

STUDY REPORT

**MEDIA CONCERNS ABOUT WHO FRAMEWORK
CONVENTION ON TOBACCO CONTROL AND
TOBACCO CONTROL ACTIVITIES IN VIETNAM**



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Table of Contents

I. BACKGROUND	3
II. OBJECTIVES	4
III. SUBJECTS AND METHODOLOGY	4
IV. IDEAS FOR USING RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	5
V. RESEARCH FINDINGS	5
VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	29

I. BACKGROUND

Smoking is one of the major causes of premature mortality in the world. Every eight seconds one person dies of tobacco-related disease, which kills 4.9 million persons every year worldwide. This death rate is expected to increase, and, without any effective control measure, between 2006 and 2030 an estimated 10 million deaths will result from tobacco exposure per year. 70% of these deaths will occur in developing countries. *

Vietnam is a developing country in which there is a high rate of smoking. The National Health Survey of 2001-2002 showed that the smoking rate among Vietnamese male adults was 56.1% and among female adults 1.8%.

Projections from the SIMSMOKE model demonstrate that there 30,000 – 40,000 deaths in Vietnam each year are related to tobacco. WHO forecasts that without timely tobacco control measures, and given current statistics and smoking trends, approximately 10% of current Vietnamese population (or some 8 million people) will die of tobacco related diseases.**

The Vietnamese Government takes this situation seriously, and has expressed its commitment to tobacco control by working towards lowering smoking rates. The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) was officially ratified by the President on 17th October 2004 and came into effect in March 2005. The roadmap to implement FCTC is currently being developed by the Government. Some measures stemming from the Convention have already been applied including a total ban of cigarette advertisement or a smoking ban in public places.

The successful implementation of the FCTC in Vietnam will be affected by many factors, including public awareness and general attitudes towards smoking and tobacco control. In Vietnam, as in other countries, the media plays a crucial role in shaping and influencing knowledge and attitudes of policy makers and the general public. For effective tobacco control, in addition to strict implementation of policies and regulations, it is therefore necessary for the media to be actively and effectively involved in creating an environment of public support, especially when it comes to sensitive policies such as raising tax on tobacco or expanding smoking bans in public places.

To date, however, the media has not been effectively used as a means of promoting tobacco control. In fact, there has been little understanding of the knowledge and attitudes of the media personnel themselves related to tobacco control policies or to the tobacco industry. A study on the opinions and attitudes of the media personnel towards the FCTC would, therefore, be very valuable to better understand how the media could be mobilized to support FCTC implementation in Vietnam.

This study was part of a research project entitled "*Facilitating FCTC Implementation through Media Personnel Support*" funded by the Canadian Tobacco Control Research Initiative, the American Cancer Society, Cancer Research – UK and Research for International Tobacco Control. The study combined a semi-structured survey and in-depth interviews in order to (i) characterize the gaps in media personnel's exposure to tobacco related information; (ii) identify factors that inhibited and facilitated positive tobacco control media coverage; (iii) identify the extent to which media personnel opinions and attitudes were influenced directly or indirectly by the tobacco industry in Vietnam; and (iv) identify methods and avenues through which media personnel could serve as tobacco control advocates.

* *Curbing the epidemic, Government and the Economics of Tobacco Control*, World Bank, 1999

** *Tobacco related diseases and prevention measures*, Health Publish House, 2004

II. OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To identify the knowledge, opinions, and attitudes of health, eco-industrial and socio-cultural reporters and of senior journalists in leading press agencies towards the FCTC and tobacco control activities in Vietnam;
2. To identify what and how information about the FCTC and tobacco control has been provided to media personnel;
3. To describe the process through which media personnel receive information from the tobacco industry;
4. To define and study the gaps in the information on tobacco control and the FCTC received by media personnel
5. To define and study the information wants and needs of media personnel to enable them to support tobacco control and the FCTC; and
6. To propose recommendations for enhancing media roles and media support for tobacco control work and FCTC implementation in Vietnam.

III. SUBJECTS AND METHODOLOGY

1. Subjects:

Quantitative study: 60 journalists and editors from the leading media agencies in Hanoi, including television, radio, online media and print media (the media list was developed in collaboration with the Press Department of the Communist Party's Central Committee of Ideology and Culture). The persons selected included:

- 20 health correspondents;
- 20 eco-industrial correspondents; and
- 20 socio-cultural correspondents.

Qualitative study: 20 correspondents identified as leaders of the 20 leading press agencies in Hanoi, including (deputy) editors-in-chief, managing editors, and (deputy) chief of news rooms.

2. Methodology:

A cross-sectional survey was conducted using questionnaires to compare the knowledge, opinions and attitudes of the journalists about tobacco control.

The information collected included:

- Basic demographic information
- Information about their knowledge on the harmful effects of tobacco
- Information on their awareness about the prevalence of smoking in Vietnam
- Information about their knowledge about tobacco control policies in Vietnam
- Information about their knowledge of the FCTC and their opinions about tobacco control measures developed through the Convention
- Information about their opinions about the tobacco industry and the availability of information provided by tobacco companies

- Information about their perception of the availability of information about tobacco control

The data collected were entered, filtered, and analyzed using SPSS software.

The qualitative study was conducted using in-depth interviews; interviewees were provided with specific instructions and were guided through the interview process.

IV. IDEAS FOR USING RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. The study aimed to assist tobacco control activists to develop communication campaigns, provide information to media personnel, and gain attention and support from journalists for tobacco control activities in Vietnam.
2. The study also served as a reference/comparison for writing training documents on the FCTC and tobacco control targeting journalists and editorial staff.

V. RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. Description of the media personnel

In undertaking the quantitative study, the researchers interviewed 60 correspondents from 40 press agencies located in Hanoi; the press agencies themselves were selected based upon advice provided by the Press Department of the Communist Party's Central Committee of Ideology and Culture. Of the 60 correspondents, 31 were male and 29 were female. The average seniority was six years; with the lowest being 1 year and the highest 35 years. Forty-one of the correspondents were non-smokers, 2 were ex-smokers, and the remaining 17 were smokers.

	Health correspondents (n = 20)	Eco-industrial correspondents (n = 20)	Socio-cultural correspondents (n = 20)	Total (n = 60)
1. Gender:				
• Male	15%	95%	45%	51.7%
• Female	85%	5%	55%	48.3%
2. Seniority:				
• Below 2 years	5%	0	5%	3.3%
• 2 – 5 years	15%	20%	40%	25%
• 5 – 10 years	65%	70%	55%	63.6%
• Above 10 years	15%	10%	0	8.4%
Average	5 years	6.6 years	6.6 years	6 years
3. Smoking status				
• Non-smoker	90%	45%	70%	68.3%
• Smoker	10%	45%	30%	28.3%
• Ex- smoker	0	10%	0	3.4%

Table 1: Media personnel participating in the quantitative study

The qualitative study was conducted with 20 senior journalists who held the positions of editor-in-chief, deputy editor-in-chief, managing editor, chief of news rooms/deputy chief, or chief representative of 15 print media, 3 online media, 1 television and 1 radio station, all located in Hanoi.

Table 2: Media personnel participating in the qualitative study

	Editor-in-chief/ Deputy editor-in- chief (n = 4)	Managing editor (n = 5)	Chief of news rooms/Deputy chief (n = 11)	Total (n = 20)
1. Gender:				
• Male	4	3	8	15
• Female	0	2	3	5
2. Seniority:				
• Below 5 years	0	0	0	0
• 5 – 10 years	0	5	3	8
• Above 10 years	4	0	8	12
Average				Above 10 years
3. Smoking status				
• Non-smoker	1	3	6	10
• Smoker	3	2	4	9
• Ex-smoker	0	0	1	1

2. Awareness and knowledge of tobacco hazards

When asked, all of the interviewees replied that smoking was harmful, particularly to health. When asked to list diseases caused by smoking, almost all of the correspondents could correctly name 2 or 3 diseases. Only one social correspondent could only correctly name one tobacco-related disease. All of the correspondents believed that passive smoking could cause health issues. The diseases most mentioned by the interviewees were lung and upper respiratory diseases; many other important diseases caused by smoking were not mentioned. These responses indicated that the correspondents' knowledge about the health hazards of smoking was relatively poor.

Table 3: Knowledge of tobacco hazards

	Health correspondents (n = 20)	Eco-industrial correspondents (n = 20)	Socio-cultural correspondents (n = 20)	Total (n = 60)
Is smoking harmful?				
• No	0%	0%	0%	0%
• Yes	100%	100%	100%	100%
Smoking cigarettes and water pipe is harmful to				
• The health	100 %	100 %	100 %	100%
• The economy	5%	30%	55%	46.7%
• The environment	70%	55%	65%	63.3%
• Others	20%	20%	10%	16.7%
Is passive smoking harmful to the health?				
• No	0%	0%	0%	0%
• Yes	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %

In terms of the economic losses caused by smoking, 53.3% of the interviewees did not believe that smoking caused any economic loss. Most notably, *70% of the eco-industrial correspondents interviewed did not think that smoking could cause economic losses.*

In terms of the environmental pollution caused by smoking, only 36.7% of the interviewees thought that smoking has no negative effects on the landscape or environment. Surprisingly,

the eco-industrial journalists demonstrated the least amount of knowledge on this topic: 45% of them stated that smoking had no negative environmental impacts.

Thus, while the health hazards of tobacco are generally well-known (even if only in part), the journalists' **awareness of tobacco's effects on the economy and environment is still inadequate, even when it comes to correspondents specialized in economics, culture, and society.**

3. Awareness of the scope and importance of the issue

To the question: "Do you think that the prevalence of current cigarettes/water pipe smoking in Vietnam is worrying?" 93.4%% of the interviewees replied either "very worrying" or "worrying." Only .6% said "not worrying". All of the health correspondents responded "worrying" or "very worrying," while 15% of the eco-industrial journalists did not find smoking rates worrying.

Table 4: Evaluation of the smoking prevalence in Vietnam

	Health correspondents (n = 20)	Eco-industrial correspondents (n = 20)	Socio-cultural correspondents (n = 20)	Total (n = 60)
Not worrying	0	15%	0	6.6%
Worrying	35%	60%	45%	46.7%
Very worrying	65%	25%	50%	46.7%
No idea/No answer	0	0	0	0

Of those interviewees responding that smoking prevalence in Vietnam was not worrying, two were smokers and two were non-smokers.

Almost three-quarters of the correspondents disagreed with the view that health problems related to smoking were less important than other issues such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malnutrition. However, 15% of the health journalists, 25% of the eco-industrial correspondents, and 30% of the socio-cultural correspondents agreed with the above view.

Thus most correspondents were concerned about the smoking prevalence rates in Vietnam, and most of them were aware that smoking is an important health issue.

