Profiting from Death: Exposing Tobacco Industry Tactics in ASEAN Countries

Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA)
June 2008
THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY SURVEILLANCE NETWORK (TISN)

The Tobacco Industry Surveillance Network (TISN), established in end of 2006 by the Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA) in collaboration with the Clearinghouse for Tobacco Control, Universiti Sains Malaysia, conducts tobacco industry surveillance in seven of the 10 ASEAN countries: Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam with financial support from the Rockefeller Foundation and Thai Health Promotion Foundation.

TISN was set up to closely monitor and respond to industry activities in order to plan and develop advocacy actions and recommends for policy changes. For example, in countries where ban on tobacco promotions are non-existent, evidence on such activities should help initiate restrictions. And if bans are already in place the system can track industry violations.

Each participating country uses a standardised tool to collect data on a regular basis. A web-based data reporting system has been developed to compile and record up-to-date information on tobacco industry activities within each country and the region.

Since nearly all the ASEAN countries have ratified the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), they have a very effective tool to advance tobacco control in their respective countries. While this is the case, Parties to the Convention still have to be “alert to any efforts by the tobacco industry to undermine or subvert tobacco control efforts and the need to be informed of activities of the tobacco industry that have a negative impact on tobacco control efforts” as the World Health Organization FCTC preamble advised.

TISN aims to:

• Systematically track industry activities within each country and the ASEAN region.
• Act as an early warning network concerning emerging industry tactics.
• Map the expansion of industry activities in the ASEAN region.
• Mobilize member countries to respond and strategically counter industry activities that are contrary to the FCTC.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms used in this report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFTA</td>
<td>ASEAN Free Trade Agreement</td>
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<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
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<td>BAT</td>
<td>British American Tobacco</td>
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<td>BATM</td>
<td>British American Tobacco (Malaysia)</td>
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<td>CSR</td>
<td>Corporate Social Responsibility</td>
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<td>EU</td>
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<td>FCTC</td>
<td>Framework Convention on Tobacco Control</td>
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<td>JT</td>
<td>Japan Tobacco</td>
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<td>NTA</td>
<td>National Tobacco Administration (Philippines)</td>
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<td>POS</td>
<td>Point of sale</td>
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<tr>
<td>TISN</td>
<td>Tobacco Industry Surveillance Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>TTCS</td>
<td>Transnational tobacco companies</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States (of America)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>YSP</td>
<td>Youth Smoking Prevention (Programme)</td>
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Introduction

The Asian region accounts for about 50 percent of the world’s annual cigarette consumption and regarded by the global tobacco industry as the “most important future market for the global tobacco industry.”

According to the tobacco industry “the Asian area is one of the last regions where tobacco consumption still increases every year, and no business these days can afford to be left out of opportunities these markets bring.”

As an economic region, the population of the 10 ASEAN countries is 14.5 percent more than all the 27 EU countries combined. It has been estimated that almost 31 percent (about 125.8 million) of ASEAN’s adult population are current smokers, accounting for 10 percent of the world’s 1.25 billion adult smokers.

Global smoking-related mortality has risen from an estimated 0.3 million in 1950 to almost 5 million in 2005. The ASEAN region contributes to almost 20 percent of these deaths.

Currently almost all the ASEAN countries (except Indonesia) have ratified the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) which provides the minimum standards for a country to enact measures that can reduce tobacco use.

FCTC Article 13

Since aggressive advertising, promotion and sponsorship activities by the tobacco industry have contributed to an increased tobacco use in the region, ASEAN countries should implement Article 13 of the FCTC. This article states that “Each Party shall, in accordance with its constitution or constitutional principles, undertake a comprehensive ban of all tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship.”

