

Poster submission

MUZZICUNI – ENCOURAGING PROPER DISPOSAL OF CIGARETTE BUTTS AMONG YOUNG ADULTS LIVING IN BOLOGNA

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Poster Reference Track – N° 8 Environment and health

Aims and objectives

The overall purpose of this project is trying to promote the correct disposal of cigarette butts among young adults living in Bologna by rethinking and reinforcing existing strategies. In particular, we organized a series of events and engaging activities that met the needs of young smokers and guided their actions towards performing the desired behavior.

The aim is to change the mindset of the target audience towards viewing correct disposal as more socially acceptable than littering. As a result, young people and the society at large will benefit from a more sustainable urban environment, in which the impact of littering will be considerably reduced. In concrete terms, we expected to collect 10% more cigarette butts on each event held in November '21 compared to the previous month.

Target group / focus

As primary target we have chosen university students and young employees living in Bologna (aged 18-24), because according to our research they are the most likely audience

to throw cigarette butts on the ground instead of using the provided bins.

On the plus side, they are easily approachable for us both online and offline, mostly when they are already doing something enjoyable as part of their daily routine. Since they belong to the younger generations, they also have a low-medium income and will respond positively to economic benefits such as giveaways.

On the negative side, this target group consists of heavy smokers who have no intention of quitting in the short term and have never considered the environmental impact of their actions, mostly because they do not have enough literacy on it.

Our secondary target is identified with the local activities which have agreed to develop a partnership with us. Integrating their product portfolio with initiatives that have a sustainable purpose represents an opportunity to seize, because it offers tangible as well as intangible benefits. The former refers to an increased inflow of customers and higher sales, while the latter consists in gaining visibility and consequently a distinctive position in the eyes of current and potential audiences.

Project / Research focus

The *Muzzicuni* project has been created by students of Alma Mater Studiorum-University of Bologna (Italy), namely within the Social Marketing course. The term *Muzzicuni* is an expression of the Sicilian dialect which refers precisely to the verb to bite, and recalls the Italian noun *mozziconi* (cigarette butts).

Although they often go unnoticed, cigarette butts make up one of the most common types of waste which lies abandoned in the environment: it is estimated that yearly around 14 million of them are not disposed of properly. This phenomenon, which involves at least 65% of smokers, brings about harmful consequences in terms of soil and water pollution, not to mention the risks for animal ecosystems.

The authorities have tried to address the problem by imposing strong fines on people who litter, but no substantial changes have been made. In recent years, a few municipalities and environment-friendly organizations have however implemented a series of successful measures to draw smokers into disposing of their filters properly, which include portable ashtrays, voting ashtray containers and returnable bottles full of cigarette butts.

The common factor which makes these initiatives so successful among cigarette users is that they suggest an easy solution for a need and do not stigmatize the habit of smoking. Instead, they reinforce the idea that disposing properly can be fulfilling and exciting, thus creating a virtuous cycle.

On the negative side, no matter how positive the results of previous studies were, the lack of knowledge about these products posed our project at a considerable disadvantage in comparison to the competing behavior (littering). Plus, the primary target we identified – students and young employees living in Bologna – belonged to precontemplators, and therefore we needed to

go the extra mile in order to catch their attention and make them consider the idea of disposing properly of cigarette butts. Even though individuals from Generation Z are commonly linked to a deeper sensitivity towards environmental issues and the future of our planet, it is notably difficult to get rid of bad habits, take action and make concrete steps for a better living, especially when there are no positive outcomes in the short term.

Nonetheless, the products we offered required little cognitive effort for young adults to use, and we could easily encourage them to perform the desired behavior because there were no economic costs attached.

Method / Approach

Thanks to our secondary target (two bars located in the city center of Bologna), which took part to the co-creation of the project, we decided to organize three evening events in November '21. We chose the bar as a meeting place for two main reasons:

- According to our research, the majority of cigarette butts are to be found at the entrance of bars.
- When the primary target is involved in leisure activities, it becomes more accessible and therefore easier to engage.

During these events, the target was engaged in two main ways:

1. Offering a returnable service: smokers received a customized ashtray made out of recycled cans for free when they brought a bottle full of cigarette butts at the bar.