Table 5: Responses to the view that "health problems related to smoking are less important than other issues such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malnutrition"

	Health correspondents (n = 20)	Eco-industrial correspondents (n = 20)	Socio-cultural correspondents (n = 20)	Total (n = 60)
• Disagree	85%	65%	70%	73.3%
• Agree	15%	25%	30%	23.3%
• No idea/ no answer	0	10%	0	3.3%

Responses gathered through the qualitative survey were similar. Most of those interviewed felt that smoking prevalence was "serious" (H.N., Section deputy chief, television), "heavy" (M.C., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media), or "pervasive" (T.H., Managing editor general, online media). Examples of statements made about this issue include:

+ *The smoking prevalence in Vietnam is too high and arbitrary* (D.N., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media);

+ *The rate of smoking in Vietnam may rank first in the world* (D.T., Chief Representative, print media);

- + *The smoking prevalence in Vietnam is some times higher than the alert level. There were 2 concerns: firstly high smoking rate – smokers include adults, children and women and secondly limited knowledge of people about tobacco harms to health, especially passive smoking* (B.T., Managing editor, print media);
- + *Confusing, irregular, disordered and serious* (H.D., Managing editor, online media);
- + *Arbitrary and irregular* (B.K., Managing editor, print media);
- + *Vietnamese people smoke terribly much as compared to European countries* (H.N., Section deputy chief, television);
- + *Too much, sometimes smokers reek of smoke which is impolite to others in the street* (H.Y., Chief of news rooms, print media).

At the same time, however, some press agency leaders expressed optimism about the current smoking prevalence in Vietnam compared to the past:

- + *Smoking became trendy about 5-10 years ago. Currently this prevalence has, however, declined considerably.*
- + *The smoking prevalence has been declining* (N.T.L., Chief of news rooms, Radio);
- + *Within narrow settings such as work places and offices, there is a happy tendency of more and more people quitting cigarettes* (N.V.Y., deputy chief of news rooms, print media);
- + *Already declined a lot* (Correspondent B.V.K., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media).

The findings from both the quantitative and qualitative investigations showed that the reporters were concerned about of smoking issues in Vietnam, and that they were well aware of its high prevalence. Most of them also agreed that ranking smoking as a low public health priority was inappropriate. They also thought that the smoking prevalence had declined recently in Vietnam.

4. Media's attention on smoking issues

When asked "Have the media paid due attention to tobacco control in comparison with its scope?" the following answers were received:

- + *It is up to the professional field that each newspaper focuses on. For example, health publications may pay more attention to this issue than social and political ones. I have no idea what happens to other media agencies, but there is no strategy for news coverage of tobacco control in our newspaper. Randomly, we only cover the issue every year when the World No Tobacco Day comes or when there is a radical tobacco ban in any country. We have no formal strategy and perhaps neither do other media organisations.* (H.T, Deputy editor-in-chief, print media);
- + *There are a lot of issues attracting media attention, smoking issues are, therefore, covered on the World No Tobacco Day only* (B.V.K., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media);
- + *I think that propagating activities fail to meet the actual needs of the issue. The news coverage is still trendy, faddy and only come up simultaneously when the World No Tobacco Days arrives* (H.N., Section deputy chief, television);
- + *Almost all media offices have no propagation policy for this issue... The news and articles on these issues appear less than other topics* (B.K, Managing editor, print media);
- + *VnMedia has never considered tobacco control as its important goal of propagating but only puts it in the health sections. Whenever any campaign is launched, VnMedia*

joins it. The propagating activities are now just trendy and come up simultaneously when any campaign is launched and then come down in silence (H.D, Managing editor, online media);

+ The mass media are supposed to be an information channel for communicating and warning smokers of tobacco hazards, however, this role has not been ensured. The media are permanently unaware of tobacco control (M.C., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media);

+ Communication in tobacco control has appeared but not in the right direction. Articles and message about tobacco control are still poor and boring (B.T, managing editor, print media).

In explaining why the media have not paid significant attention to smoking, the press agency leaders responded that although the nature of the issue is serious and harmful, it happens so gradually and silently that it is not seen to be as urgent or “noisy” as other social problems:

+ The media circle itself is unaware completely of tobacco hazards because they are not as obvious and specific as HIV and so heart-rending and shocking as traffic accidents. Those hazards come gradually and slowly, thus very few people realize them. (N.V.Y., Section deputy chief, print media);

+ The issue has not been paid due attention to because it does not cause death. Other issues such as poverty alleviation and flood fighting... are more primary interests of people. This issue is still considered secondary since it has no direct effect on people lives (H.Y, Chief of news rooms, print media);

+ Firstly it is the nature of the issue; secondly there are a lot of smokers within the media circle itself. Finally, specialized correspondents are not much dedicated to the issue. (H.N., deputy chief of news rooms, television);

+ The media goal is targeted at readers. There is nothing new with smoking situation, and if any, they are only the figure of the dead and smokers and the waste caused by smoking...The process of diseases happening remains the same from year to year, which does not attract attention from readers, and therefore, the media also (B.K., Managing editor, print media);

+ Tobacco control is a smoldering and long-term issue and can not become breaking news. The media always, in contrast, run after “hot” news (H.D., Managing editor, online media).

In sum, the correspondents thought that the media coverage of smoking and tobacco control issues was not adequate, and that media agencies lacked a systematic and strategic approach to addressing tobacco control. Except for the period around World No Tobacco Day, the issue was largely ignored by media in their day-to-day work. The reasons, as given by them, were 1) the health issues of smoking are chronic and not always clear to public; 2) there is a low awareness of the harmful effects of smoking and 3) it is difficult to make tobacco control issue a hot news issue to attract the public, which is very important in mass media. The high prevalence of smoking among reporters was also mentioned as a reason for low coverage of the issue.

5. Knowledge of tobacco control policies and activities in Vietnam

86.7% of the journalists interviewed knew that the Vietnamese Government had issued tobacco control policies. Among the interviewees who were not aware of the policies, one was a health journalist, 2 addressed eco-industrial issues, and 5 followed socio-cultural issues. Therefore, the health and eco-industrial correspondents were more aware than the socio-cultural journalists of legal and institutional issues related to tobacco control.

Table 6: Has the Government issued any tobacco control policy in Vietnam?

