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Unrestricted tobacco marketing prompts young adults to smoke in an emerging market: a study of emotional responses

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ABSTRACT

Despite tobacco manufacturers' social responsibility claims about switching to less harmful products and strict marketing regulations, smoking is still being heavily promoted in emerging markets. This strategic paradox is highlighted by this research that provides fresh insights into young adult smokers' exposure and reaction to unrestricted tobacco marketing in Vietnam. A survey with 440 responses tested a conceptual model relating the impacts of unregulated tobacco promotion on emotional responses (i.e. pleasure, arousal and dominance – PAD), and subsequent smoking approach behaviours. This model, tested using partial least square structural equation modelling, proved appropriate and well-explained by most constructs. The results demonstrated significant positive impact of tobacco marketing on young smokers' emotions, particularly pleasure and arousal that increased smoking approach behaviours, such as smoking, tobacco purchase intention, seeking tobacco-related information and communicating with others about smoking. The need for more enforced evidence-based marketing regulations is highlighted and future research avenues discussed.

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Tobacco marketing exposure; pleasure-arousal-dominance; irresponsible marketing; tobacco regulations; young smokers; emerging markets

Introduction

This study responds to the call for more research in the marketing domain that seeks to understand the negative impact of irresponsible marketing strategies (e.g. tobacco marketing activities) on harmful product consumption (e.g. Greenland et al., 2023). The majority of existing harmful product promotion research is from non-marketing fields, such as medicine, nutrition and public health (e.g. Bennett et al., 2020). Consequently, public health and marketing regulations based on such research often overlook the specific marketing design mechanisms that increase harmful consumption (Greenland et al., 2023). This study addresses this important gap by specifying how unrestricted tobacco marketing in an emerging market encourages young smokers' smoking behaviours directly and indirectly via emotional response, which is an important outcome of marketing and advertising strategies (Loureiro, 2015). This study can, therefore, help

regulators work out how best to restrict the use of specific youth-appealing tactics used by harmful product marketers (Moran et al., 2021).

Smoking-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including cancers, cardiovascular disease, and chronic respiratory illness, are the major cause of ill-health and death globally (Delobelle, 2019). Most countries consequently have marketing controls restricting promotion and advertising (Henriksen, 2012), and such regulation is a proven driver of smoking reduction and corresponding public health improvement (Michaelidou et al., 2010). Despite the health benefits, most emerging markets with rapidly growing populations have limited tobacco marketing regulations and consequently higher smoking rates (Lee et al., 2012).

While the tobacco industry conveys global health responsibility with claims of transitioning to less harmful non-combustible tobacco products such as e-cigarettes (Delobelle, 2019, Edwards et al., 2022), traditional smoking remains its main revenue source, especially in emerging markets. For example, in Vietnam, less than 3% of 2021 tobacco sales were non-combustible tobacco products (Euromonitor International, 2021). In such markets, the tobacco industry has continued to promote traditional smoking to fast-growing younger adult populations, presenting a 'time bomb' for future NCDs (Greenland, 2019).

The greatest public health challenge and opportunity therefore remains reducing smoking in emerging markets (e.g. Gilmore et al., 2011). In these markets with often lenient tobacco regulations, it is critical to enhance understanding of how marketing continues to encourage smoking, to expose industry strategies and to enable more effective legislation (Delobelle, 2019, Greenland, 2015, Huong et al., 2017). This study makes important practical and theoretical contributions by deepening such understanding, via an empirical investigation of the emotional and behavioural impact of unrestricted tobacco promotion on young smokers in Vietnam.

Importantly, this study develops and validates a unique model illustrating how exposure to unrestricted tobacco advertising and promotion communications leads to emotional and behavioural responses towards smoking. While the significant effects of even limited exposure to tobacco marketing stimuli on young people's smoking behaviour are well-recognised (e.g. Braverman & Aarø, 2004, Strong and Eftychia, 2006), there is a dearth of research that has explained the mechanisms through which it appeals to smokers and affects their smoking behaviour (Moran et al., 2021). The model validated in this study can serve as a theoretical basis for future research into the effects of marketing on harmful consumer behaviour, such as smoking.