2. Installing two voting containers at the entrance of the bar: smokers could express their preference between two alternatives by throwing their cigarette butt into one of the two containers, which were former kegs of beer.

The core of the product strategy lies in the effective improvement of existing services and products, which can be used more efficiently in order to exploit their full potential and thus represent a guarantee of greater sustainability and emphasis on the environmental impact. This choice also takes into account the lower cognitive effort that the target audience will have to sustain in order to properly dispose of cigarette butts. If young adults already recognize the products provided as useful tools for disposing, it will be more natural and immediate for them to use.

On the other hand, we opened the Instagram page *Muzzicuni* to underpin the operating strategy and interact with the target audience. We decided to promote our objectives in different ways:

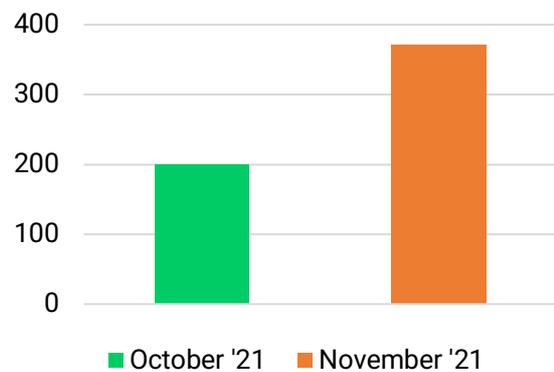
- Providing useful information and captivating contents. At first, we chose to focus on statistics and graphs for the purpose of assessing the relevance of the problem and spread awareness among the selected target.
- Engaging the primary target into quizzes and surveys on the topic of the project (e.g. asking what they think is the city with the most polluted parks). In addition, our followers had the opportunity to select which alternatives would be proposed in

the following voting ashtray challenge. By doing so, we raised interest in the mind of the target, who got involved in the making of the final product.

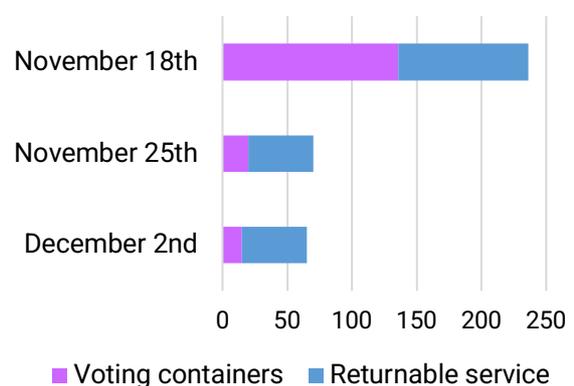
- Creating Instagram stories with the payoff *#shareyourmuzzicuni* and stickers with the project logo right before the events, so as to channel the attention and encourage the primary target to participate.

Relevant Data and Graphics

Total amount of cigarette butts collected (in absolute terms)



Cigarette butts collected on each event (in absolute terms)



Findings / Evaluation

At the end of the project, the events achieved a wide-ranging success among the primary target, as we managed to collect a total

amount of 371 cigarette butts and reached the expected goal during the first event (+18% cigarette butts collected). On average, the returnable service was the most successful initiative: thanks to it we collected 200 cigarette butts (4 plastic bottles).

Plus, our partners expressed positive feedbacks about the overall evolution of the project, which has brought new customers and has improved the brand image of the bar. To them the most relevant and time-saving initiative were voting ashtray containers: considering that the bar had no bins at the entrance, installing these containers kept the outside of the bar easier to clean up.

Talking about our communication strategy, we also got access to an audience of 302 accounts and 91 followers with our Instagram page *Muzzicuni*, among others Legambiente Agricoltura, a volunteer association which is responsible for the safeguard of crops.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In the forthcoming years, the future of our planet will hang on how each individual is willing to change their consumption patterns. In this context, understanding that every action one does produces an impact on the environment is the key to make a step forward. To this end, promoting low-cost, sustainable initiatives such as portable ashtrays and voting containers is proven to generate positive and immediate results. However, these examples of good practices have to go well beyond isolated actions and get included

in greater strategic plans that encompass a wide variety of issues.

With this community-based approach in mind, we plan to further develop our project to involve more partners and associations in the following months.

Links for further information

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