	Health correspondents (n = 20)	Eco-industrial correspondents (n = 20)	Socio-cultural correspondents (n = 20)	Total (n = 60)
Not yet/ Not remember	5%	10%	25%	13.3%
Yes	95%	90%	75%	86.7%

Nearly one fourth of the correspondents could not name any of the policies. Therefore, although awareness of existence of national tobacco control policy was high, in-depth awareness was low.

Table 7: Knowledge of tobacco control policies in Vietnam

	Health correspondents (n = 19)	Eco-industrial correspondents (n = 17)	Socio-cultural correspondents (n = 16)	Total (n = 52)
Unable to name tobacco control policies in Vietnam	10%	23.5%	31.3%	21.2%
Able to name tobacco control policies in Vietnam	89.5%	76.5%	68.8%	78.8%

6. Knowledge and attitudes of correspondents towards the FCTC and FCTC implementation in Vietnam

a. Knowledge of FCTC

Surprisingly, *more than one quarter of the interviewees replied that they had never heard of the FCTC before*. Of these, one was a health journalist, eight were eco-industrial reporters, and seven were socio-cultural correspondents.

Table 8: Knowledge of the FCTC

	Health correspondents (n = 20)	Eco-industrial correspondents (n = 20)	Socio-cultural correspondents (n = 20)	Total (n = 60)
Never heard of the FCTC	5%	40%	35%	26.7%
Already heard of the FCTC	95%	60%	65%	73.3%

Among the correspondents who had already heard of the FCTC, only 36.3% said that they knew of it through tobacco control agencies; 38.6% knew of it through newsletters and press releases, 22.7% received information about it from seminars and conferences; and 65.9% received information from the mass media. *The media can be, therefore, an effective information channel to raise awareness of the FCTC.*

Table 9: Source of information about the FCTC

	Health correspondents (n = 19)	Eco-industrial correspondents (n = 12)	Socio-cultural correspondents (n = 13)	Total (n = 44)
Tobacco control agencies	63.2%	16.6 %	15.3%	36.3%
Newsletters/press releases	31.6%	33.3 %	53.8%	38.6%
Seminars/ conferences	21.1%	16.6 %	30.7%	22.7%
Mass media	52.6%	66.6 %	84.6%	65.9%
Others	31.6%	33.3%	7.6%	25%

Although most of the correspondents had already heard of the FCTC, their actual knowledge of the issue was still very vague. Only 5 interviewees (including 3 health and 2 socio-cultural pressmen) could give the correct names and contents of 3 TC measures outlined in the FCTC, while the rest (85.3%) could not accurately name or describe the tobacco control measures put forward in the FCTC.

To the question whether Vietnam had ratified the FCTC, 84.4% of the interviewees replied “already” and only 15.6% answered “not yet” or “no idea”. Specifically, 100% of the health correspondents knew that Vietnam had joined the Convention, while for eco-industrial correspondents the figure was 69.2% and for the socio-industrial correspondents it was 76.9%.

Table 10: Knowledge of the FCTC's content

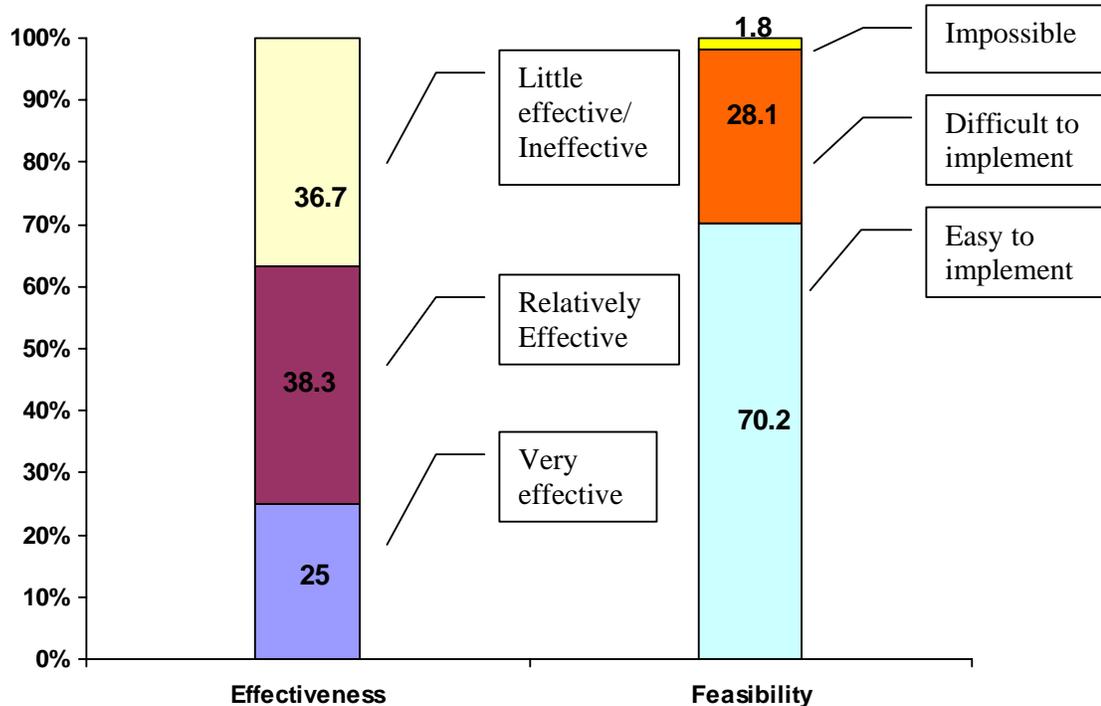
	Health correspondents (n = 19)	Eco-industrial correspondents (n = 12)	Socio-cultural correspondents (n = 13)	Total (n=44)
Able to give the correct contents of at least 3 measures mentioned in the FCTC	15.7%	0%	15.3%	11.3%
Unable to give/ give incorrect names of 3 measures in the FCTC	84.3%	100%	84.7%	85.3%
Knowing that Vietnam had ratified the FCTC	100%	69.2%	76.9%	84.4%
No idea/ thinking that Vietnam had not ratified the FCTC yet	0%	30.8%	23.1%	15.6%

