

## Media Essay.

Currently in the United Kingdom there are approximately 10 million people who smoke cigarettes. It has been documented that tobacco is currently the leading cause of preventable death in the UK also. The government has estimated that in around 100,000 deaths per year in the United Kingdom, smoking has a helping hand in all of them. The government also mentions that it is spending a large proportion of the NHS on self-inflicted illnesses such as drug overdosing and cigarettes. This is a staggering amount spent by the NHS and the governments are attempting to ultimately decrease this devastating loss through tobacco prevention and control programs. In light of these statistics, it is obviously important that successful and effective programs are created in attempts to reduce smoking-related disease and premature death due to cancers as well as drink driving.

Historically, public campaigns have been up for debate to whether they are effective or not. There is currently much debate over the "shock" tactics used to portray drink driving as many people feel the "shock" tactics employed by the government showing in what could be described as an uncut full gore version of a woman/child being hit by a car doing over the limit.

During a four year run in 1997-2000 in Australia, the National Tobacco Campaign aired controversial advertisements with regard to smoking cigarettes, and their evaluations have proven their success in reducing the national smoking rates.

An example I can use for "Shock Ads" is the brand FCUK. When most people first saw it or seen it advertised they were shocked at how explicit it first was but now this "Shocking" brand has developed into one of the world's leading fashion brands. There were a few complaints and an Advertising Standards Authority investigation. French Connection's Stephen Marks has attributed the bulk of his 84% increase in

profits in the first half of last year to the fcuk advertising campaign. Consumers voted by buying 120,000 T-shirts bearing the slogan. French Connection has been transformed from a run-of-the-mill name to being a youth icon right up there with Sony, Nike and Tango. With its "Shock" tactics, FCUK won campaign of the year.

The UK government's 1998 white paper on tobacco promised that £60m would be spent over three years to set up smoking cessation services in the NHS and that these services would be backed up by an advertising campaign. The campaign—"Don't give up giving up"—was launched in December 1999. This initial £5m media campaign comprises posters and six weeks of television advertising; it offers tips on giving up, testimonials from people with smoking related diseases, and a video diary of nicotine addicts trying to quit. All the advertisements feature genuine smokers: there is not an actor in sight.

The testimonials are particularly powerful. It would be surprising if the story of a 43 year old woman who died of lung cancer three weeks after filming didn't prompt many smokers to think again. The video diaries provide a day by day account of smokers' efforts to quit. They seem partly to be designed to remind smokers that they are not alone in trying to quit at the beginning of a new year and to convince them that they can succeed.

Despite their controversy "Shock" ads may be considered necessary to be included in a national campaign as a tobacco prevention and control method for the United Kingdom due to the large amount of smoking-related human suffering and economic loss. The challenge of preventing and reducing smoking amongst youths and others is a big one. In the past twenty years, anti-smoking campaigns and resulting public health awareness of the consequences of long term smoking have increased dramatically. Studies have been done on many government funded national public anti-smoking campaigns that prove their effectiveness. The government programs to

educate youths about the dangers of smoking are definitely justified, no matter how controversial the "Shock ads" may be.

However in comparison with the stunning statistics on smoking-attributable deaths coming to 100,000 people a year, its hard to argue that "Shock ads" are wrong and the risk of offending too many people is too great. It is possible that the most effective elements of "Shock" advertising can still be delivered well and perhaps even enhanced in effectiveness. Due to the large extent of human suffering and economic loss from things like smoking, drink driving and not wearing your seatbelt, it is important that the government take extreme measures to develop new types of campaigning to counteract the damage done. Extreme measures such as socking advertising can be expected to result in some controversy but in the end it will pay off due to the amount of money and lives saved. No matter the controversy, "shock ads" depend on the simple saying "their is no such thing as bad publicity". If everyone is talking about how controversial the advertisements are then surely how controversial the acts themselves are will somehow work its way into the conversation leading more and more people to believe that it is bad for you.