Moreover, this study's focus on Vietnam addresses the knowledge gap about marketing strategies and their impact on youth smoking behaviours in emerging markets (Isip & Calvert, 2020). The tobacco industry has long recognised these as 'growth engine markets' (e.g. Greenland, 2012, p. 5) and critical for transnational tobacco companies seeking to exploit growing (young) populations, rising incomes and lax regulations (Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, 2021). The context of Vietnam is specifically worth examining since the tobacco industry, despite the prohibition of tobacco marketing and advertising, is still able to utilise alternative distinctive advertising and promotion methods that attract new smokers and increase consumption (Huong et al., 2017).

Literature review

Smoking prevalence, marketing regulations, and unrestricted tobacco advertising and promotion

Like many evolving Southeast Asian markets, Vietnam's smoking rate is high and far higher for men (44.3%) compared with women (0.9%) (Euromonitor International, 2021). Vietnam's tobacco marketing regulations have been in place since 2000, with stronger controls since 2013 that supposedly prohibit all tobacco advertising and promotion (Huong et al., 2017). Since 2013, while Vietnam's male smoking rate has declined by 3.5% (from 47.8%), the amount of male smokers has increased from 15,321.6 million in 2013 to 15,456.0 million in 2022 due to population growth (based on Euromonitor International, 2022).

Despite Vietnam's legislated marketing restrictions, tobacco advertising and industry promotion has actually continued in the following ways:

- promotion across various media channels (E-News, 2021, Huong et al., 2017), such as
 - private text messages to customers' phones, and advertisements run on virtual platforms in smokers' social media groups to promote cigarettes (E-News, 2021)
 - tobacco-related advertising via billboards, as well as point-of-sale posters and merchandising (Huong et al., 2017, Huy, 2021)
 - quarterly manufacturer company updates, such as multi-page spreads in leading magazines (Huy, 2021)
- tobacco industry CSR initiatives, including sponsorship of sustainability-related causes reported by the media, such as
 - Vinataba (Vietnam's biggest tobacco manufacturer) donated VND 100 billion (USD 4.2 million) to Vietnam's COVID-19 Vaccine Fund, as announced at a high-profile launch attended by the prime minister and reported across media (Vinataba, 2021)
- employing third parties primarily to exploit legislative loopholes, such as using young attractive representatives to give out free cigarette samples and other merchandise often at events, bars and clubs (Huong et al., 2017, Huy, 2021).

Modelling the emotional and behavioural impacts of tobacco marketing communications

Environmental psychologists Mehrabian and Russell (1974) developed the pleasure-arousal-dominance (PAD) model to explain the impact of physical environments on users' emotions and corresponding approach-avoidance behaviours. Pleasure is the degree a person feels happy or satisfied, arousal is the degree they feel excited or stimulated, and dominance is the degree they feel in control and free to act. In more pleasant and arousing but less domineering and controlling environments, people are more likely to exhibit approach behaviours such as desire to visit and remain in the setting, as well as willingness to communicate with others.

Adaptations of the PAD model have been used by marketers to evaluate the emotional impact of retail and service delivery settings on consumers, both in-store (e.g. Greenland

& McGoldrick, 2005) and online (e.g. Hsieh et al., 2021). Other studies have adapted PAD dimensions to evaluate emotional and behavioural responses to other marketing elements, including promotion in print, video and online media (Beig & Khan, 2022, Jaeger et al., 2021, Poels & Dewitte, 2008, Wen et al., 2022). In these studies, positive emotional impacts correspond to approach behaviours relating to purchase intention (Wen et al., 2022), word-of-mouth (WOM) communication, and the degree that consumers talk about the brand/product, brand loyalty (Beig & Khan, 2022) and brand engagement (Loureiro et al., 2020).

In support of the original PAD model, other studies have highlighted positive relationships between approach behaviour and higher pleasure and arousal ratings in response to marketing stimuli (e.g. Loureiro et al., 2020, Wen et al., 2022). Although results in relation to dominance and approach behaviours have been mixed. For example, Jaeger et al. (2021) found dominance the least important PAD dimension, while Wen et al. (2022) found it the strongest purchase intention predictor.