There were a significant number of reporters unaware of the Vietnamese government's commitment to an international Treaty and an even fewer number aware of its details. From the perspective of social responsibility of reporters in communicating and educating the public of the government's policies and commitment, this is a serious gap, marking a challenge for policy advocacy and public education

b. Belief in the effectiveness and feasibility of implementing the FCTC's tobacco control measures in Vietnam

• **Raising tobacco tax to increase cigarette prices**

Chart 1: Correspondents' opinions on tobacco tax raising measure



More than one third of the interviewed correspondents thought that tobacco tax raising would have little or no effect in reducing smoking rates, although a majority of the correspondents said that it would be easy to increase tobacco taxes in Vietnam.

All of the senior journalists thought that it was necessary to raise tobacco taxes. . Some even showed enthusiasm for this measure:

+ “I think that with regard to effectiveness, this measure is second to none. To keep propagating tobacco hazards or even printing “smoking is harmful to the health” on cigarette package are all useless. Attacking directly the pockets of tobacco consumers is the best way” (D.T, Chief Representative, print media);

+ “This is a more effective measure or sanction than other administrative bans” (N.V.Y, Section deputy chief, print media);

+ “I think that this measure is very suitable and effective. Because most smokers in Vietnam are of low income, raising tobacco tax in order to raise tobacco price will reduce the rate of smoking” (M.C., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media);

+ “This measure is very effective because it attacks directly the pocket of tobacco consumers. They will have to restrain buying tobacco in the meanwhile the Government will get more income from tax” (H.T., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media);

+ “It’s right to raise tobacco tax. I myself am a smoker and from personal awareness, I always want to lessen my dosage of smoking per day. If the price is low, I can buy a little bit more without any regret. However if the price is high, I will have to calculate whether buying a cigarette package or a half. From personal logic, I think that this measure is right” (P.V.B., Editor-in-chief, print media).

However, some correspondents did show doubt about the feasibility of this measure in Vietnam:

+ *“Raising tobacco tax is also one of measures. However is it the foremost one in helping smokers lessen or even quit smoking? No, I don’t think so. It is an effective but not the foremost one”* (D.N, Deputy editor-in-chief, print media); *“It will be effective but only to a certain extent”* (B.V.K., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media).

Most of the correspondents thought that increasing public support would create the most favorable conditions for putting this measure into practice in Vietnam. However they also pointed out some hindrances such as *the response and interests of the tobacco industry and some local governments as well as concerns about the spread of smuggled tobacco: “Because tobacco is a giant industry, raising tobacco tax will affect sales”* (D.M.V., online media); *“The tobacco industry brings in a lot of profits to the country and the economy in general. If we raise the sales price of tobacco, the production will be stagnant and, therefore firstly, affect the labor working in the tobacco industry. Also, the government income will suffer”* (M.C., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media); *“It should be understood that if our tobacco is imported from outside, raising tobacco tax will limit the import. However if our tobacco is locally produced, raising tobacco tax will make the price higher. What will happen to tobacco production facilities? What about tobacco growers and worker? It is necessary for policy makers to consider those factors.* (D.N., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media); *“It is difficult to apply this measure because it affects the interests of local governments, especially those ones with incomes coming mainly from the tobacco industry. In Khanh Hoa, for example, since the tobacco industry contributes nearly half the budget of the province and, it is therefore, anyone can see the income from tobacco, it really matters if the industry goes out of business”* (H.N., Section deputy chief, television).

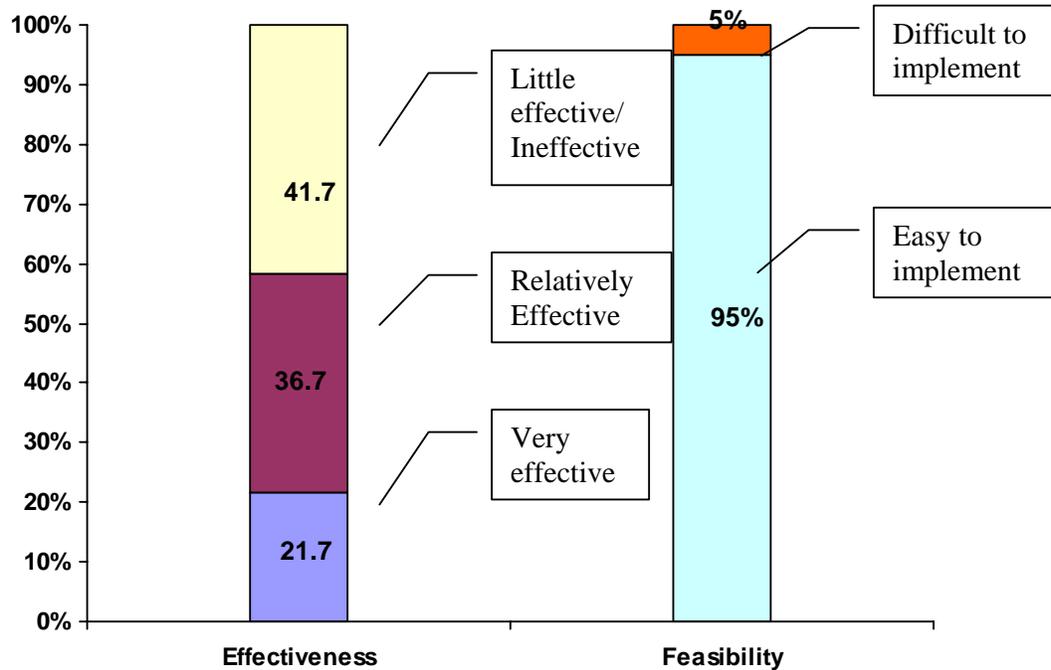
The above opinions demonstrate that the journalists believed that the industry’s economic contribution was very important and worried that a tax increase would affect this contribution. Therefore, in advocating for tobacco tax raising it is also necessary to raise awareness levels of the leaders of the media agencies of the benefits of tax raising. They should be educated to understand that there would be few difficulties facing Vietnam if the country raised tobacco tax, however *“any economic measure has two sides, what matters most is that we should choose among alternatives the more beneficial one”* (D.T., Chief representative, print media).

