase the benefits of quitting. Share success stories of those who have conquered addiction.

Humorous ads (remember the 'Who is Balbir Pasha' ads for AIDS): Humor can help capture attention and make advertisements more memorable. For instance, humorous scenes can be used to highlight the absurdity of tobacco use or the consequences of addiction. For example, a commercial that showcased husband-and-wife gorillas smoking and acting foolish, or an ad could show gorillas as more intelligent than a smoking man or woman.

Incorporate interactive elements: This could include quizzes, polls, or challenges related to tobacco cessation, like a knowledge quiz, poll questions, or quitting challenges.

Influencers: Partner with influencers who have a strong following and can effectively communicate. These could include health (how to stay healthy by quitting), food (how to eat healthy after quitting, and food that could help to quit), travel (how to travel and utilise time for a healthy lifestyle), fashion & beauty (benefits of quitting, effects on skin and health), personal growth & development (sharing their journeys and experiences with overcoming challenges), and celebrity (for their image and impact) influencers.