In terms of future PAD investigations, Loureiro et al. (2020) called for more research measuring responses to a wider range of marketing stimuli beyond place and point-of-sale design. Wen et al. (2022), whose study measured consumer emotional responses to adverts shown to respondents, similarly called for further PAD research measuring responses to advertising and promotion in real-life situations. Furthermore, Beig and Khan (2022) who examined responses to luxury brands' social media marketing called for further PAD research in a wider range of consumer settings. This study responds to these calls, by applying the PAD approach to investigate the impact of tobacco marketing on young adult smokers in Vietnam.

This study's conceptual framework, as presented in Figure 1, is consistent with other researchers that have investigated the impact of marketing stimuli, via the three PAD dimensions, on approach behaviours (e.g. Beig & Khan, 2022, Jaeger

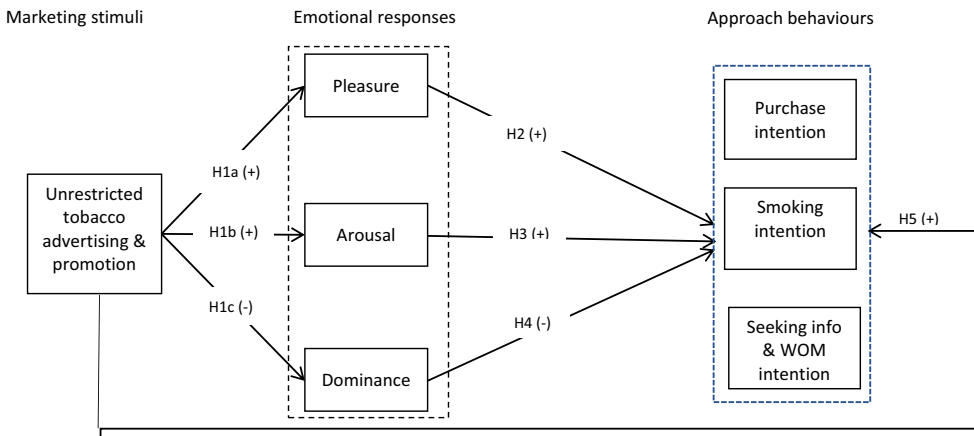


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework.

et al., 2021, Poels & Dewitte, 2008, Wen et al., 2022). The approach behaviours in this study are also based on extant research, such as studies that have examined intended purchase and continued consumption behaviour (Hsieh et al., 2021, Wen et al., 2022), as well as WOM communication, and brand engagement, such as seeking out related information (Loureiro et al., 2020). Furthermore, consistent with Beig and Khan (2022), this study's framework also includes the direct relationship between exposure and approach behaviour. Several other studies have supported this inclusion by demonstrating a positive association between exposure to tobacco advertising and smoking-related intentions and behaviours among adolescents (Henriksen et al., 2010, Zhu et al., 2019).

Thus, the following hypotheses were put forward in this study:

H1: Exposure to unrestricted tobacco advertising and promotion communications elicits positive emotional response in young smokers – positive for pleasure (1a) and arousal (H1b), negative for dominance (H1c).

H2: Pleasure is positively associated with tobacco and smoking approach behaviours.

H3: Arousal is positively associated with tobacco and smoking approach behaviours.

H4: Dominance is negatively associated with tobacco and smoking approach behaviours (H4).

H5: Exposure to unrestricted tobacco promotion and communications is positively associated with tobacco and smoking approach behaviours (H5).

Method

Questionnaire and construct measures

A questionnaire was used in this study to capture respondents' exposure to unrestricted tobacco advertising and promotion related communications as discussed in the literature review section. They were asked to rate both their emotional response and anticipated future smoking related behaviours based on these communications. Previously validated scales and items were used to measure the constructs of the conceptual model (see Table 2 for further detail). The questionnaire also captured demographic data and began with screener questions to ensure all respondents were young smokers.