Most leaders of the press agencies thought that some compatible and harmonious measures should be carried out simultaneously; otherwise, it will be ineffective to raise tobacco tax alone.

Most of the interviewees through the semi-structured survey thought that the tobacco tax raising policy would be feasible. However, the rate of reporters not believing in the effectiveness of tax increase remained high at 36.7%. The senior journalists seemed to have a better understanding of the effectiveness of tax raising. They also showed their support to this policy. Nevertheless, some of them expressed a concern that tax raising would reduce government revenue and increase unemployment. Two explanations for these beliefs are possible: 1) the treaty and its scientific basis have not been introduced properly to the media, and 2) media beliefs could be the “outcome” of tobacco industry propaganda. This fact also poses a challenge to tobacco control policy advocates, as the Vietnamese media is a strong tool for policy advocacy. If the media does not have a strong enough belief or confidence in the effectiveness and feasibility of tobacco control policies, they will not be able to help tobacco control advocates to gain support for tobacco control policies or to educate the public to comply with the policies and regulations

- **Printing health warnings and a list of the harmful substances in tobacco clearly and legibly on cigarette package**

Chart 2: Correspondents' opinions on printing strong health warnings



Almost one half of the interviewees doubted the effectiveness of printing health warnings and a list of the harmful substances of tobacco clearly and legibly on cigarette packages. However, the correspondents were very optimistic about the implementation of this measure in Vietnam, as all most all of them agreed that it was easy to require the tobacco industry to print them.

The senior journalists also showed two nearly opposite currents of opinions about the effectiveness of this measure:

+ “This measure is as old as the hills. There is nothing new. It is more extreme, in some countries, to print a skull and crossbones on the package. However this proves hardly effective because with this way of propagating, people can not feel clearly, specifically and directly the tobacco hazards. Printing a health warning in the form of large letters or pictures on the cigarette package should be considered as the solution to the head of the issue only” (N.V.Y., Section deputy chief, print media);

+ “I don’t think the measure is much effective. It is because of the normal consumer behavior that when we have already asked to buy tobacco, we will not change our mind no matter how large the letters are or how awesome the picture is. None out of every 100 smokers takes notice of health warnings because they are too familiar and bring no mental pressure on smokers” (H.D., Managing editor, online media);

+ “I think the measure is used to scare the poor-spirited only. To people once addicted, no matter how large the health warning letters or picture are, it makes no sense” (M.C., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media);

+ “I think it is ineffective but still necessary to put the measure into practice. It is ineffective as without printing a health warning, anyone, including ex-smokers, has

already known the health hazards of tobacco, yet they still smoke. However, the measure can serve as a warning or reminder to non-smokers or those who intend to smoke” (D.T., Chief Representative, print media).

Other journalists, in contrast, highly appreciated the measure and thought that it should be carried out in Vietnam:

+ *“Completely agree! Totally consent! It is a relatively strong measure. The current health warning is not powerful and eye-catching enough. It is too tiny on the tobacco cigarette package. It will be much effective if the health warning is printed in the form of large letters and picture” (P.V.B, Editor-in-chief, print media);*

+ *“It is effective but not to Vietnam because the way we have done so far is not effective. The letters are too tiny and not eye-catching. Some countries print a health warning in large letters or even with a picture of a cancerous lung” (H.N., Section deputy chief, television);*

+ *“It will shock, worry and obsess tobacco buyers” (N.T.L, Section deputy chief, radio);*

+ *“It will be effective if all the details, pictures and health warnings on cigarette package are rotating” (P.T, deputy editor in-chief, online media);*

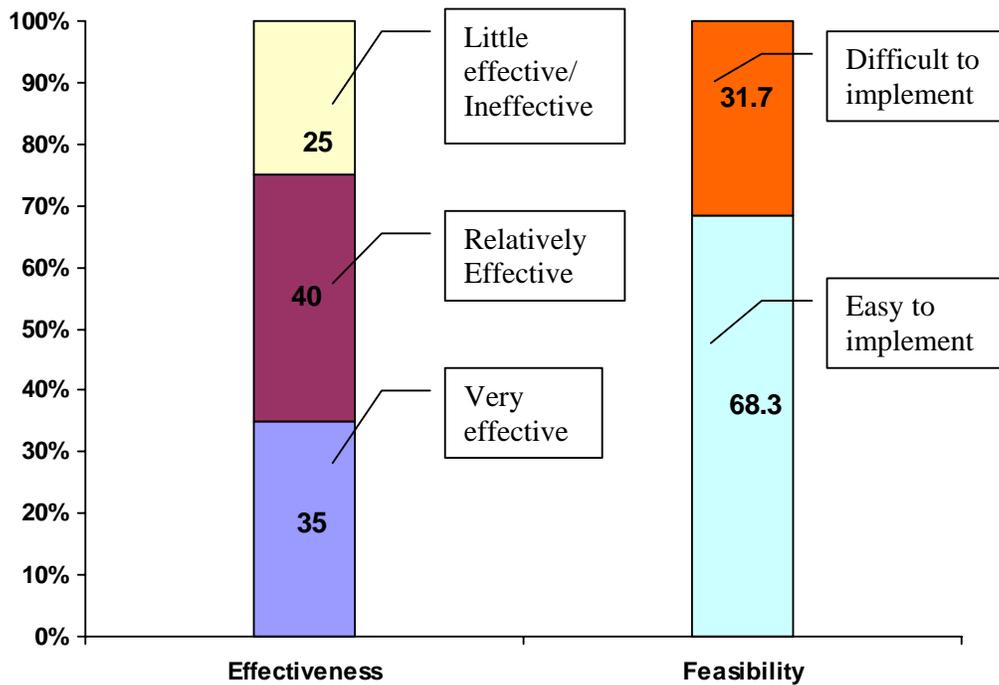
H.Y., (Chief of news rooms, print media) also showed support to this measure; however *“the current health warning is too light. As far as I know, there is a brand of tobacco named Death overseas, but people still smoke it. It is necessary to use strong adjectives and print in large and bold letters. In addition to the cigarette package, the health warning should be put in public or traffic places so that it will be more eye-catching than on the cigarette package because people are too hasty to have a look at the package”.*

