TOBACCO ADVERTISING, PROMOTION AND SPONSORSHIP (TAPS) IN SOUTH EAST ASIA

INTRODUCTION

Experts say tobacco advertising increases consumption. In 2009 a comprehensive review of tobacco-related research from the disciplines of marketing, psychology, communications and public health was released by The National Cancer Institute (US). The monograph was compiled by 23 authors, 63 expert reviewers and took five years to produce. The two main scientific conclusions were:

1) There is a causal relationship between tobacco marketing and increased tobacco use.
2) Comprehensive bans reduce tobacco consumption but partial bans only lead to greater expenditure in ‘non-banned’ areas resulting in no net reduction of tobacco use. [1]

The report also found that generally tobacco marketing exhibits three main themes:
• Providing satisfaction (taste, freshness)
• Reducing fears about the dangers of tobacco use (mildness)
• Creating associations between tobacco and desirable characteristics (social success, sexual attractions, thinness etc)

It is clear that, in unregulated countries, marketing reaches a very high proportion of people. For example, in the 2011 National Adult Tobacco Survey of Cambodia 80% of respondents had seen tobacco advertising in the past months.[2] Cambodia and Lao PDR have recently joined the majority of ASEAN countries in banning tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship (see table below) with notable exception of Indonesia, which is still in the process of imposing bans.

Current policies on Tobacco Advertising, Promotion and Sponsorship (TAPS) in ASEAN, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>TAPS status</th>
<th>Legislation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>Banned except POS &amp; CSR</td>
<td>Sub-decree banning advertising, promotion and sponsorship approved in February 2011 and will take into effect in August 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Partial ban</td>
<td>Regulations on partial advertising ban in print and television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>Banned except POS &amp; CSR</td>
<td>Under the TC Law (12/2009) and Decree to Implement the Tobacco Advertising Ban (8/2010) tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship are banned except at POS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Banned except POS &amp; CSR</td>
<td>Control of Tobacco Product Regulations, 2004 (and subsequent amendments) provides extensive regulation and banning of advertising, promotion and sponsorship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Banned except POS &amp; CSR</td>
<td>The Tobacco Regulation Act of 2003 (RA9211) prohibits only mass media advertising on TV, radio, print, and outdoor billboards. Advertising and promotions are allowed at POS. Limited sponsorship is allowed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Banned except CSR</td>
<td>The Tobacco Product Control Act of 1992 effectively banned advertising, promotion and sponsorship of tobacco. Note: use of tobacco company name is allowed in CSR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Banned except POS &amp; certain CSR activities</td>
<td>Regulation banning tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship except at POS. In addition, there is a ban on any domestic organization receiving sponsorship from tobacco companies for cultural, art or sporting events related to tobacco advertising</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Tobacco companies have innovated their tactics that effectively reach their targets and found ways to defeat the TAPS bans. **Below-the-line (BTL)** marketing tactics are employed in ASEAN through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities, product placement in movies, dance parties, promotion girls distributing samples and music festivals among others.

**Advertising**

The enormous and ever-expanding popularity of online social media represents a new challenge for governments in the battle to enforce TAPS bans. A recent analysis of British American Tobacco’s activity on Facebook revealed that employees of the company were “energetically promoting BAT and BAT brands” by joining groups, posting photos of brand events, products and promotional items.[3]

Although these social media websites exist on a global scale, evidence of region or country specific activity has been found. Most ASEAN countries have TAPS bans in place, where tobacco companies are forced to use other strategies to reach their target markets.

In less regulated countries such as Indonesia, companies can use multiple forms of advertising and promotion rolled into one major campaign. The Djarum Black campaign “Blackxperience” is a series of live promotional events centred around fast cars and technology, which are clearly targeted at young males. The events are advertised through an interactive website (see image 1), activities on the social media platforms Facebook (Djarum Black has over 42,000 fans) and Twitter, as well as an e-newsletter.

Language barriers act as natural regulators for cross-border advertising via the internet and these kind of sites are closely monitored where contents are found being produced or funded by tobacco companies.

![Image 1](http://www.blackxperience.com/) - with live feeds from their Facebook and Twitter accounts, plus a link to their ‘e-paper’ and promotional merchandise.
Traditional advertising continues in ASEAN countries with less restrictions including but not limited to:

- Media advertising via TV, radio, magazines, newspapers
- Billboards, posters, streamers and tarpaulins erected in streets, restaurants and shops. Malls, airport, police post and cars are also not spared.
- Promotional items bearing cigarette brand or logo, given away such as hats, t-shirts, lighters for people and ash-trays, tissue holder, place/bar mats and large umbrellas for restaurants and bars.

Advertising often takes advantage of annual festivals and events, such as the (see inset) Lao New Year promotional packs to associate their brand with good luck, to capitalise on extra spending at this time and the general good will of the population. Another was the recently held local annual fish festival in a northern province of the Philippines used by Philip Morris Fortune Tobacco Company (PMFTC) to promote its multi colored and kiddie Marlboro packs, by its promo girls who were wearing the brand’s trademark color. Families and teenagers are the usual visitors to local festivals.
Promotions

Raffle contests are a common form of promotion, advertised both at the point-of-sale (POS) and through posters and billboards. The purpose is two-fold:

1) to attract non-smokers by appealing to their desire to win free products, which are usually targeted to their market, for example in Cambodia, Laos and the Philippines (see inset) the prizes include motorbikes, computer, cellphones, laptop and other luxury “cool” items which particularly appeal to youth and the poor.