The questionnaire was developed in English prior to translation into Vietnamese. Translation accuracy was ensured via the back-translation method (e.g. Nguyen et al., 2016), with one professional translator first translating the questionnaire into Vietnamese, before another translated it back into English. This process continued until equivalence between the two versions was achieved, with further refinements then made from pilot survey feedback involving 10 respondents.

Data collection and sample

Research ethics approval was granted by the Charles Darwin University Human Research Ethics Committee prior to commencing data collection.

A sample target of 400 smokers aged 18–34 years was considered appropriate, with an associated 95% confidence level and margin of error of below 5% (e.g. Zikmund et al., 2010). Young adults were chosen because these are a key focus of tobacco industry marketing. In addition, to align with other emotion and smoking studies (e.g. Bares et al., 2018) this research used a convenience sample of students, which were smokers studying at a university in Vietnam.

The survey was administered in March 2022 by sending a questionnaire link via the Qualtrics online survey platform. Respondents were contacted via the university learning management system, and were screened to ensure they were young adult smokers who had both smoked and purchased cigarettes in the last two weeks.

Analysis methods

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 24.0 and SmartPLS 4. SPSS was used to run Cronbach's alpha and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to determine the valid items, followed by SmartPLS to evaluate the discriminant validity of the conceptual model. Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was next conducted to test the hypotheses. A bootstrapping method was adopted with 5,000 subsamples to generate 95% confidence intervals for significance testing (Hair et al., 2021). PLS-SEM is considered both flexible and rigorous in terms of producing reliable and valid results (Sarstedt et al., 2016). It is ideal for data analysis for business and management studies based on its ability to provide high statistical power when the data is not normally distributed and its tolerance towards the assumptions of heteroscedasticity (Hair et al., 2021). Hence, it was deemed suitable for this study where the sample of smokers may not be normally distributed. PLS-SEM also enables the testing of complex relationships involving multiple direct and indirect effects (Hair et al., 2021), such as those proposed in this study.

Results

Sample and demographic profile

Following data cleaning and removal of incomplete questionnaires, there were 440 responses. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of these respondents, which was mostly comprised of male smokers (82.7%), followed by those who preferred not to disclose gender (12.7%) and female smokers (4.6%). While these demographics were similar to national statistics on Vietnamese smokers, there were more female smokers in this study (4.5% vs 0.9%) (Euromonitor International, 2021). Furthermore, a large proportion were single or never married (91.4%) and made less than VND5 million in income (43%).

Table 1. Respondent demographics.

Indicator	Category	n=	Percentage
Gender	Female	20	4.6
	Male	364	82.7
	Prefer not to say	56	12.7
Marital status	Currently married/partnered	35	8.0
	Divorced/separated	1	0.2
	Single/never married	402	91.4
	Widowed	2	0.5
	Have no income	120	27.3
Income (VND*)	Under 5 million	189	43.0
	5–10 million	91	20.7
	10–20 million	31	7.0
	Over 20 million	9	2.0
	Total	440	100

Note: *USD1 = VND23,210.

Validity and reliability tests

The factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha (α), composite reliability (CR) and average variance explained (AVE) indicated significant levels of reliability and convergent validity across all constructs in the conceptual model, as well as the goodness-of-fit criteria (Hair et al., 2010). Table 2 specifies the necessary criteria values for evaluating PLS-SEM models. That is, each CR value was loaded higher than 0.60, which aligns with the specification that all CR values need to be higher than 0.89 (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012); and the α values for all constructs were higher than 0.86, while all AVEs were greater than 0.66, which indicated a satisfactory correlation (Yockey, 2016). As a result, all of this study's measurement model items were retained.

The goodness-of-fit of the data for performing EFA was confirmed via Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett tests (KMO = 0.89; $p < 0.05$) (Hair et al., 2010). There were 14 items with the eigenvalue criterion greater than 1.0 and with a cumulative total variance of 100%. Thus, seven factors were formed (marketing communication exposure, pleasure, arousal, dominance, smoking, purchase, and communication approach intentions), and as all items received loadings higher than 0.6, they were all retained.

