

TECHNICAL NOTE

Future perspectives for strengthening the tobacco industry fight indicators

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Abstract

The tobacco industry, as a “commercial” determinant of health, uses various tactics to increase the number of smokers at the global level. Governments, with the support of the tobacco control community, should focus on reversing the tobacco endgame. Watching out for industry manipulations with objective and well-known tools might be helpful. Although WHO-MPOWER is a frequently used assessment tool to define the tobacco control capacity of the countries, it may not give “objective” messages to assess the situation of tobacco industry interference. On the other hand, the Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index (GTIII) is a better indicator to understand and emphasize the tobacco industry interference. Comparing these two assessment tools might be helpful in deciding which one to use. In this regard, we aimed to compare selected countries’ tobacco control status using MPOWER and GTIII indicators. Data from twenty-four countries were included in the study. We found that a country that fully covers the MPOWER criteria can be open to industry interference based on the GTIII values. This discrepancy highlights the need for more comprehensive tools to assess the status of tobacco interference. Besides the current ones, the development of new indicators with a transdisciplinary approach might also be helpful in the tobacco endgame.

Keywords: Tobacco Industry, Tobacco Control, Tobacco, MPOWER, Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index (GTIII), Age-standardized Estimates of Tobacco Use

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INTRODUCTION

As a global health threat, the tobacco industry (TI) is known to be a commercial determinant of health¹. The global tobacco control community and the governments have crucial roles in taking preventive actions against TI.

As the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) Article 5.3. targets to eliminate the harms of the TI, watching TI might be helpful to be proactively responsive to the threats. In this regard, we have practical tools which we can use to watch TI. As a strategy tool, the MPOWER document pointed out the importance of TI struggle when developed in 2008.² A more recent tool is the Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index (GTIII).³ It is used to assess the interference level of the TI in tobacco control activities in a country. Somehow, it gives an idea to understand the implementation of the WHO FCTC Article 5.3 capacity of the country. Despite the availability of these tools, various missing points in assessing the TI interference still exist. In this paper, we aimed to discuss the missing points of the current TI interference indicators and to emphasize the need for the development of new indicators for a stronger tobacco industry fight.

METHODS

Items of the MPOWER strategies linked with TI interference and the GTIII values have been used for the selected countries in this study. MPOWER values were included for the years 2007, 2019 and 2020. GTIII ranking was included for 2021 (Table 1). The GTIII was obtained from the “Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index 2021”, and the MPOWER scores were obtained from “The Tobacco

Atlas” and “World Health Organization, The Global Health Observatory”. Also, tobacco consumption values were obtained from “Age-standardized estimates of current tobacco use, tobacco smoking and cigarette smoking data, The Global Health Observatory, World Health Organization .^{3,4,5,6}

MPOWER measures aim to assist in the country-level implementation of effective interventions to reduce tobacco demand contained in the WHO FCTC. The MPOWER measures include six steps: “M”- Monitor tobacco use and prevention policies, “P”- Protect people from tobacco smoke, “O”- Offer help to quit tobacco use, “W”- Warn about dangers of tobacco, “E”- Enforce bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, and “R”- Raise taxes on tobacco.² Among the six, step “E” is thought to have a strong link with the tobacco industry.

The GTIII shows the interference level of the industry in tobacco control activities. In other words, the indicator is believed to show how a government is “realistic” in the implementation of WHO FCTC Article 5.3. The GTIII 2021 is based on publicly available information on tobacco industry interference in 80 countries and their respective governments’ responses to this interference. The lower the index score, the lower the tobacco industry interference level.³

The comparisons have been done by using the data of the countries with the lowest (n=10) and the highest (n=10) GTIII scores in 2021. In addition, data for Brazil and Türkiye, which WHO stated as the only two countries to fully implement all the MPOWER measures at the highest level of success, were also examined. Countries with four big tobacco companies (USA, UK, Japan and China) were included

in the list. In conclusion, 24 countries were evaluated.

