

EVALUATING TOBACCO INDUSTRY ‘TRANSFORMATION’: A PROPOSED RUBRIC AND ANALYSIS

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KEY FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

- There was no evidence of any company meeting our proposed definition and essential criteria for transformation
- Public health practitioners need to lead the transformation debate, establish credible definitions and criteria, and critically analyse whether transformation is occurring.

OBJECTIVE

To critically investigate claim of Tobacco Industry (TI) transformation.

BACKGROUND

- Some multinational tobacco companies (MNTCs) claim they are ‘transforming’ by adopting harm reduction objectives or seeking to achieve a vision of a ‘smokefree’ world (Figure 1).
- What characterises TI transformation and whether it is occurring is unclear.



Figure 1 Philip Morris International is the most prominent multinational tobacco company claiming it is transforming

METHODS

- We developed a definition and criteria for transformation, and assessed whether these criteria are being met using documentary evidence, including:
 - a report prepared by the Philip Morris International funded Foundation for a Smokefree World ¹
 - Euromonitor tobacco sales data.

RESULTS

Definition:

We defined a transforming tobacco company as one demonstrating substantial, rapid and verifiable progress towards eliminating the production and sale of conventional smoked and oral tobacco products within five years in all markets where the company operates.

Criteria for transformation and evidence of progress:

We developed three essential criteria that a tobacco company must meet to be categorised as transforming, and identified one non-essential criterion.

Essential criteria

- Evidence of substantial progress towards eliminating the production, distribution, marketing and sales of conventional tobacco products within 5 years.**

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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W E L L I N G T O N

Evidence:

- No MNTC has committed to ending the production and sale of conventional tobacco products in all its markets within five years (or any specified timeframe)
- No evidence of accelerating declines in tobacco sales since ‘transformation narrative adopted around 2017.

“...there is little evidence that they (companies committed to harm reduction) are committed to reducing high-risk product sales faster than the natural decline already occurring.” ¹

2. No obstruction of core and innovative tobacco control measures in any jurisdiction.

Evidence:

- The TI continues to oppose, obstruct and undermine tobacco control policies in countries all over the world.

3. Evidence of action to reduce uptake and eliminate disparities in use of conventional tobacco products.

Evidence:

- The TI continues to oppose policy measures that would constrain their activities to foster youth uptake and to market conventional products to marginalised populations (Figure 2).

Non-essential criterion

4. Replacement of conventional tobacco products with acceptable alternative products or services.

Evidence:

- Several MNTCs are diversifying into new nicotine and tobacco products (NNTPs)
- However, MNTCs’ actions more consistent with profit maximisation than with eliminating conventional tobacco products – e.g. by failing to prevent youth uptake of NNTPs and using these products to augment, rather than replace, conventional tobacco product revenue.
- Conventional tobacco products continue to dominate, comprising 97% of sales volumes across the 15 leading tobacco companies in 2019. ¹

A full review of the evidence is available in a forthcoming paper. ²



Figure 2 Tobacco companies continue to launch and market innovative products that appeal to youth, including in lower and middle income countries

CONCLUSIONS

- We found no evidence of meaningful transformation judged against our three essential criteria
- The public health community needs to lead the debate, and shape the conceptualisation and the language of transformation
- Public health practitioners need to continue to advocate for evidence-based measures to eliminate conventional tobacco products.
- Governments must implement comprehensive strategies that respond to this evidence and rapidly reduce use of smoked tobacco products.

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