Discriminant validity was confirmed by calculating the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT_{0.85}) of correlations (Henseler et al., 2015). The HTMT values for all constructs ranged from 0.185 to 0.8, which was well below the threshold of 0.85. All model constructs met the validity of measurement scale criteria, which demonstrates that all were well-explained in terms of HTMT (as shown in Table 3)

Structural model (PLS-SEM)

Table 4 and Figure 2 highlight the structural model results. As expected, tobacco marketing was positively associated with pleasure ($\beta = 0.135$, $p < 0.05$) and arousal ($\beta = 0.106$, $p < 0.10$), which supported hypotheses H1a and H1b. However, the association between exposure to unrestricted marketing communication and dominance was not supported ($\beta = 0.081$, $p > 0.10$), which meant that H1c was rejected. Other results presented in Figure 1 show that pleasure was also positively associated with purchase ($\beta = 0.272$, $p <$

Table 2. Constructs, items and model results.

Theoretical construct	Item codes, items measurement	Scale adapted from sources	Mean	SD	α	Factor loading	
	Exposure to unrestricted tobacco marketing communication ($\alpha=0.871$, AVE = 0.66, CR =0.906)						
Unrestricted tobacco advertising & promotion	EXP1	I [1- never, 7 - always] see/hear tobacco-related communications on the internet	Pokhrel et al. (2015); Schooler et al. (1996); Zhu et al. (2013)	3.17	2.08	0.863	.743*
	EXP2	I [1- never, 7 - always] see/hear tobacco-related communications in printed newspapers and magazines (e.g. CSR articles)		4.09	2.02	0.829	.851*
	EXP3	I [1- never, 7 - always] see/hear tobacco-related communications in retail stores		4.09	1.95	0.830	.850*
	EXP4	I [1- never, 7 - always] see/hear tobacco-related communications via promotional people (e.g. sales promotion by reps)		4.38	1.89	0.843	.809*
	EXP5	I [1- never, 7 - always] see/hear tobacco-industry-related communications at events (e.g. sponsorship of events)		3.37	1.94	0.846	.797*
	Pleasure ($\alpha=0.851$, AVE = 0.771, CR =0.91)						
Emotional responses	PLS1	I feel annoyed (1)/pleased (7) with tobacco-related communications	Hsieh et al. (2021); Jaeger et al. (2021); Koo and Lee (2011)	4.87	1.66	0.860	.725*
	PLS2	I feel unhappy (1)/happy (7) with tobacco-related communications		4.89	1.68	0.725	.875*
	PLS3	I feel dissatisfied (1)/satisfied (7) with tobacco-related communications		4.77	1.65	0.782	.862*
		Arousal ($\alpha=0.87$, AVE = 0.786, CR =0.917)					
	ARS1	I feel sleepy (1)/aroused (7) by tobacco-related communications		4.74	1.67	0.760	.892*
	ARS2	I feel anxious (1)/relaxed (7) by tobacco-related communications		4.95	1.58	0.763	.889*
	ARS3	I feel bored (1)/excited (7) by tobacco-related communications		4.96	1.68	0.914	.596*
		Dominance ($\alpha=0.852$, AVE = 0.72, CR =0.884)					
	DOM1	I feel controlled (1)/liberated (7) by tobacco-related communications		4.98	1.79	0.846	.830*
DOM2	I feel inhibited (1)/uninhibited (7) by tobacco-related communications		4.94	1.74	0.832	.785*	
DOM3	I feel guided (1)/autonomous (7) by tobacco-related communications		4.89	1.77	0.841	.833*	
	Purchase intention						
Approach behaviours	PI1	I will purchase cigarettes again in the future.	Soroya et al. (2021); Yang and Kahlor (2013)	4.60	1.80	-	-
		Seeking information & WOM intention ($\alpha=0.852$, AVE = 0.811, CR =0.896)					
	AI1	I'll actively talk about tobacco manufacturers' related communications to my friends		5.06	1.66	0.852	.827*
	AI2	I will look for information about tobacco-related communications		4.84	1.69	0.833	.722*
		Smoking intention ($\alpha=0.852$, AVE = 0.871, CR =0.931)					
	S11	I will continue to smoke	Churchill et al. (2021)	5.02	1.61	0.901	.881*
	S12	I will smoke more cigarettes than usual		4.98	1.65	0.861	.824*

Note: * $p<0.001$; standardised factor loadings are reported.