These measures include:

- Prohibit all forms of tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship
- Require that health or other appropriate warnings or messages accompany all tobacco advertising and, as appropriate, promotion and sponsorship
- Restrict the use of direct or indirect incentives that encourage the purchase of tobacco products by the public
- Require, if a Party does not have a comprehensive ban, the disclosure to relevant governmental authorities of expenditures by the tobacco industry on advertising, promotion and sponsorship not yet prohibited
- A comprehensive ban on cross-border advertising, promotion and sponsorship originating from a Party’s territory

The above are minimum standards and Parties are encouraged to implement measures beyond the obligations set out in the FCTC. This report will review the status of tobacco advertising, promotions and sponsorship in seven ASEAN countries and make policy recommendations on implementing FCTC Article 13.
The tobacco industry does not have a single strategy for all countries but rather applies versatile and highly adaptable strategies according to the prevailing situation in each country. It defines its target groups, assesses political will for tobacco control reflected through legislation, the legislative limitations, the economy of the country, and the various stakeholders for determining the way it promotes and markets its products to achieve maximum sales. Although marketing strategies may vary from country to country, they depended largely on the prevailing situations: primarily legislative and economics.

Some of the ways the tobacco industry conducts their marketing activities in ASEAN countries:

- Direct advertisements are those forms of advertisements that communicate directly with the consumers such as putting up tobacco product-related billboards, advertisements in the print and electronic media and advertising at points-of-sale using posters, brand colour counters and functional objects such as ashtrays and parasols with logos.

- Indirect advertisements, also known as brand stretching, are those forms of advertisements that carry tobacco product brand names on non-tobacco products, e.g. the selling of Davidoff coffee, Camel adventure gear, perfumes and luxury products by Dunhill.

- Promotional activities such as sample distribution of cigarettes, offering coupons, contests, and lotteries that come with purchase of cigarettes for the redemption of gifts, distributing promotional items for free, as well as person-to-person promotion.

- Event sponsorship of F1, GT racing, pop concerts, and street parties where cigarette booths and billboards are set up.

- CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) activities such as providing scholarships, supporting environmental projects, and YSP programmes under either company name or brand name.

To delay or discourage the government from enacting stringent and effective tobacco control laws, the industry would propose self-regulation in the form of guidelines as it had done through the International Tobacco Products Marketing Standards introduced by Philip Morris, British American Tobacco, and Japan Tobacco International in September 2001. This guideline essentially contains tepid clauses that are ineffective in reducing tobacco consumption.

In countries where marketing restrictions are enacted, the industry and its representatives have fought to dilute laws (by creating exceptions or legal loopholes) and delay or circumvent implementation (e.g. use of brand colours when brand names are prohibited). Since law-making process takes years to rectify loopholes, the industry usually gets away with its actions and its business as usual. Hence, there is an urgent need for tobacco control legislation in a country to be comprehensive and strictly enforced.

Consequently the current group of TISN members gathered evidences on industry activities and the results, as seen in this report, were collected over a nine-month period starting from January 2007.
### Table 1

The status of tobacco control legislation on advertising, promotion and sponsorship in selected ASEAN countries as in 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cambodia</th>
<th>Indonesia</th>
<th>Laos</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Philippines</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Vietnam</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Outdoor</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<tr>
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**Key**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Banned</td>
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<tr>
<td>NB</td>
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## Table 2

### Tobacco industry activities in selected ASEAN countries observed from January to September 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
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<th>Laos</th>
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<th>Philippines</th>
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<th>Vietnam</th>
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<tr>
<td>Outdoor</td>
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<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✔*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<tr>
<td>Television and radio</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print media</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising at POS</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<tr>
<td>Viral marketing</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect advertisements</td>
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<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<td><strong>B. Promotion</strong></td>
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<td>Promotional events</td>
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<tr>
<td>Product design</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pack design</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lotteries, coupons and contests</td>
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<td>Person-to-person</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>C. Sponsorship</strong></td>
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<td>F1, GT racing, pop concerts, and street parties</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<td><strong>D. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Programmes held under brand names</td>
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<td>2. Programmes held under company names</td>
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<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Key**
- Activity observed
- Activity not observed
* Prior to July 2007
Emerging trends

While the tobacco industry often argues with governments that it needs prolonged time (example 24 months) to change its pack warnings or contracts on advertising, in reality the industry can make rapid changes in its marketing strategies and is versatile in introducing new pack designs which make surveillance in each country a daunting task. Some emerging trends are outlined below.