2) to sustain the habit of current smokers and increase their smoking rate by offering an added incentive to buy more packs, in order to win prizes or, as is the case in Cambodia and Laos, a pack which has cash actually hidden in some of the packs.

Street Promoters by young girls or pretty women dressed in brand colors, are employed by tobacco companies to attend festivals and popular events (see Image 4 & 5), particularly when they release new products. They entice attendees with offers of free merchandise and then engage in a face-to-face marketing speech. Additionally, tobacco companies employ promoters to engage in face-to-face marketing in restaurants and cafes, offering special deals and/or promotional merchandise.

Image 3: Posters promoting cash in cigarette packs in Cambodia (Ara brand of British American Tobacco) and Laos (Dollar brand of Lao Tobacco Company Limited)

Image 4: Cigarette brand promotions during the 2010 water festival in Cambodia. Left to right – Gillman cigarettes (Kahok Company), Black and Djarum cigarettes (Cheng Kav Company), Goldseal/Lips/JustBlack (Goldseal company) and Winston (Indobest group).
Sponsorship

Sponsorship of sporting events has been used as a tobacco marketing tool for decades, targeting the aspirations of young people to become like their sporting role models who either directly or indirectly endorse cigarettes. Even in countries with strict regulations, such as Thailand, sponsorship of sports using tobacco company names, has been a way to circumvent these laws by sponsoring international events and the complications with cross-border legislation that they entail.[4]

In less regulated parts of the ASEAN it is easier for companies to provide sports sponsorship. For example, in Indonesia, the tobacco company PT Djarum sponsored the 2010 basketball league at Universitas Budi Luhur in order to promote to students; the league was named “The LA Lights Campus League”. Local and international badminton competitions in Indonesia are also regular recipients from PT Djarum, the third largest tobacco company in the country.

Music festivals are geared toward youth and give the tobacco companies ample opportunity to market to this demographic and align themselves with a cool rock music image. For example, since 2009 the Indonesian music festival “Rockin’land Java” has been sponsored by Gudang Garam, the second largest manufacturer of cigarettes in that country. Tobacco sponsorship of the festival continues in 2011 despite the outcries of international tobacco control experts and negative coverage by foreign media in 2010.[5] Local and international music concerts, badminton and football also continue to be sponsored in Indonesia by local big tobacco companies.
Sponsorship of sports, arts and cultural events is often one of the means by which tobacco companies conduct Corporate Social Responsibility activities. By financially contributing and broadcasting their “socially responsible” contributions as widely as possible they attempt to avoid TAPS regulations to reach their target audience and sell their products as well as gaining positive business PR.

Image 6: The Marlboro red Rush Racing campaign in the Philippines and Indonesia

Dark Marketing: the new weapon in Big Tobacco’s arsenal

In countries where TAPS regulations are in place the most common challenge has been enforcement. Research conducted by the Hanoi School of Public Health in Vietnam last year found that around 95% of the tobacco merchants surveyed in 10 provinces and cities had violated TAPS bans, most of the time claiming they had no knowledge of the regulations.[6]

However, a new challenge is emerging in the form of dark marketing.

“Dark marketing is the concept of brand building and demand-creation through largely ‘invisible’ (in terms of tracking spenders) and unregulated media: marketing below the radar.” [7]

There are two key elements in dark marketing which make it so successful:

1) A strong and recognisable symbol or idea
2) Deep-seated resonance in a story likely to “tip” in the target market

The Freedom 360 logo (fulfilling element number 1) in Malaysia obviously represents Winston cigarette promotion, which is owned by Japan Tobacco International (JTI). The sole purpose is to distribute cigarettes at the Freedom 360 parties held in key cities around Malaysia, often touted as “exclusive” and very cool parties with music provided by international DJs. Freedom 360 acts as a pseudo-brand, which young people can engage with without knowing that they are engaging with a tobacco company, a kind of accessible gateway into
smoking. Once they are at the party they are offered cigarettes or given the option to buy a pack to gain entrance to the VIP section.

Evidence of these practices has been seen too in Eastern Europe and is one of the first examples of dark marketing to appear on the scene.[8] It is not long before similar instances appeared in Malaysia, Philippines and presumably soon in the rest of ASEAN region. With the fast rise of social media in the region, it is important that governments are made aware of and crack down on these subversive “dark” marketing strategies.

WHO FCTC Recommendations

The recommendations for implementing Article 13 of the FCTC [9] include monitoring and banning of:

- all advertising and promotion, as well as sponsorship, without exemption;
- direct and indirect advertising, promotion and sponsorship;
- acts that aim at promotion and acts that have or are likely to have a promotional effect;
- promotion of tobacco products and the use of tobacco;
- commercial communications and commercial recommendations and actions;
- contribution of any kind to any event, activity or individual;
- advertising and promotion of tobacco brand names and all corporate promotion; and
- traditional media (print, television and radio) and all media platforms, including internet, mobile telephones and other new technologies as well as films.

References

5. Coates, S., Rockers blasted over Indonesia tobacco deal. 28 September, 2010, Agence-France Presse (AFP).
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