Table 3. Discriminant validity of measurement scale – HTMT_{0.85}.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Arousal							
2 Seeking information & WOM intention	0.461						
3 Dominance	0.880	0.420					
4 Unrestricted tobacco advertising & promotion	0.115	0.185	0.095				
5 Pleasure	0.680	0.480	0.848	0.153			
6 Purchase intention	0.374	0.714	0.290	0.158	0.357		
7 Smoking intention	0.453	0.765	0.408	0.178	0.419	0.810	

Table 4. Structural model results: relationships between unrestricted tobacco marketing and PAD emotional states on three smoking approach behaviour intentions.

Hypothesis	Path relationships	Estimate	SD	T-value	P value	Result
H1a	Unrestricted tobacco advertising & promotion → Pleasure	0.135	0.054	2.417*	0.016	Supported
H1b	Unrestricted tobacco advertising & promotion → Arousal	0.106	0.054	1.916**	0.056	Supported
H1c	Unrestricted tobacco advertising & promotion → Dominance	0.081	0.054	1.447 ^{ns}	0.148	Not supported
H2	Pleasure → Purchase intention	0.272	0.075	3.644*	0.000	Supported
	Pleasure → Seeking info & WOM intention	0.289	0.077	3.722*	0.000	Supported
	Pleasure → Smoking intention	0.173	0.075	2.319*	0.020	Supported
H3	Arousal → Purchase Intention	0.349	0.068	5.175*	0.000	Supported
	Arousal → Seeking info & WOM intention	0.299	0.067	4.447*	0.000	Supported
	Arousal → Smoking intention	0.320	0.068	4.715*	0.000	Supported
H4	Dominance → Purchase Intention	-0.204	0.089	2.323*	0.020	Supported
	Dominance → Seeking info & WOM intention	-0.113	0.092	1.232 ^{ns}	0.218	Not supported
	Dominance → Smoking intention	-0.024	0.086	0.321 ^{ns}	0.748	Not supported
H5	Unrestricted tobacco advertising & promotion → Purchase Intention	0.098	0.048	2.023*	0.043	Supported
	Unrestricted tobacco advertising & promotion → Seeking info & WOM intention	0.102	0.045	2.209*	0.027	Supported
	Unrestricted tobacco advertising & promotion → Smoking intention	0.104	0.048	2.100*	0.036	Supported

Note: SD = standard deviation; *significant at $p < 0.05$; **significant at $p < 0.10$; ns = not significant.

0.05), approach ($\beta = 0.289, p < 0.05$) and smoking intentions ($\beta = 0.173, p < 0.05$), which supported hypotheses H2a, H2b, and H2c. Arousal was similarly found to have a positive association with purchase ($\beta = 0.349, p < 0.05$), approach ($\beta = 0.299, p < 0.05$) and smoking intentions ($\beta = 0.320, p < 0.05$), supporting hypotheses H3a, H3b and H3c.

In contrast, the results for dominance showed that while there was statistical support in terms of its hypothesised negative relationship with purchase intentions ($\beta = 0.-204, p < 0.05$), its proposed relationships with approach ($\beta = 0.-113, p > 0.10$) and smoking intentions ($\beta = 0.-024, p > 0.10$) were not supported. Thus, hypothesis H4a was accepted while H4b and H4c were rejected. Lastly, results for the proposed direct association between unrestricted tobacco marketing communication and purchase ($\beta = 0.098, p < 0.05$), approach ($\beta = 0.102, p < 0.05$) and smoking intention ($\beta = 0.104, p < 0.05$) supported hypotheses H5a, H5b and H5c.

