Smoke packaging

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Australia is one of the first nations to introduce plain packaging that is mandatory for all tobacco and cigarette products. The tobacco plain packaging act of 2011 prohibited any use of logos, colors and brands on tobacco and cigarette products and imported, manufactured and packaged products in Australia. Since the measure was introduced five more members of the world trade organization have in turn requested a settlement of the dispute with Australia. There is a large interest in the outcome of the given disputed that are pending in the world trade organization (Akosile, 2015). Based on different kinds of research that have been undertaken, the findings indicate the policy could reduce the prevalence of smoking in Australia. Thus, plain packaging should as a matter of fact remain compulsory in Australia.

The market for cigarettes in Australia is relatively small, and most of the tobacco products that are sold are domestically manufactures and rarely imported. The primary concern of the industry is the effect that the introduction of plain packaging in Australia would have on the global market. If the policy remains in the world trade organization or any other dispute forum, it may encourage an olive revolution globally with the dissemination of drab olive plain packaging that has huge warnings that are health related for tobacco products. The result would be the deprivation of the industry of the control over marketing and advertising where their profits lie.

The act was legislated with the intention of improving the public health by regulating the packaging of tobacco products. The law’s primary purpose is to reduce the smoking rate in Australia. Removing the attractive and luring nature of branded cigarettes can reduce the desire for people to smoke (Alomes& Walker, 1985). Some brands are associated with a particular class thus consumers are sometimes drawn to cigarettes due to the specific brands. Thus removing the class from the cigarettes and tobacco might discourage people from purchasing the items since they no longer have the distinct factor that was drawing them in the first instance. Research has shown that many young people engage in smoking due to the aesthetic beauty of the packaging of certain brands. Thus, if the aesthetic beauty is removed the correlating effect is a reduction in tobacco smoking.

Tobacco is considered to be the only product that is legalized and that can cause the death of up to a half of the total number of people who use it. It does not contribute to one’s health in any given way but caused more harm in the long run. Users mainly smoke as a recreational activity while others use it as a coping mechanism when faced with life’s stressing situations. Thus, the packaging policy is more of an initiative to reduce the prevalence of smoking, the risks it is associated with, and the economic and social costs together with the inequalities that it causes. The packaging accompanied with health warnings and taxation can reduce smoking by ten percent in the next five years (Burki, 2014). However, the expected reduction of smoking is a probability not a proven fact. There is thus an issue that is raised on whether the change in packaging will inadvertently reduce the rate of smoking as compared to increasing taxes and health warnings on the package.

The tobacco companies and stakeholders are stringently against the packaging policy claiming it’s not a useful measure but inly seeks to weaken the profits of individual companies. If there is no differentiation, then competition will not exist, and thus, profits will not be realized. Since tobacco has been legalized as a commodity that can be sold and produced, then the right of the companies to package it in a way that represents their brand is in line according to the stakeholders. It would be more sensible to control the packaging of products that are not acceptable to be sold in the market. If the government is putting measures of control on one item that is deemed unhealthy, then it should also apply the same standard action on other issues. Others have suggested that tobacco smoking should be banned altogether instead of setting up measures to discourage its use("Department of Health | Tobacco key facts and figures", 2016). In response, the Australian government states that it is impractical to ban a product that many people are addicted to while other governments all over the world have legalized it and accepted that it is not ethical to encourage tobacco use. Thus legislating laws to prevent all forms of promotion is a more efficient measure.

The government had previously tried other strategy such as taxation and use of warnings that are big and graphic which did not achieve the desired effect that they were working towards. The government then decided to prohibit any form of tobacco advertising in the early nineties, but it also did not yield the expected results. Therefore, plain packaging was a last resort for the government after trying all measures that were within their ability and the law. While on the other hand after being heavily taxed and being denied the right to advertise, packaging was the only market tool that tobacco companies had remained with as a means of retaining and attracting customers.

Packaging homogenous products is essential for consumers to be able to differentiate products. Tobacco companies use branding to promote their products through the branding and different designs which creates identification, differentiation and ultimately preference which creates competition between different manufacturers. Advertising makes it possible for consumers to know an individual product and brand exists thus increasing the influence particular goods and brands have on consumers. Research has found that plain packaging has reduced brand image associations that were priory made based on the brand design elements. Moreover, the plain packaging leads to the picture of a smoker being less attractive as it was before since they are just smoking a cigarette and not a brand. Additionally research indicated that colors affect sensory ratings which in turn affect the consumer’s perception of different products. Certain colors such as white, green and blue menthol tones of cigarette are associated with something soothing and refreshing. Thus, customers are more likely to purchase such a product due to the perception they have of the effect that the cigarette will have on them. In that case, most consumers believe they will be refreshed and soothed if they smoke it is all a psychologically driven. Plain packaging thus covers all the given designs and colors of different brands leaving little room for imaginations and perceptions that can draw them to purchase the product. The thought of a cigarette being a couple of tobacco sticks wrapped in paper then burnt for its contents to be inhaled is not a very appealing imagery (Media, 2015).

The tobacco companies in protest also seem to present a couple of strong arguments that are against plain packaging. One is that no sufficient evidence shows the measure will achieve its purpose of reducing smoking thus it does not fare to base the fate of the industry on probability. Secondly, the policy is damaging to the retailers business thus not only the manufacturers are affected but also every middleman involved in the firm. This means many people will experience losses on a decision that is not certainly proved that it will work. Thirdly competition will be ultimately diminished with plain packaging increasing illicit trade, and eventually, the international agreements made on intellectual property will, as a result, be breached.

In response to the above stated arguments, the cancer council released a published review that gives the evidence that finds out that plain packaging does, in fact, reduce the prevalence of smoking among the youth. Findings include how imagery coloring alters perception causing consumers to believe one brand is better than the other while in real sense they contain the same ingredients. Removing misleading words such as silver, gold and smooth reduces the belied that cigarettes are not harmful ("Mitchell, Andrew --- "Australia's Move to Plain Packaging of Cigarettes and its WTO Compatibility" [2010] UMelbLRS 8", 2016). Also, young people find plain packaging as less palatable, lower quality and less satisfying compared to cigarettes that are branded. Thus, the study further reinforces that plain packaging does, in fact, alter the perceptions concerning the status and character of people who smoke branded cigarettes. Additionally, the firm opposition of the tobacco companies shows they do believe that the given policy will reduce company profits and sales. Thus, since there is substantial evidence to support plain packaging the government is adamant in using the given measure as a strategy to the overall purpose of reducing tobacco use.

In conclusion, the Australian government does seem to be heading in the correct direction since based on the evidence provided by research the policy is more likely than not to produce the expected results. On the other hand, the rights of the tobacco companies seem to be infringed in a way, and a standard measure is not being used on all products that are deemed as harmful to consumer’s health. However even though their rights to having a trademark are taken away what matters more are the health of people it is a priority above all other things such as profits. Thus, plain packaging of cigarettes should remain compulsory in Australia, and other nations should follow their example.

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