Profiting from the poor

In poorer countries lacking a strong legislation, it is observed that the industry targets the poor segment of society. For a society gripped by poverty, advertisements that offer gifts or lotteries are attractive. Such industry tactics were observed in Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia and the Philippines. As in Cambodia tobacco industry conduct ‘lucky draws’ which requires a consumer to merely deposit empty cigarette packs with the name and contact number of the smoker.

By this method, the company can entice non-smokers to start purchasing cigarettes and predispose them to smoke, and for smokers to indulge more in their habit. They can also create a huge database of their customers. Without the need to write anything more than their name and address, it encourages the less literate to participate.

Lucky draw used to promote cigarettes in Cambodia.

Person-to-person promotion of cigarettes that comes with a on-the-spot lucky draw (Laos).

An advertisement from the Philippines. Smokers, join now and be taken for a ride by the tobacco industry!

US$441,333 is up for grabs for the 21 million adult smokers in the Philippines … with only one winner.
POS advertising and promotion

In countries where direct and indirect advertising have been banned, POS remains the main marketing channel. Prominent displays on counters and shelves at POS are very common as they are located close to the entrance and can easily be seen by anyone who walks in.

The incorporation of culturally significant items in advertising is because people tend to accept them as an everyday aspect of life. This demonstrates that the industry designs advertisements to target very specific groups of people. As observed in Malaysia, BATM designed posters to target different ethnic groups.

The FCTC recommends that cigarettes are not to be sold in the small packs (‘kiddie packs’ are usually understood to contain less than 20 sticks). However, single sticks are still being sold in Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philippines, and Malaysia allows the sale of packs of a minimum of 14 sticks.

Although the sale of single sticks is banned in Malaysia, certain POS were found to sell them under-the-counter at a price of US$0.29 per stick before July 2007. The retailer, hence, makes a profit of US$3.69 for every 20 sticks as a pack was US$2.11 then.

Among the attractive features used to promote cigarettes were the availability of promotional prices, multipack discounts, and even free gifts with purchase. Promotional prices on cigarettes are given in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. Through promotional prices, it means that certain brands are given a discount for a limited period of time while multi-pack discount can be for two or more packs. In Malaysia, there are the twin-pack promotions whereby two cigarette packs are placed in one sleeve and are sold ‘while stock lasts’ or for about two months.

Smokers in Cambodia and the Philippines are able to obtain free gifts with promotional cigarette purchase. BATM has been circumventing the Malaysian prohibition of ‘gifts’ with cigarette purchase because it charges a token sum for the item – cigarette lighter, aluminium ashtray or some functional object - packaged with cigarette packs.
Colours, designs and flavours

New flavours have made their way into Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. In Malaysia, a tobacco company SKL has introduced exotic flavours such as manufacturing white cigarettes with pipe tobacco, strawberry and cappuccino flavours. JT Camel has recently started marketing for the first time Camel Lights and BATM’s Dunhill is promoting ‘fine cut’ which is suppose to produce a better flavour and more satisfying smoke for a higher price the smoker pays. Then in July 2007, JT Mild Seven marketed Mild Seven in a new category of ‘Lights’ … ‘Super Lights’.

Besides new flavours, the industry produced new innovative packaging designs which inundated the Malaysian market in particular. The use of sleeves over cigarette packs is also found in Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philippines.

After the success of the wallet pack design in Malaysia, it was introduced in other countries including Australia and the Philippines. Although it was eventually banned in Australia, it demonstrated one point that a strategy successfully implemented in one country can be adopted elsewhere. The frequent changing of packaging designs and introduction of new flavours in Malaysia can potentially be part of a strategy in the developing parts of Asia.

Colours and specific graphic patterns can be used to advertise a particular brand as the situations in Vietnam and the Philippines shows. When brand advertising is banned, vehicles or buildings can be painted with brand colours and patterns.
The tobacco industry buys its good public image through CSR activities. Besides improving its public image to the government and the society as a whole, it is also to create a sense of indebtedness.

