Reviewer's report

Title: The potential impact of plain packaging of cigarette products among Brazilian young women: an experimental study

Version: 3 Date: 1 April 2012

Reviewer: Janet Hoek

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General Comments:
Plain packaging is a highly topical area and the authors have led several important studies that extend our knowledge of how this policy might affect smokers and smoking prevalence. It is also helpful to see research using samples from nations other than Canada, Australia and New Zealand, where the bulk of the empirical work has been conducted. I have some comments that I hope will be useful to the authors.

Specific Comments - Major
I would be interested to know whether brand familiarity influenced the estimates; given smokers prefer the brand they use (otherwise they’d use another brand), was there any evidence that existing brand use influenced the estimates?

Some of the results could be discussed further as the relationship between the plain-with descriptors (PWD) and plain – no descriptors (PND) is not consistent across all brands used as test stimuli. For example, as far as ‘appeal’ goes, some brands have very similar estimates for PWD and PND, but other brands have three times higher scores for PWD than PND, while, for yet others, PND has a higher score than PWD. This variation is evident across several other attributes and suggests factors other than the level of branding present are influencing the estimates. Aggregating the results across all brands obscures these differences, which I suspect could be due to brand familiarity (general awareness of the brand) and brand experience (brand user). Both the results and the discussion should acknowledge the overall patterns (current focus of both sections) as well as the individual deviations from this (not currently noted). If the differences are attributable to brand familiarity and progressive removal of brand elements has a clear relationship with diminished attribute association, we would have additional evidence that PP could influence existing smokers. Other things being equal, I would expect to see more ambiguity in responses to unfamiliar brands (where respondents would know less about the experiential attributes they were being asked to evaluate).

Specific Comments - Minor
I would find it helpful to have some information about overall smoking prevalence in Brazil (beyond the statement that Brazil it is a large and important global tobacco market, p. 3); many readers may have a limited understanding of this
market. The authors suggest 13.1% of women 15+ smoke and, if I interpret them correctly, 6.4% of women aged 15-24 smoke (p 1). If correct, this looks to be a low smoking prevalence relative to other countries, and merits further comment (particularly given the sample records prevalence of around 28%).

The literature review omits several recent and important references that I would expect to see included (references provided below). Given how quickly the research in this field is developing, I think it is important to refer to recent research beyond the authors’ own work.

As a suggestion for future research, it would be interesting to retain the stylised brand logo as a treatment option (as Wakefield et al. did in their initial study). Could the authors explain why they included both pack shape and branding level (as they note on p. 10, it is not possible to tell which variable affected the outcomes)? Perhaps future research could separate out these variables? The authors do not include suggestions for future research in their concluding comments and could perhaps note how some of the limitations they have thoughtfully outlined could be addressed and the study itself extended.

If possible, it would be helpful to support claims about ‘female’ oriented cigarettes with references to industry documents (Stacey Anderson’s 2005 paper with Ling and Glantz would be a useful reference here).

I’m not familiar with demographic classifications in current use in Brazil but assume the categories provided reflect measures used in, for example, Census instruments (or other national survey instruments)?

Overall, a well-written paper that extends our understanding of how PP could apply internationally.

References


Journal (AMJ), 19(3), 174-180. doi: 10.1016/j.ausmj.2011.05.003

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I have no competing interests in respect of any of the questions posed above. However, I note I have worked on a committee with Professor Hammond and am involved in a funding application with him. He has also provided advice to a student of mine and is an author on an output arising from her work. I do not believe these links have influenced my comments, but note them so the editors are aware they exist.