With regards to printing pictorial health warnings in Vietnam, there was an opinion that *“There is nothing difficult, it is just an action of printing” (D.H.T., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media).* One correspondent stated *“There is no hindrance from the public, surely they will support it. What make it difficult are the producers” (D.T.T., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media); “Do the producers accept it? Although they may accept the regulations of printing, they never want the number of customers to decrease. Thus, there should be a certain compulsion, for example, from the WHO” (D.D.N., Deputy editor in-chief, print media).*

Despite the fact that pictorial health warnings have a strong impact on public awareness of the harmful effects of smoking, the opinions of interviewees were mixed. Nearly one half of interviewees thought that the measure was not effective in convincing smokers, demonstrating that media itself has not been educated enough about effective tobacco control measures. In general, the correspondents felt that this measure would be easily implemented but in fact, the tobacco control activists are facing a lot of difficulty in advocating for the implementation of this policy.

- **A total ban on tobacco advertisement and sponsorship:**

Chart 3: Correspondents' opinions on a total ban on tobacco advertisement and sponsorship



Approximately three-quarters of correspondents participating in the semi-structured survey thought that banning advertisement would be an effective measure and feasible. Meanwhile, the senior journalists thought that it was necessary to implement this measure and noted that the Vietnamese media have conformed strictly to the ban on tobacco advertising:

- + *“The measure is effective. It is necessary to ban because tobacco producers make a lot of impressive and eye-catching images. Like alcohol, if tobacco is allowed to freely advertise, the number of smokers will certainly increase”* (D.N., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media);
- + *“The measure should be put into practice. It is effective because at least the range of selection is limited”* (D.M.V., online media);
- + *“It is right to ban advertising since advertising has big influences consumer behavior. The image of a cowboy in the advertisement of Marlboro tobacco has strong impact on men”* (H.D., Managing editor, online media);
- + *“The measure has been implemented for a period of time. It is an effective and necessary one. This government’s policy is very good”* (K.H., Chief Representative, print media);

Tobacco advertising in newspapers has been totally banned; tobacco sponsorships for cultural, sports and charity events, however, are still taking place:

- + *“Not good enough. There is still tobacco sponsorship and charity. It is hard to ban those activities because who should ban charity or support to disabled children. It is possible to ban tobacco sponsorship for cultural and sports events, but in reality it still happens”* (B.V.K., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media).

All of the correspondents stated that tobacco companies were now trying all possible means to take advantage of legal loopholes for marketing their products as well as promoting their names through sponsorship, promotion, and charity. Those activities were actually seen as disguised advertising.

To the question how the media should respond to those activities of the tobacco industry, almost all the correspondents held a common view that it should only cover the event name but not mention the sponsoring tobacco company name:

+ “I think donation and sponsorship should still be received but with a condition that there will be no tobacco brand name or logo in newspapers” (K.H., Chief Representative, print media);

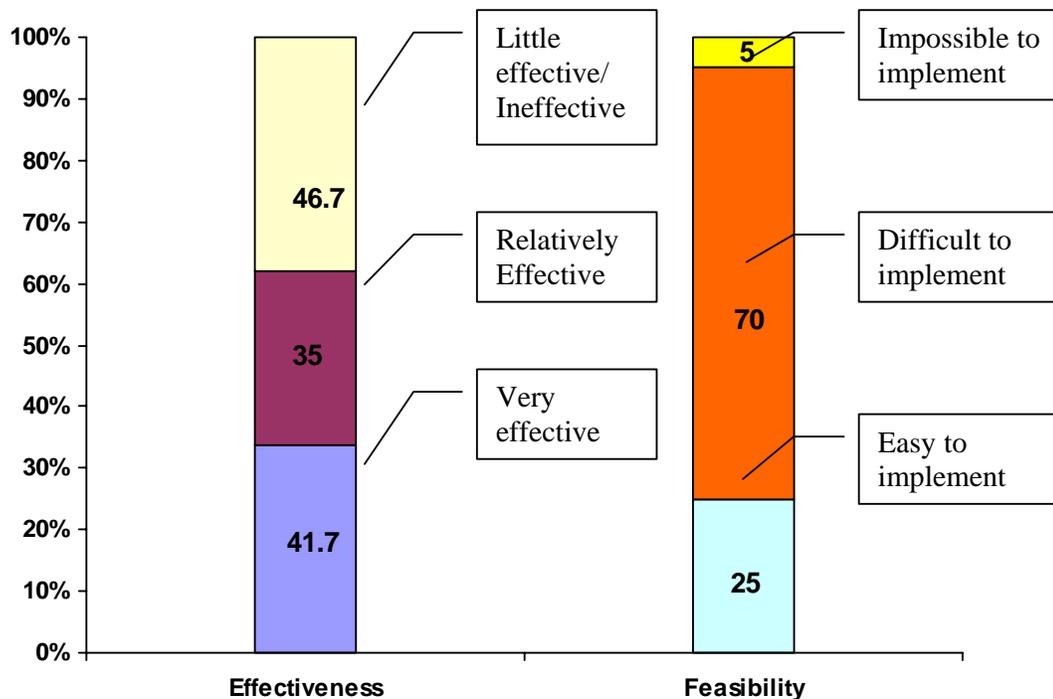
+ “How hard it is to cover this kind of information! The news coverage of special events is needed because it is the reader request. We should cover the event only but not mention the sponsor. A Newspaper is not a tool for promoting tobacco enterprises” (H.T., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media).