As it effectively buys 'good corporate citizenship', CSR has been used by the industry in practically every country: Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Tobacco industry sponsorship of cultural and sports events were reported in Indonesia and the Philippines. It is not a surprise that the industry is keen to sponsor these events because cultural events draw large crowds of all ages. In addition, popular sporting events such as soccer and F-1 racing are telecast on television and/or reported in newspapers or magazines which can receive world coverage. Such publicity transgresses national borders and is considered as cross-border advertising.

BAT and PM sponsored Youth Smoking Prevention (YSP) programmes have been conducted in countries including Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines. Studies have shown that YSP programmes though ineffective to discourage youth from smoking, are effective public relations efforts to pacify governments from enacting strict legislations that curb industry promotions.

There are instances whereby the industry carries out sponsorship indirectly through, for example, a foundation. Scholarships and art awards are often done this way.

Education is perceived as the gateway to a better future. Handing out scholarships to students from poor families is another winner of public approval for the industry. Providing scholarships is another means to secure the industry’s position because it knows that the entire family of a student will feel indebted to it. Hence, scholarships are given out under the tobacco company’s foundation with much fanfare and publicity.

Such scholarships have been distributed in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines. In Malaysia for example, children of tobacco farmers were given US$140 each.
There are times when tobacco companies also sponsored message boards, construction of basketball courts, or provide meals in schools.

The tobacco industry has also been participating in environmental projects. In the Philippines, for example, the National Tobacco Administration was involved in a research in turning tobacco stalks into pulp for paper making and the use of tobacco dust for controlling molluscs in fish ponds.

The tobacco industry was also involved in the La Mesa Dam Watershed Project and subsequently one of the streets leading to the watershed area was named after Dunhill. Elsewhere, in Malaysia BATM was involved in a project to plant “5.75 million trees on 11,000 hectares of over-logged forest land in the state of Sabah by 2006.” A similar project was supported by BAT in Vietnam.

It is ironic that despite such ‘environmental’ project, the industry is responsible for deforestation because one of the main materials used in cigarette production is paper – from the cartons to the cigarette wrapper - and much of it are not recycled including the plastic outer wraps.

When tsunami struck this part of Asia in 2005, BAT rebuilt a village in Sri Lanka and its Indonesian staff collected funds for the purpose:

“While in some places the banners with the names of aid agencies are hoisted, similar to advertisements in a sports stadium, in other camps, banners with names of cigarette manufacturers fly, because tobacco companies financed the tents.”
Advertising bans reduce tobacco use while partial bans have been shown to be ineffective. Per capita consumption of cigarettes was reduced by between 14 and 37 percent in countries like Finland, France, New Zealand and Norway where tobacco-advertising bans have been introduced as part of comprehensive tobacco control policies. Whereas, a study by the US National Bureau for Economic Research using data collated from countries with partial bans showed that smoking decline in those countries was by a mere 1 percent.

With comprehensive bans Thailand has been able to reduce the smoking prevalence from about 30 percent in 1981 to about 20 percent in 2004.

The industry circumvents partial advertising bans in the following ways:

- **Sports sponsorships:** When the industry is banned from sports sponsorship, it can still conduct it through proxies.

- **Promotional items:** In Malaysia where free gifts are banned, the tobacco industry sells promotional items for a token sum to circumvent the definition of ‘gift.’

- **Brand stretching:** Tobacco companies may ‘sell’ their stake in luxury product companies to another non-tobacco company which still maintains the brand name.

- **Samples:** In some countries where giving free sampling of cigarettes are banned, promoters were reported to randomly visit entertaining outlets to distribute samples.

- **Entertainment:** A weekly quiz show with Sampoerna’s tagline “Sampurnakan Hari Mu” (Make Your Day Perfect) was shown on Malaysian television. The show initially had the Sampoerna A’s stylized ‘A’ and its red-and-white brand colours for stage design. After complaints were lodged, the TV station was asked to remove the tobacco company logo.