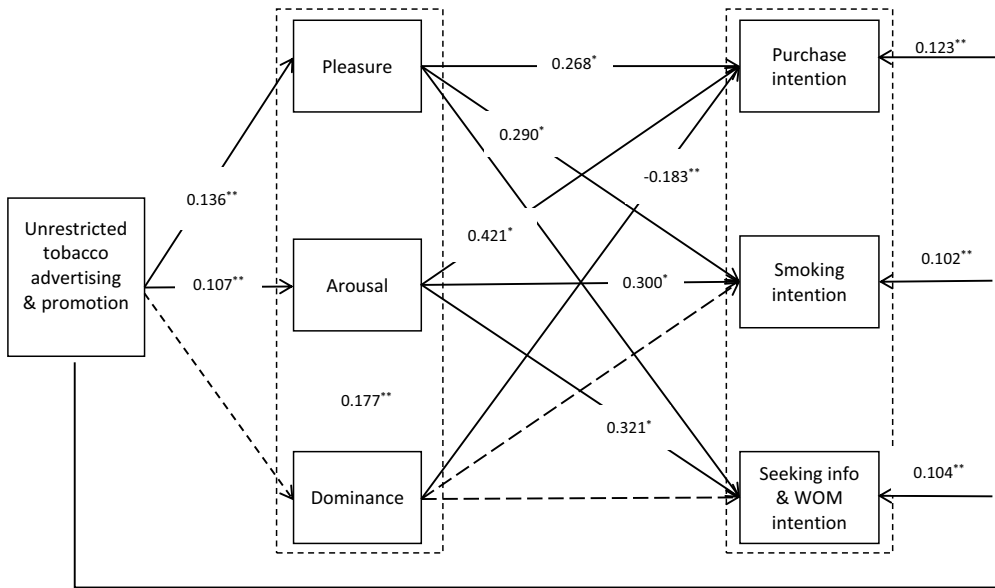


Figure 2. PLS-SEM path results. Note: *significant at 0.001; **significant at 0.05

Discussion and implications

The prevalence of smoking and related NCDs in emerging markets highlights the urgency of more effective marketing regulations based on improved understanding of the impacts of ongoing tobacco advertising and promotion. Young consumers in these markets are the main target segment of the tobacco industry's marketing strategies (Isip & Calvert, 2020). This study therefore investigated the impact of unrestricted tobacco marketing communications on Vietnamese young adult smokers' emotional responses and their consequent behavioural intentions, relating to cigarette purchase, smoking and seeking tobacco related information and WOM communication. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first study to systematically demonstrate how tobacco manufacturers' unregulated marketing communication exposure creates impacts on smokers' emotional responses and approach behaviours. The proposed conceptual framework and hypothesised relationships between tobacco marketing exposure, PAD-emotional responses and smoking approach behaviours were confirmed. The basic tenets of this study's conceptual model were based on the sensory marketing and emotional response theory, which suggests that individuals' behavioral intentions are evoked through external stimuli that affect their emotions that in turn leads to certain behaviours (Shahid et al., 2022). Based on its literature review, it was proposed that higher levels of exposure to tobacco marketing communications lead to higher levels of smokers' emotional responses and subsequent behavioral intentions (i.e. purchase, approach and smoking). The findings highlight that the tobacco industry is able to circumvent existing regulations and use unregulated marketing mix elements, which in turn affect smokers' emotional states, leading to repurchase intentions, increased smoking, and the seeking of information and WOM communications about smoking. Among the unrestricted marketing communication channels strategically used by the tobacco industry, promotional people

(e.g. sales promotion by representatives), in-store communications, and printed newspapers and magazines (e.g. CSR and sustainability articles) are the most popular.

This study's analysis indicated that exposure to unrestricted tobacco marketing communication is instrumental in evoking pleasure and arousal feelings in smokers, which aligns with other studies that have investigated the impact of marketing on emotional response across other contexts (e.g. Wen et al. 2022). Although unlike Wen et al. (2022), dominance was perceived as less important in this study's findings. In Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) original PAD model, dominance related to feelings of control in a particular setting rather than in relation to marketing communications (as in this study), which may offer explanation for the weaker predictive power of dominance in this study. Pleasure and arousal were strong predictors of smoking approach behavioral intention, implying that smokers who feel aroused and pleased by tobacco marketing communications generally smoke more, purchase cigarettes more, and seek out tobacco information and engage in more WOM smoking related communication. Furthermore, while dominance and the extent that smokers viewed the marketing communications as controlling were not supported in terms of the relationship between approach and smoking intentions, it had a significant negative relationship with purchase intentions.

