

Trends in the use of premium and discount cigarette brands: Findings from the ITC US Surveys (2002-2010)

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Abstract

OBJECTIVE: The purpose of this paper was to examine trends in the use of premium and discount cigarette brands and determine correlates of type of brand used and brand switching.

METHODS: Data from the International Tobacco Control (ITC) US adult smoker cohort survey were analysed. The total study sample included 6669 adult cigarette smokers recruited and followed from 2002 to 2011 over eight different survey waves. Each survey wave included an average of 1700 smokers per survey with replenishment of those lost to follow-up.

RESULTS: Over the eight survey waves, a total of 260 different cigarette brands were reported by smokers, of which 17% were classified as premium and 83% as discount brands. Marlboro, Newport, and Camel were the most popular premium brands reported by smokers in our sample over all eight survey waves. The percentage of smokers using discount brands increased between 2002 and 2011, with a marked increase in brand switching from premium to discount cigarettes observed after 2009 corresponding to the \$0.61 increase in the federal excise tax on cigarettes. Cigarette brand preferences varied by age group and income levels with younger, higher income smokers more likely to report smoking premium brand cigarettes, while older, middle and lower income, heavier smokers were more likely to report using discount brands.

CONCLUSIONS: Our data suggest that demographic and smoking trends favour the continued growth of low priced cigarette brands. From a tobacco control perspective, the findings from this study suggest that governments should consider enacting stronger minimum pricing laws in order to keep the base price of cigarettes high, since aggressive price marketing will likely continue to be used by manufacturers to compete for the shrinking pool of remaining smokers in the population.

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