There is a need to be constantly aware of innovations and new strategies by the industry to circumvent the existing regulations and laws.

**Parties recognize that a comprehensive ban on advertising, promotion and sponsorship would reduce the consumption of tobacco products (FCTC Article 13)**
The tobacco industry does not have a single strategy for all countries but rather applies versatile and highly adaptable strategies according to the prevailing situation in each country. It defines its target groups, assesses political will reflected through legislation, legislative limitations, the economy of the country, and the various stakeholders for determining the way it promotes and markets its products to achieve maximum sales. Although marketing strategies may vary from country to country, they depend largely on the prevailing situations: primarily legislative and economics.

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ASEAN happenings
A marketing paradise in Cambodia and Indonesia

Cambodia and Indonesia are two of the ASEAN countries that have no ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship. Hence, these countries are subject to relentless and blatant tobacco-product marketing.

Billboards are common in Cambodia and Indonesia. They can dominate the skyline and reach out to a large segment of the population, including children who commute daily.

In both countries where a significant portion of the population is poor, the scenes of success, wealth and excitement depicted on the tobacco billboards is far from the reality and will remain an unattainable dream. It does not matter if the majority of a country is poor but the picture will inject a dose of euphoria of being in places one may never have the chance of visiting in this lifetime or of imaginary wealth.

Another form of entrapment into a lifetime of nicotine addiction is through tobacco sponsored music concerts during which cigarettes may be sold or distributed for free. Youth and children form the largest group at these events which are usually without charge.

It was discovered that such concerts are not only held in the main capital but are taken to various provinces. Not surprisingly, it was reported that in Cambodia thousands of people will attend such concerts which are also very popular in provinces. Indonesia too, reported similar findings where most of the promotional activities took place in the provinces.

Vehicles ferried sales personnel comprising young men and women to visit even remote villages in Cambodia and Indonesia to promote and sell cigarettes. Cambodia reported that the female sales promoter will try to approach men to promote and sell the cigarettes while male sales promoter will do the same to the opposite gender.

Hence, while Cambodia is waiting for the National Law on Tobacco Control to be passed by the National Assembly, tobacco companies targeted the overwhelmingly large segment of the poor by enabling them to participate in lottery draws when they purchase cigarette packs. Smokers can win prizes just by depositing empty cigarette packs or entry tickets (with the names of the participants filled in) into strategically located boxes. Lotteries are appealing to smokers with low education and who are illiterate.
The other country that is subjected to aggressive tobacco advertising and promotions is Indonesia which earned its position as the most populous country in the ASEAN region and fourth in the world (after China, India, and the US). In the absence of effective tobacco control, it is known that Indonesia is subject to the full barrage of tobacco product marketing ranging from the existence of billboards on street lamp-posts to sponsorship of pop concerts, sports events, and many other marketing strategies, targeting the general population.

It has been estimated that 49 percent of the Indonesians live on less than US$2 per day and 17.8 percent of the population live below poverty line. Free concerts and roadshows are some of the ways to lure the poor to such events where tobacco advertisements, promotions and free sampling are subsequently used to entice potential smokers. Since there is no ban, the tobacco industry has managed to elevate its public image by sponsoring uniforms for school children, school and sport facilities, and building homes for the very poor.
The fact that when the poor use tobacco, their poverty is exacerbated and is lost in the midst of these public image buying activities. Such are deceptive ways to sidestep the issue of poverty being aggravated by nicotine addiction acquired through tobacco use. The government remains unconvinced of the World Bank’s findings that increasing taxes reduces tobacco consumption while at the same time increasing government revenue.\(^6\)

Viral marketing is used in Indonesia. For a concert “The Future Sounds of B1” organised by Marlboro and Centro on 16 May 2007, short text messages were sent out stating: “Show SMS for FREE ENTRY!”

The industry had also sponsored religious events such as the Isra Mi’raj in August, Gema Dzikir Tabligh Akbar in July, Tabligh Akbar in June and the Qur’an Reading Competition in May. This is despite the fact that a growing number of Muslim countries are considering smoking as ‘haram’ (forbidden).

