



Globalization of Tobacco Marketing, Research and Industry Influence: Perspectives, trends and impacts on human welfare

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ABSTRACT Derek Yach and Douglas Bettcher examine how the globalization of tobacco marketing, trade, research and industry influence is a major threat to public health worldwide. They show how the tobacco industry operates as a global force buying influence and power in order to penetrate markets across the world. They propose ways to strengthen tobacco control's fight back based on utilizing the new communication technologies for effective partnerships for global regulation.

Introduction

Tobacco is at the centre of the contradictions inherent in the evolving process of globalization. It is where the goals of a set of multinationals are clearly in conflict with public health and welfare and where globalization of values such as accountability and corporate responsibility are under severe pressure. The transnationalization of marketing and promotion of harmful commodities, such as tobacco, is one important component of globalized public health threats. Moreover, considering that in 1986, 61 percent of the world's tobacco consumption was in developing countries and by the year 2000 this number is expected to jump to 71 percent (FAO cited in MacKay and Crofton, 1996: 206); that by 2020, 70 percent of the expected 8.4 million deaths due to tobacco will be in developing countries (Murray and Lopez, 1996); and that at present almost 70 percent of tobacco is grown in developing countries (FAO cited in MacKay and Crofton, 1996: 206), tobacco control needs to be a higher priority in development programmes.

Globalization and the tobacco industry

The global shift towards trade liberalization, facilitated by multilateral trade agreements such as the single package of World Trade Organization (WTO)

trade agreements, regional, and bilateral agreements, has encouraged the penetration of new markets by tobacco multinationals. Market liberalization and penetration have been linked to a greater risk of increased tobacco consumption, especially in low and middle income countries (World Bank, 1999: 62). Directly linked to the business opportunities offered by global trade liberalization, multinationals such as BATCo are anxiously awaiting further opening of the Chinese market. The tobacco industry's strategies are intimately linked with the idea of international brands. The industry looks towards the creation of new 'global brands' and a 'global smoker' as one way of overcoming markets which have resisted the tobacco industry's onslaught. Industry strategists are encouraging the homogenization of the global tobacco industries and the creation of a new global shared culture enshrined in the concept of a global smoker.

The extent of the threat

If the world were a village of 1000 people, it would include 584 Asians; 150 Europeans, of which 55 are from the former soviet republics; 124 Africans; 84 Latin Americans; 52 North Americans and 6 Australians and New Zealanders. In this 1000 person village, 169 men and 56 women smoke. Further, 115 of the smokers are Asian, 28 are European and 28 are African. The tobacco industry would see massive marketing opportunities in the Asian population and among women for its products. A careful reading of the industry documents released as part of the Minnesota trial reveals the tobacco industry's focus on Asia. However, Asia is not the only target market or the only population to suffer the consequences of tobacco industry globalization.

The tobacco industry fails to acknowledge that if none of the 229 regular adult smokers in the hypothetical 1000 person global village quit, 114 of them – fully half – will die because of tobacco. Furthermore, the industry has not conceded that environmental smoke kills and harms the health of non-smokers, which is particularly alarming in light of the fact that of the 124 children in the

village, almost 40 percent are exposed to tobacco. Today, tobacco use kills 4 million people annually worldwide. This figure will increase to 10 million by about 2030, by which time 70 percent of the deaths will be in developing countries (World Bank, 1999: 1). Members of the tobacco industry continue to deny the addictive properties and the poor health outcomes that are associated with tobacco use. This is in direct contrast to the awareness of the deleterious effects of tobacco use demonstrated by decades of industry documents, over 35 million of which were released as a result of the Minnesota law suit. The documents show clearly that the industry realized the threats associated with their disclosure.

Controlling the debate

The combination of the tobacco industry's almost US\$400 billion annual turnover and powerful longstanding linkages to governments and a range of organs of civil society makes progress towards a tobacco free world a difficult process that will take decades and the dedication of millions. Philip Morris's massive investments in marketing over the last 40 years recently resulted in *Advertising Age* provocatively naming the Marlboro Man the number one advertising icon of the century. Contrast the powerful Marlboro icon with the humble and well recognized no smoking sign, also in Marlboro red. It aims to improve public health but has virtually no power to influence the behaviour of millions.

Tobacco control is essentially powerless in the face of tobacco brand control. The contrast between tobacco control and the tobacco industry begs the question: Who controls the global tobacco control movement? This question merits a brief discussion of tobacco industry influence on the budgets and policy of specialized agencies of the United Nations system, in particular WHO and the World Bank, as well as the industry's framing of the ongoing freedom of expression in advertising debate. Additionally, it is useful to examine the tobacco industry's challenge of the scientific evidence on addiction/health effects of tobacco and their developing agricultural lobby.

