Reviewer's report

Title: Who calls the shots in tobacco control policy? Policy monopolies of pro and anti-tobacco interest groups across six European countries.

Version: 1 Date: 11 Feb 2019

Reviewer: Jennifer McKell

Reviewer's report:

I liked the premise of this paper, examining the role of powerful interest groups in policy-making relating to tobacco control, and I found a lot of the data presented fascinating. I also felt convinced by the arguments set out in the discussion and conclusions. However, I struggled with the way in which the findings were presented. As I was reading through this section, I felt I was reading a list of illustrative examples simply transposed from interview transcript to manuscript. This section lacked a narrative to guide the reader through the findings making it feel incoherent and difficult to follow. As I read on, I was pleased to find that some of the analysis and interpretation I had looked for in the results was in the discussion, but it was frustrating to have to wait until this point in the paper to find these. Additionally, the lack of a strong narrative in the findings, to my mind, meant that important and interesting data was buried in the detail. The quotes from the Italian civil servant and the German civil society advocate under the section on transparency and the FCTC were particularly powerful yet recognition of this important evidence was muted.

Additionally, I am confused why there was so little reference to actual policy-making relating to display bans within the findings, considering it was selected as an example of tobacco control policy for comparison earlier in the paper. By the end of the paper, the reader is no wiser as to the outcome of policy-making in relation to display bans in individual countries. Instead, I think it would be helpful to anchor the findings in relation to actual events and if possible, to also include some reference to the wider context of tobacco control in each country.

I felt the methods could also benefit from some minor revisions in relation to the description of the interviews and the analysis. I think it would be clearer to say that the interviews were started with an open question about the current status of a display ban in individual countries rather than saying that interviews started with a narrative part, as there is no information about what this contained. I also think it would be helpful to provide an overview of the topic themes discussed rather than simply saying they were related to the theory on policy monopolies. In terms of the analysis, it would be good to explain why the codebook was developed by looking at Finnish transcripts only - important as this was presented as a cross-country comparison. Also, I feel
there needs to be clarity about the purpose of using the Framework method, as the priority it has currently suggests its use provides a theoretical approach.

Overall, I found this an insightful and important piece of work and I would very much like to see it published after some important re-working of the findings and methods sections.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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