Among the unrestricted marketing communication channels used by the tobacco industry, promotional people (e.g. sales promotion by representatives), in-store communications, and printed newspapers and magazines (e.g. CSR and sustainability articles) are the most popular. In terms of the direct impact of unrestricted tobacco marketing communication on purchase, smoking and approach intentions, the data supported all three relationships, further augmenting that non-traditional marketing is a strong predictor of smoker intentions to smoke more and approach intentions towards marketing communication. Notably, this study's model demonstrated a particularly strong variation across the three endogenous target variables ($R^2 = 65.2\%$), which suggested that smoking continuation, repurchasing, and communication approach intentions were well-explained. This study's findings support many aspects of those in previous PAD studies conducted in other contexts (e.g. Ainsworth & Ballantine, 2014, Elliott et al., 2021, Mehrabian & Russell, 1974, Sihvonen & Turunen, 2022).

This study's results provide useful insights from both a practical and theoretical perspective. In terms of practicality, since Vietnam introduced tobacco marketing prohibitions in 2013, traditional marketing channels have become less accessible for manufacturers. Yet it would appear that alternative direct and point-of-sales marketing have become the main marketing channels for delivering information and promoting brands and sales. For example, the tobacco industry has circumvented such regulations by using sponsored brand and sales representatives in various public settings, as well as point-of-sale promotion and print media, which appears to be having significant impact on young adult smoking behaviours. The results indicate that such exposure not only evokes positive emotional responses, but also directly influences smoking, purchase and tobacco information approach intentions, as well as WOM smoking related communication. Thus, tobacco industry legislators in Vietnam need to consider how to better control such unrestricted marketing activities. In this regard, it is critical to regulate these unrestricted marketing elements, including promotional people, in-store communications, and printed magazines and newspapers (e.g. CSR and sustainability articles).

Theoretically, this appears to be the first study to explore emotional responses in the context of unrestricted tobacco marketing communications, and their impact on various tobacco-related behavioral intentions within an emerging market. The results indicate that the PAD approach is beneficial for investigating the affective and behavioural impacts of unregulated tobacco marketing. In particular, the pleasure and arousal dimensions demonstrated the impact of unregulated marketing communications. Although in contrast, this study's conceptualisation of dominance (i.e. perceived feelings of dominance associated with the communication source) was weak and atypical of the original dominance dimensions used within an environmental context (i.e. place/environment) (e.g. Greenland & McGoldrick, 2005). The unique model validated in this study can provide a theoretical basis for future research into the effects of marketing communications on emotional responses and harmful behaviours, such as smoking.

Limitations

There are several limitations within this study. First, it has focused on young adult smokers in one emerging market, which limits its generalisability. Future research could investigate exposure to unrestricted tobacco marketing via this study's PAD-influenced model, in other emerging markets. More research is also warranted to understand how unregulated marketing exposure varies among different smoker types, such as by age and level of smoking. This would enable more targeted marketing regulations to address the looming smoking-related NCD crisis that many emerging markets with high smoking rates face. Lastly, this study's model could also be used to examine the impact of marketing beyond the place-environment element, for other unhealthy products such as food and alcohol, to examine their alignment with unregulated tobacco marketing.

Conclusions

While tobacco advertising and promotion is supposedly banned in Vietnam, this study has revealed that it still persists via alternative marketing methods that encourage smoking among young adults. This finding highlights the ongoing paradox of industry claims about behaving responsibly and switching to less harmful product ranges (Morton and Greenland, 2018). This study's PAD-influenced conceptual model was verified via PLS-SEM, and demonstrated that ongoing tobacco marketing exposure is appealing to young adult smokers by generating pleasure and arousal emotional responses that, in turn, stimulate smoking approach behaviours. In particular, the exposure and impact reported by this study's young smoker sample was higher through promotion by sales representatives that distribute free tobacco samples and merchandise, as well as point-of-sale promotion and print media. Such findings can inform more effective tobacco marketing regulation to curtail such promotion, to contribute to improved public health.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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