Influencing the WHO budget

More than a decade ago INFOTAB, a tobacco industry supported think tank, published 'A Guide for Dealing with Anti-tobacco Pressure Groups' (INFOTAB, 1989). This guide calls for the establishment of an 'early warning system' to detect dangerous signs such as the 'presence of a WHO regional office, setting-up of a regional workshop of activists, setting up of non-smoker's rights associations and starting up of an anti's coalition' (INFOTAB, 1989). If a pro-tobacco control group is identified, the think tank recommends that the industry 'form industry lobby groups and alliances with the core arguments freedom/liberty, attack the credibility of activists; and stress the industry's role in jobs and revenue' (INFOTAB, 1989). Material from BATCo documents indicates that four years later they were studying WHO's programme budget in detail and commissioning academics to write articles seemingly in their private capacity that questioned WHO spending priorities. For example, Paul Dietrich, President and sole member of the Institute for International Health and Development, who was influential in downplaying tobacco in a New York Academy of Sciences publication 18 months ago, and Bob Tollison, from the Centre for Study of Public Choice, were paid by BATCo to prepare articles that later appeared in the *International Herald Tribune*. The World Bank's 1993 World Development Report, *Invest in Health*, called for the Bank to end its support of tobacco production and processing but urged the Bank to 'treat the subject with sensitivity and flexibility in some countries which are heavily dependent on tobacco as a source of foreign exchange' (World Bank, 1993).

Distortion of the truth about advertising

The tobacco industry has long maintained that tobacco advertising bans constitute an infringement of commercial speech rights. The counter argument, which rarely emerges, is simple. Governments limit tobacco companies' product advertisement because it influences the behaviour of children, is deceptive, and leads to addiction. Individuals who are addicted are not 'free to

choose', and this compromises government's role in fostering individual liberty.

Continued questioning of the scientific evidence on addiction and health effects of tobacco

Earlier this year, the Chairman of BATCo, in a letter to the WHO Director-General, maintained that tobacco was addictive only in the sense in which chocolate was addictive.¹ Despite such arguments, his company and other tobacco companies have invested heavily in studying the science of addiction and how best to manipulate nicotine to maintain and increase smoking rates. The Minnesota Tobacco Litigation case extensively documented how the industry carried out a public relations campaign in order to create doubt about the links between smoking and disease.

Developing the agricultural lobby

Earlier this year, Richard Tate, President of the International Tobacco Growers Association (ITGA), expressed his concern that poor farmers in Africa would suffer if the World Health Organization's initiatives were successful (Tate, 1999). The ITGA, he maintained, is independent of industry and wants a dialogue with WHO.² This statement appears to be in conflict with the history of the development of the ITGA as discerned from industry documents.

Since 1988 the ITGA has lobbied ambassadors from key countries to influence WHO policy on tobacco, ensure that the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) continues to support tobacco growing, and deliver to the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro the message that tobacco's relative importance within the deforestation issue is minimal. Later, in 1993, BATCo coordinated concerted activity in response to the First All Africa Conference on Tobacco Control convened in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Today, firm evidence from the World Bank, supported by FAO, USAID and others, indicates that supply side approaches to tobacco control are not warranted (World Bank, 1999: 57-65). The impact of declining demand will be gradual and extend over many decades. With 1.1 billion

smokers today, a figure projected to grow by almost 40 to 50 percent if current policies continue, establishing a goal of an 800 million to 1 billion smoker market by the late 2020s seems a realistic target for global tobacco control. It should be noted that this is still an enormous market. While it is politically prudent to identify alternative livelihoods for tobacco farmers, one should not assume these would be in agriculture.

Towards a heightened global response: The World Health Organization's new leadership

In contrast to the size of the challenge, global tobacco control has, until recently, lacked sustained global leadership, been severely underfunded, and wanted for strategic direction. The WHO Director-General's leadership and support for the Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI), as one of three central cabinet projects, provides an opportunity for real global action against tobacco.

In his latest book, Bill Gates comments that 'how you gather, manage and use information will determine whether you win or lose' (Gates, 1999). In public health, and specifically in tobacco control, determining success, or 'winning' in Gates' terminology, is measured by the magnitude of prevention of premature death.

The major tobacco control intervention is information. This includes information about health effects, the negative economic impact of tobacco, the benefits of quitting, what policies work and the structure and functioning of the tobacco industry. Making this body of material available on time to key groups will make a difference to the epidemic. There exists a growing ability through the Internet to interact simultaneously with key policy makers, academics and NGOs in all countries. A threat from an industry action in one country is shared globally, and best practices appropriate to the country can be developed electronically. GlobaLink, the current major platform, now links over 1200 tobacco control programmes worldwide, demonstrating the power of modern information technologies to close the gap between global and local concerns.

