

[In praise of packaging](#) [1]

Written by [Dr Madsen Pirie](#) [2] | Monday 13 August 2012

The proposal to require 'plain' packaging for tobacco products has now completed its consultations. The ASI submitted evidence against plain packaging, and we published [Chris Snowdon's report on the subject](#)

[3].

The case for plain packaging is weak since it has not been tried anywhere. Proponents claim that glitzy packaging leads people to take up smoking, whereas the tobacco companies say it is about promoting their brands over others. Supporters cite tests in which subjects said they felt 'negative' about cigarettes in plain packs. I myself would feel pretty negative about having to look at other people's packs showing tumours and corpses.

Counterfeiting and smuggling would be easier with plain packaging, reducing tax revenues. Already one cigarette in nine is smuggled or fake. The civil liberties issue makes a strong case against plain packaging. Although proponents tell us that it will only apply to tobacco products, activists in Australia, which took the lead in plain packaging laws, are now campaigning for graphic warnings on alcohol and for what they deem to be 'junk' food to be sold in generic packaging.

Packaging can influence choice of brand by projecting an image that users want to identify with. The feelings that go with a product are part of the intangible value that it adds. Malt whisky in India is seen as an 'aspirational' product associated with success and ambition. Young Indians enjoy feeling part of that world, in addition to enjoying the whisky itself. Similarly tobacco companies like to project an image for their brands. Friends of mine who started Regius Cigars wanted to convey an image of top quality, and designed distinctive packaging in black and gold. Plain packaging would require them to forego the distinctive imagery that marks out their brand and gives it class.

I applaud the New World vintners for the innovative and bold wine labels they have adopted. They brighten up the table, and I doubt they make people drink more wine. I do think that putting disgusting pictures on them would make people 'negative' toward them, however.

It would be a duller world if everything activists thought bad for us had to be sold in plain packaging. It would be less informative, and would deny us the intangible pleasures of associating with images and lifestyles we aspire to be part of. It would be a drabber world and one considerably less free.

[blog comments powered by Disqus](#) [5]

Source URL: <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/regulation-industry/in-praise-of-packaging>

Links:

[1] <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/regulation-industry/in-praise-of-packaging>

[2] <http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5779>

[3] <http://www.adamsmith.org/sites/default/files/research/files/plain-packaging.pdf>

[4] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript

[5] <http://disqus.com>