FINDINGS

As seen in Table 1, the indicators do not define a clear position for the country to reflect the ‘current’ situation against TI. For example, Brunei Darussalam (BD) seems to be the best at blocking TI. Nevertheless, the consumption frequency in BD is not the lowest on the list. In France, although the level of industry interference is low and the percentage of compliance with advertising bans is high, the

frequency of tobacco consumption is high. The TI interference level is high in both Brazil and Türkiye, which are seen as the most successful countries to implement MPOWER strategies. The Dominican Republic, which has a high level of TI interference and is insufficient to implement the bans on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship, has one of the lowest frequency of tobacco consumption. Uganda and Palau increased their MPOWER scores. Although MPOWER scores in Türkiye, Argentina, and Georgia increased, three countries still had low GTIII scores.

Table 1. GTIII ranking, compliance with three dimensions of MPOWER including compliance with adv bans, enforce bans on tobacco adv, and tobacco consumption in selected countries.

Country name and GTIII ranking of the country (2021) ³	MPOWER components			
	Compliance with advertising bans (%) ^{4*}	Enforce bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, 2020 ^{5**}	Enforce bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, 2007 ^{5**}	Tobacco consumption (%) (WHO, 2019) ⁶
1.Brunei Darussalam	High	4	4	16.2
2.New Zealand	High	4	4	14.2
3.UK	Not available	4	4	16.1
4.France	High	4	4	33.6
5.Uganda	Medium	5	2	8.9
6.Netherlands	High	4	4	22.6
7.Mongolia	High	5	4	29.6
8.Kenya	High	5	5	11.5
9.Iran	High	5	5	14.0
10. Palau	High	4	2	17.9
43. Brazil	High	5	4	13.2
62. Türkiye	Medium	5	2	30.9
68. China	High	4	4	25.7
68. USA	Not available	2	2	23.4
71. Argentina	High	4	2	24.9
72. Zambia	Not applicable	2	2	14.6
72. Jordan	Moderate	5	4	34.6
74. Romania	High	4	4	28.4
74. Italy	High	4	4	23.3

Table 1. (Continued) GTIII ranking, compliance with three dimensions of MPOWER including compliance with adv bans, enforce bans on tobacco adv, and tobacco consumption in selected countries.

76. Georgia	High	4	2	31.7
77. Indonesia	Not applicable	2	2	37.2
78. Japan	Not applicable	2	2	20.5
79. Switzerland	Medium	2	2	25.7
80. Dominican Republic	Not applicable	2	2	10.9

* Data was taken before the site (<https://tobaccoatlas.org>) was updated.

** 1 = Data not reported, 2 = Complete absence of ban, or ban that does not cover national television (TV), radio and print media, 3 = Ban on national TV, radio and print media only, 4 = Ban on national TV, radio and print media as well as on some but not all other forms of direct and/or indirect advertising, 5 = Ban on all forms of direct and indirect advertising.

In brief, using only these indicators may not give us the opportunity to objectively assess the TI status.

COMMENT

The tobacco industry is almost the major obstacle in achieving tobacco control. Today, very close follow-up and proactive blowback interventions are needed to make the struggle against the TI 'realistic'. Monitoring the trends and invasion levels of the TI can be helpful in this regard. However, the WHO-MPOWER strategy document is basically assessing the tobacco demand side and is almost inefficient in assessing in a comprehensive and permanent approach.

Although WHO-MPOWER strategies have been used for many years to follow up and compare different aspects of tobacco control, it seems, they are not 100% sufficient to reveal the supply needs of tobacco control including interference of the TI. New indicators meeting these missing points are recommended to be developed with the aim of **#endgame**. The Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index is one of the recent tools which has been developed compatible with this aim; however, it does not represent the global situation as only a limited number of countries are included. In this sense, the analysis should be extended to all countries in the world to

see the global situation in a more objective manner. Studies on similar subject give important messages. For example, the study of Yuri Lee et al. -which aims to investigate the impact of tobacco industry interference on the implementation and management of tobacco control and the tobacco epidemic using the TIII and MPOWER and adult daily smoking prevalence in 30 countries-emphasizes that national governments and global society should counter tobacco industry interference to protect public health and advance tobacco control policies.⁷ Additionally, transdisciplinary features⁸ of health (and disease) should be given priority in this long and challenging journey.

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