Serious expansion of the reach, content and uses of this platform is now underway. TFI, in

conjunction with the centres for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Bank, and the International Union Against Cancer (UICC), have defined a strategy to develop a global tobacco surveillance system. This new system will provide information on patterns of prevalence, trends in tobacco related morbidity and mortality, policy and programme interventions, and tobacco industry analysis. The goal is to allow the truth to emerge wherever and whenever the tobacco industry is active. While information exchange is vital, for the long-term and for true, sustained action, the major benefit of the Internet is the improved connectivity of people.

Many citizens in countries with progressive tobacco control policies are outraged about the lack of coherence between domestic tobacco control and their countries' trade policies. By connecting groups in countries where tobacco marketing and exports originate with the target consuming countries via the creation of a virtual community, this outrage can be turned into pressure for tobacco control policy in real communities.

Nationally and locally grounded action

The strength of any global policy depends upon the degree to which it is firmly grounded in communities and countries. However, national action is not sufficient. In the age of immediate, accessible communication, cross cultural and international communication and unification is possible. Global networks of local groups allow for exciting local-global synergies. WHO and its partners in tobacco control are currently addressing and will steadfastly continue to address the transnational aspects of tobacco control.

The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) is a critical component of WHO's response to these problems. The World Health Assembly, the governing body of the WHO, unanimously adopted Resolution WHA52.18 calling for work to begin on the FCTC in May 1999. This is the first time in WHO's 50 year history that it has exercised its treaty making powers mandated in Article XIX of the WHO Constitution. The size of the public health problem the world faces from tobacco use demands such a response.

Partnerships with purpose

The globalization of risk beyond national borders means that individual governments cannot meet the challenges of tobacco control alone. A strong network of partners, each with their own identified unique and complementary roles in tobacco control, is emerging. The role of a vibrant NGO sector that is able to mobilize citizens and governments to act is essential to the success of the tobacco control movement. In May 1999, before the World Health Assembly, several major NGOs met to define, in areas such as women's roles in resisting the tobacco industry, health care and cessation, and human rights and consumer protection, how best to organize for more effective work at local and global levels (INGCAT, 1999).

Towards a sustainable globalization?

Increasingly, national social policies are being affected by transnational forces. With the advent of global markets 'social policy activities traditionally analysed within and undertaken within one country now take on a supranational and transnational character'. Questions of how to create a socially regulated global capitalism, rather than an anarchic unregulated system, are becoming part of the mainstream global social policy debate (Deacon et al., 1997: 1, 218). In this regard, social improvements, for example in public health, should be seen

as a means of forging a sustainable globalization: health improvements have been increasingly linked to positive economic effects (Strauss and Duncan, 1998), and the crucial link between health and human capital formation has become an important area of recent health policy research (World Bank, 1993).

The tobacco industry's strategies/tactics are at odds with the norms of social and corporate responsibility. The tobacco industry's unethical business practices, which have been aimed, *inter alia*, at deceiving the public about the extent to which tobacco harms people's health, contravene widely accepted ethical considerations. Therefore, as part of moving towards a more palatable form of globalization, the public should not give the tobacco industry the two things it needs above all to ensure its long-term profitability: respectability and predictability. Ongoing community action, a variety of legislative and litigation strategies, and multi-institutional approaches to tobacco control will ensure continued unpredictability for the tobacco industry provided that all are part of a broadly based comprehensive approach spread over years. The analysis of tobacco industry documents and their wide dissemination, along with the epidemiological and economic evidence about the true impact of tobacco, will prevent the tobacco industry from gaining respectability. These actions, simultaneously local and global, could halt and eventually reverse trends currently underway.

Notes

1 Mr Broughton's full statement was as follows:

On the matter of addiction, there are several definitions in use: under some, smoking, as well as coffee drinking and also chocolate eating, is addictive. While stopping smoking can be difficult for some, we do not consider that there is anything in cigarette smoke that removes the ability of someone to quit, as evidenced by the millions who have. (Broughton, 1999)

2 This sentiment is echoed in the recently released ITGA documents wherein ITGA's independence from the normal commercial activities of the tobacco industry is emphasized. See British American Tobacco document, File number BA0143, box number DEP0304, pages 502555396-9 for further description of ITGA written by D. Walder, Chief Executive of ITGA, in a letter to Ms G. Pedlow, Information Services Manager, BATCo., Ltd., dated 14 May 1990.

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