**Plugging loopholes in Laos and the Philippines**

Countries such as Laos and the Philippines have banned direct and indirect advertisements. However advertising and promotion at points-of-sale are still allowed. Posters on walls are one of the most common form of advertisements.

In Laos, local tobacco companies started an advertising blitz to compete with the transnational tobacco companies for the marketing niche. However, they focused on the points-of-sale by providing display lockers made from wood and glass.

Empty cigarette packs can be exchanged for gifts such as cigarette lighters, baseball caps and sports shirts. There are also competitions for smokers to win fabulous prizes. Such gift reedemptions with empty cigarette packs are also taking place in the Philippines. It is one of the most lucrative promotions because smokers are not subjected to any quiz or skill, but merely hand in empty packs.

Local tobacco companies have again shifted their method of advertising to the supplying retailers with parasols printed with cigarette brand names and logos, illuminated signs and the emblazoning taxis with brand names. Larger TTCs with enormous promotional budgets such as Philip Morris and BAT are more sophisticated in their approach by sponsoring more attractive functional store fixtures and illuminated signages.
In Asian countries cultural elements are vital for the inhabitants of a country to associate with. Laos is therefore not an exception as 'A' brand used the photographs of beauty contest winners dressed in cultural costume for the production of its poster calendar. This is an excellent way to advertise because calendars are meant to be posted at a place of easy reference for the entire year.

Philippines had cinema and outdoor advertising banned from July 2007. Currently only advertising at the POS is allowed, the industry has utilised this avenue extensively by placing varied advertisements. It also sponsored the painting of the POS in easily identifiable brand colours such as green for Hope. This is to sensitisise consumers to equate brand colours to brands in anticipation that eventually advertising is disallowed at POS and also, perhaps, the ban on display of cigarette packs as in Thailand.

Advertisements are permitted at POS (Philippines).
Parasols are also seen in the Philippines.

Examples of non-tobacco products carrying tobacco brand names – or brand extension – are evident in Malaysia and the Philippines. Marlboro Classics sell attire and fashion accessories in the Philippines as well as having cashboxes made in the shape of an oversized cigarette with Marlboro printed on it.

Viral marketing is another strategy seen in the Philippines. Although sent anonymously, these SMS messages clearly promote tobacco use.

For example mobile phone owners received messages such as:

- Kung si James may Hope.
- Si Kris may Phillip.
- “Potatoes, when consumed in der raw state, rapidly converted to glucose dat raises insulin levels bcoz of its simple sugar. Wen cooked n high temperatures like french fries ,dey produce large amount of free radicals n d body causing aging, clotting, inflammation, cancer, weight gain, 1 french fry is worse dan 1 cigarette.” Have a great day!

The first two SMS messages refer to the names of celebrities in the Philippines. The name Hope, for example, is also the popular cigarette brand in the Philippines and ‘Phillip’ suggests ‘Philip Morris’.

Industry sponsored concerts in the Philippines.

Viral marketing was used to promote Hope in the Philippines.
Circumventing the law in creative ways in Malaysia and Vietnam

Even with advertising ban, the industry has widely used the pack as an advertising medium to promote their brands. Hence, it is possible to observe many creative pack designs in these two countries and they are expected to spread to other countries as tobacco laws in these countries become more stringent.

With a ban on direct and indirect advertising, the industry in Vietnam has resorted to providing parasols with brand colours at POS in order to circumvent the ban.

Female sales promoters dressed in clothes of tobacco brand-colours are occasionally spotted in Vietnam. They conduct one-to-one sales promotion for Dunhill and 555.

Soon after the industry’s Tabinfo 2005 exposition in Malaysia, a new packaging design in the region – wallet pack – was introduced. It has the potential to circumvent pictorial health warnings because it comprises two sections that is hinged along one side that allows it to open up like a wallet (hence its name).

