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TOBACCO AND HEALTH

THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE MEDIA

ESTEVE FERNÁNDEZ

From the mid twentieth century, several studies showed that cigarette-smoking was related to the increase in the incidence of lung cancer. After their publication the tobacco industry felt threatened and used the media to counteract the effects these studies had on the population. From this perspective, the present article reviews the role of the media in the dissemination of tobacco-related information and the evolution in tobacco control policies that the approach has caused.

Keywords: tobacco, smoking, media, advertising, lobbying.

■ WE KNOW THAT TOBACCO IS BAD

Quite probably, almost every article or essay we read or write about tobacco today would start with a sentence like «Tobacco use kills nearly six million people annually, and it is estimated that it will cause a billion deaths during the 21st century» (Atusingwize, Lewis, & Langley, 2015). We have known this for a few decades. At the beginning of 1960, two reports titled «Smoking and Health» confirmed the causal relationship between tobacco smoking and cancer and other diseases. The first, written by United Kingdom's Royal College of Physicians (1962), went largely unnoticed. The second was written by the North-American Luther L. Terry in 1964 (Surgeon General's Advisory Committee on Smoking and Health, 1964).

Evidence had accumulated during the preceding decades and in 1950, three important papers on the tobacco-related risks of disease or death were published, three case studies with cancer patients and control groups that gave the scientific evidence for the relationship between tobacco smoking and lung cancer. Two of the studies were conducted in the United States by independent groups. Levi, Goldstein and Gerhardt's study (1950) included 1,000 cancer patients and 600 cancer-free patients. All of them were asked in a questionnaire about their medical history, occupation and lifestyle, including

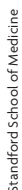
smoking. The other study, published by Wynder and Graham (1950), included 684 lung cancer patients and 780 hospitalised cancer-free patients. Both studies consistently showed that the prevalence of tobacco use among the cases was much higher than among the members of the control group. The third study, conducted in the United Kingdom by Doll and Hill (1950), included 709 patients with lung cancer and another 709 patients without cancer. Information was collected using a questionnaire about tobacco

use, age of starting the habit and degree of smoke inhalation. Doll and Hill observed that a higher frequency of smokers had lung cancer, and the fact that patients with the disease used more tobacco than the control group.

It is worth noting that the authors of the studies had great difficulty in publishing

their research because, apart from using a new epidemiological design they used, they offered quite an uncomfortable answer to the question of the cause of the tragic lung cancer epidemic in the Western world. Smoking prevalence was very high, including the researchers themselves (Graham quit smoking in 1951 but died of lung cancer six years later). Even Graham warned Wynder when they were preparing the text: «You are going to have many difficulties. The smokers will not like your message. The tobacco interests will be vigorously opposed. The *media* and the government will be loath to support these

«IN 1950, THREE IMPORTANT PAPERS ON THE TOBACCO-RELATED RISKS OF DISEASE OR DEATH WERE PUBLISHED»



«IT IS NO SURPRISE THAT THE TOBACCO
INDUSTRY USED HEALTH CLAIMS IN
THE ADVERTISING OF CIGARETTES DURING
THE 1950s AND 1960s»

findings» (Thun, 2005). The emphasis has been added, although the reader probably does not need it, because his words perfectly show the important role of the media, even according to these intrepid researchers.

■ THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY ALREADY KNEW

It is no surprise that the tobacco industry used health claims in the advertising of cigarettes during the 1950s and 1960s (Figure 1). Their advertising used people who were considered to be exemplary, like health care professionals, to publicise the merits of one brand of tobacco or another, as well as their safety. The media survive mainly thanks to advertising revenue, so they shamelessly (and probably with very little information) welcomed such advertising. In 1954, in response to other research on the direct carcinogenic effect of tobacco, tobacco companies launched the campaign (today it would be considered an advertorial) *A frank statement to cigarette smokers* (Figure 2) in the most important magazines and newspapers in the United States. The «frank statement» publication attributed statements like «there is no proof that cigarette smoking is one of the causes» of lung cancer to scientific experts. It marks the beginning of the tobacco industry's strategy of spreading misinformation among the citizens regarding the effects of tobacco on health.

■ THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY TRIED TO INFLUENCE THE MEDIA

The tobacco industry pressured the media because they understood that media coverage influences the population's behaviour. A study by Soto-Mas, Villalbí, Granero, Jacobson and Balcazar (2003) analysed internal industry documents (released after tobacco companies' trial in the United States and publication of the *Master Settlement Agreement*¹ in 1998) and revealed the industry's strategies for attracting journalists. For instance, in November 1984 a conference for Latin American journalists was organised in Madrid to «have the tobacco industry's point of view clearly and fairly

«THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY PRESSURED THE MEDIA BECAUSE THEY UNDERSTOOD THAT MEDIA COVERAGE INFLUENCES THE POPULATION'S BEHAVIOUR»

¹ An agreement reached in the United States in 1998 between, on the one hand, the lawyers of 46 states, five territories and the District of Columbia, and on the other, the main tobacco companies regarding the advertising and marketing of their products.

A Frank Statement to Cigarette Smokers

RECENT REPORTS on experiments with mice have given wide publicity to a theory that cigarette smoking is in some way linked with lung cancer in human beings.

Although conducted by doctors of professional standing, these experiments are not regarded as conclusive in the field of cancer research. However, we do not believe that any serious medical research, even though its results are inconclusive should be disregarded or lightly dismissed.

At the same time, we feel it is in the public interest to call attention to the fact that eminent doctors and research scientists have publicly questioned the claimed significance of these experiments.

Distinguished authorities point out:

1. That medical research of recent years indicates many possible causes of lung cancer.

2. That there is no agreement among the authorities regarding what the cause is.

3. That there is no proof that cigarette smoking is one of the causes.

4. That statistics purporting to link cigarette smoking with the disease could apply with equal force to any one of many other aspects of modern life. Indeed the validity of the statistics themselves is questioned by numerous scientists.

We accept an interest in people's health as a basic responsibility, paramount to every other consideration in our business. We believe the products we make are not injurious to health.

We always have and always will cooperate closely with those whose task it is to safeguard the public health.

For more than 300 years tobacco has given solace, relaxation, and enjoyment to mankind. At one time or another during those years critics have held it responsible for practically every disease of the human body. One by one these charges have been abandoned for lack of evidence.

Recognition of the record of the past, the fact that cigarette smoking today should even be suspected as a cause of a serious disease is a matter of deep concern to us.

Many people have asked us what we are doing to meet the public's concern aroused by the recent reports. Here is the answer:

1. We are pledging aid and assistance to the research effort into all phases of tobacco use and health. This joint financial aid will of course be in addition to what is already being contributed by individual companies.

2. For this purpose we are establishing a joint industry group consisting initially of the undersigned. This group will be known as TOBACCO INDUSTRY RESEARCH COMMITTEE.

3. In charge of the research activities of the Committee will be a scientist of undoubted integrity and unbiased reports. In addition there will be an Advisory Board of scientists disinterested in the cigarette industry. A group of distinguished men from medicine, science, and education will be invited to serve on this Board. These scientists will advise the Committee on its research activities.

This statement is being issued because we believe the people are entitled to know where we stand on this matter and what we intend to do about it.

TOBACCO INDUSTRY RESEARCH COMMITTEE

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Figure 2. In response to research connecting tobacco and lung cancer, tobacco companies launched the campaign *A frank statement to cigarette smokers* in magazines and newspapers in 1954. It was the beginning of the tobacco industry's strategy to spread misinformation among the citizens regarding the effects of tobacco on health.

stated by exposing leading journalists to myths and realities about passive smoking (Figure 3), the economic impact of the tobacco industry, the negative effects of restrictive advertising, etc.» (Rothermel, 1984) or by organising the travel arrangements for journalists specialised in health issues (from *La Vanguardia* and *El Mundo*) to the United States to be shown the marvels of Philip Morris's activities (Winokur, 1995).

The different ways the industry tried to influence journalists, informants and the media has been investigated, including the aforementioned documents or actively in the case of new laws (smoke-free spaces, prohibition of smoking in cars, etc.). Among their most frequent activities, travel to special events are organised, usually in privileged locations, combined with extraprofessional activities, as well as press releases as a source of information for journalists (Hiilamo, Kahl, & Lambe, 2009), although the effect

Philip Morris International
PHILIP MORRIS INTERNATIONAL RECEIVED **INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE**

120 PARK AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10017

TO: Mr. Andrew Whist
 FROM: Tim Rothermel *T. Rothermel* R. W. MURRAY
 SUBJECT: Conference of Latin American Journalists in Madrid

DEC 5 1984

DATE: December 3, 1984

On 27 and 28 November, I participated in the first two days of a three day PMI conference in Madrid for twelve journalists from Spain and Latin America. As you know, the purpose of this conference was to have the tobacco industry's point of view clearly and fairly stated by exposing leading journalists to myths and realities about passive smoking, the economic impact of the tobacco industry, the negative effects of restrictive advertising, etc. Although only time will tell whether these objectives are fully met, in my view, the effort will be highly successful.

Figure 3. Another strategy used by the tobacco industry was to organise meetings to present their point of view on passive smoking, its economic impact and the effects of restrictive advertising legislation to journalists and pundits. The picture shows a Philip Morris document about a conference in Madrid in 1984 for Spanish and Latin American journalists, which was organised to that end.

on the media and journalists seems rather weak, with the exception of economy magazines.

A United States study (Pierce & Gilpin, 2001) on mass media news about health and tobacco between 1950 and 1983 proved the association between media coverage and changes in the rates of smoking cessation. Because of this, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the tobacco control movement included denouncement of the tobacco industry's manoeuvring to manipulate the media among their priorities (World Health Organization, 2000).

In Spain, the existence of the discussion in the media for most of 2005, before the Law 28/2005 for health care measures against smoking was passed (the law was passed on 26 December 2005 and entered into force on 1 January 2006), is evidence of the media's importance. As described in the 2006 Informe Quiral (Fundació Vila Casas, 2007), the covers of the most important national newspapers included information on the proposals, negotiation of and amendments to the new law, with an approximate average of forty news items about tobacco per month, and a peak in

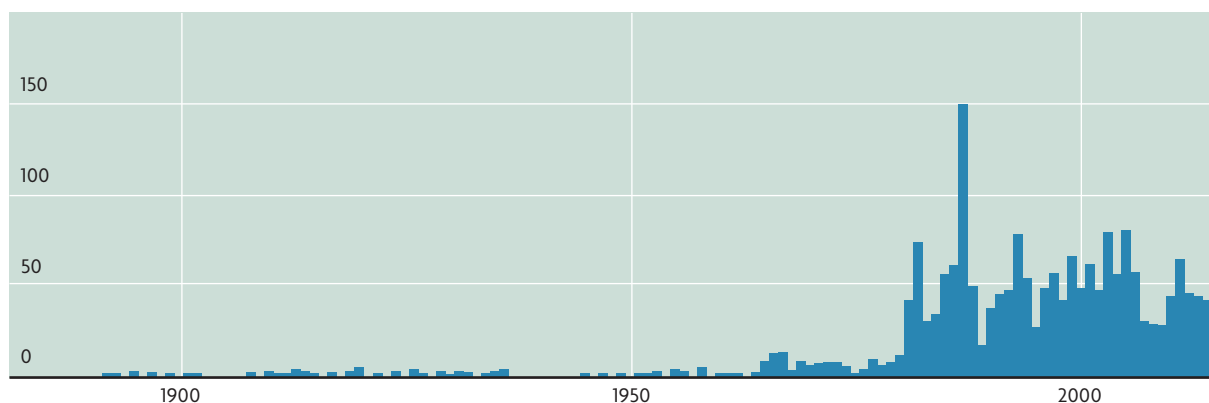


Figure 4. The graph shows the number of articles published in *La Vanguardia* including the word «*tabaquismo*» (tobacco use) over time (1881-2015).

SOURCE: *La Vanguardia*.



Figure 5. On the left, the 1962 «Smoking and Health» report from the Royal College of Physicians of the United Kingdom. On the right, a brief note in *La Vanguardia* days after the report was published.

December 2005 of over 200. The 700 news items about tobacco in 2005 almost doubled the figure published between 2002 and 2004, and tripled those of preceding years (1997 to 2001). This trend can also be observed in the news published by the veteran Spanish newspaper *La Vanguardia*, which has accessible online information about issues as far back as 1881, as shown in Figure 4.

The treatment of tobacco news has changed gradually over time. For instance, *La Vanguardia* was very timid in the way it presented the «Smoking and Health» report from the Royal College of Physicians of the United Kingdom, issued on 6 March 1962 in London. The report was only mentioned in a brief agency news note two days later (Figure 5).

Evidently, the media have directed advertising and information on tobacco since it became established as a huge business, and the industry has tried to influence the media and its informants. Despite this, in Spain and in other developed countries, the media have been decisive in creating the social change required to control tobacco use. ©

«THE WHO AND THE TOBACCO CONTROL MOVEMENT INCLUDED DENOUNCEMENT THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY'S MANOEUVRING TO MANIPULATE THE MEDIA AMONG THEIR PRIORITIES»

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