If pictorial health warnings are required to be printed on the major surfaces of cigarette packs, tobacco advertisements can still be printed on the inside without violating current tobacco control regulations.
Cigarette pack designs have dominated the market strategy since early 2006 with an average of a new design once every two months. Besides creative designs, some emulating the graphically creative ‘perfume bottle’ packaging approach (recommended during the Tabinfo 2005), some designs came with sleeves or inserts, as wallet packs, soft packs with crush-proof plastic casing, and most recently in printed zipper bags to ‘seal in the flavour’ and to protect from moisture.

Dunhill luxury products is continuing its business at the Star Hill Gallery, Kuala Lumpur despite the fact that BATM claimed to have sold its stake in 2002 to a Swiss company which was found to be partially owned by BAT (UK). JT has stepped up its indirect advertising of Camel through Camel Active which is also a collection of ‘adventure gear’ and attire for the ‘adventurous’.

On its way and exemplary - but still leaky - Thailand

Thailand has a comprehensive tobacco control policy. It has instituted the pictorial health warnings on cigarette packs. It is one of the pioneers in the region to impose ‘Sin Tax’ on tobacco and alcohol.

According to the Thailand Tobacco Product Control Law, all forms of tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship are banned. However, the tobacco industry (both domestic and international) still try to find ways to promote their companies by organizing many CSR activities.
These activities are run under company names. As we all know the key objective of these CSR programme is to establish friendship and network with civil society, government officers as well as policy makers.

More recently, Thailand enforced a ban on the display of cigarette packs at POS. However, retailers have been flouting the law by ‘absent-mindedly’ leaving the opaque storage cabinet doors ajar.

Before and after the ban on display of cigarette packs at POS in Thailand.

After the banning of cigarette pack display at POS from September 2005 in Thailand, retailers ‘conveniently’ forget to close the door of the cigarette cabinets. Whenever they are approached, they would just close the door … but not for long.
References


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About SEATCA

The Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA) works closely with key partners in ASEAN member countries to generate local evidence through research programmes, to enhance local capacity through advocacy fellowships, and to be the catalyst in policy development through regional fora and in-country networking.

By adopting a regional policy advocacy mission, it has supported member countries to ratify and implement the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). SEATCA has been in existence since 2001 to act as supportive base for government and non-government tobacco control workers and advocates in the SEA region, primarily to Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia and Vietnam. Currently, the alliance has formally extended to three more countries of Indonesia, Lao PDR, and the Philippines.

SEATCA was awarded the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office's 2004 World No Tobacco Day Award in recognition of its major contribution to tobacco control in the region. “SEATCA has emerged as a major catalyst for advances made in tobacco control in the South East Asia Region, especially with regard to policy and legislation.”

- Dr Shigeru Omi, Regional Director for the Western Pacific Regional Office at the presentation of 2004 World No Tobacco Day Awards.

SEATCA Objectives

1. To form a supportive base for government and non-government tobacco control workers in their efforts to promote the implementation of effective evidence-based national tobacco control measures.

2. To encourage greater cooperation between tobacco control workers at national and regional levels and to act as a regional leader on issues which affect all countries in the region.

3. To facilitate information transfer and the sharing of experience and knowledge, to organize capacity building exercises, and to coordinate national and regional initiatives in tobacco control work.

4. To strengthen national tobacco control movements and to bring mainland Southeast Asian issues into the international tobacco control arena.

SEATCA Activities

1. Building local evidence through Collaborative research programme which provides funding, capacity building training, mentorship and platform to disseminate research studies to policy makers. The products from this programme are local evidences and knowledge for policy development.

2. Capacity building which focuses on strengthening local capacity on policy development through programmes named ASEAN fellowship programme and national tobacco control working group.

3. Regional network for policy development through SEATCA regional forum which highly responds to in-country policy movement. SEATCA organizes two regional fora per year focusing on policy issues like tobacco tax, health warnings, best practice on advertising ban, etc.

For more information  www.seatca.org
"Working together to promote the implementation of effective evidence-based tobacco control measures in Southeast Asia"

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