When asked about advantages and difficulties of implementing the measure, all the correspondents agreed that it is, basically, favorable. Difficulties, if any, only arose from the tricks and techniques of tobacco companies trying to take advantage of loopholes in the law.

Generally, the press corps supported the policy and believed that this measure could be easily implemented. Through in-depth interviewees, the weak enforcement of the policy in Vietnam was pointed out.

- **Smoking ban in public places:**

Chart 4: Correspondents’ opinions on a smoking ban in public places



All the interviewees, though highly appreciating this measure, still showed concern over its application in Vietnam:

+ “(Smoking rates will) Decrease for sure. It will make it difficult for us to find out somewhere to smoke if banned. Once in a conference, for example, I had to go without smoking for 4 consecutive hours, in the meanwhile, if at home, I should have smoked a lot during the 4 hours” (P.V.B., Editor-in-chief, print media);

“Surely the measure should be maintained and strictly implemented” (N.V.Y., deputy chief of news rooms, print media).

All of the correspondents agreed that Vietnam has not seriously and strictly conformed to regulations on smoking in public places. The regulations have been developed, but have not been put into practice. What hindered most in implementing the measure was that the public awareness of smoking was still limited. In addition, the lack of severe regulations and enforcement capability, and the negative reaction from non-smokers, who formed the majority of the society, also impeded implementation. :

+ *“It would be very difficult to apply the ban on smoking in public places in Vietnam as the public intellectual level is not well prepared for conforming to regulations which they believe to be trivial. They think that it is their personal right... In order to be effective, the regulations should come to the public via all information channels* (DDN, Deputy editor-in-chief, print media);

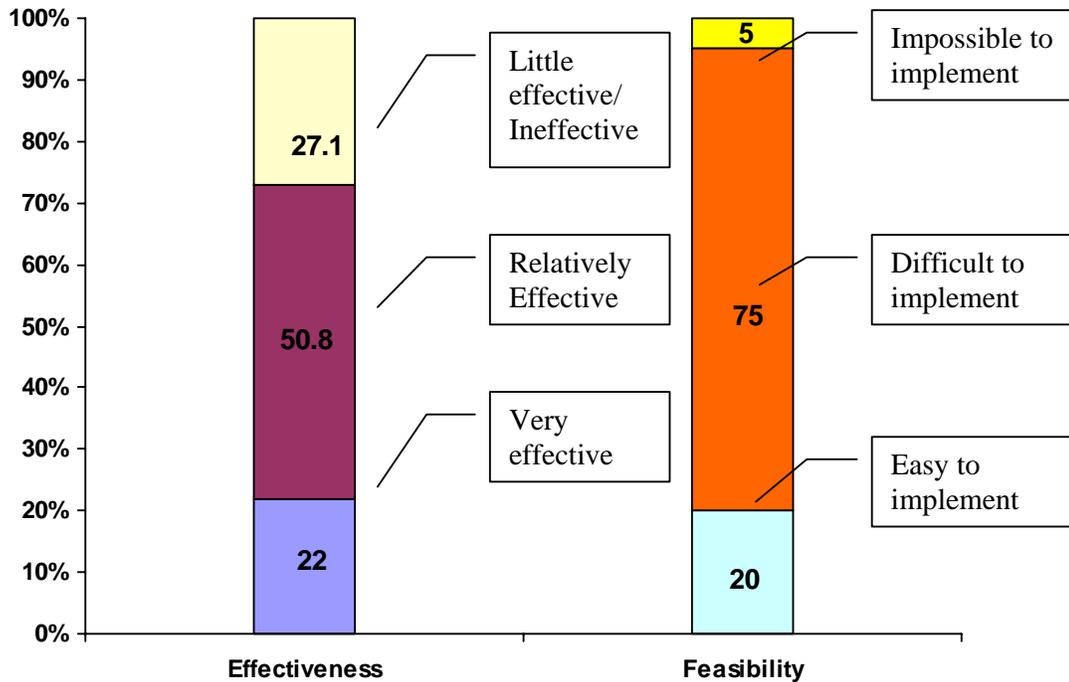
+ *“Even the regulation implementers have not found it necessary to impose a fine. The ban on smoking in public places in Vietnam will surely receive different feedback. People traditionally see smoking as a normal activity of life and get used to it. Furthermore, it is very easy for people to react negatively to the situation of being fined just for smoking a small cigarette. The fact explains why a too strict fine for a small thing can lead to unexpected results* (K.H., Chief Representative, print media)

+ *“What makes it difficult is the low public self-consciousness. If only 2 out of 100 people break the rules like in other countries, it is possible to fine, in Vietnam however, 100 out of 100 people break the rules, who will fine or be fined? The mechanism of monitoring and punishment is still not strict enough. For example, if we impose a fine of 50,000-100,000 VND for smoking in public places, who will fine? How to fine without any regulation guidelines? The degree banning smoking in public places has taken effect but we still haven’t got any system or personnel to implement it”* (N.H.N., Section deputy chief, Television)

In general, the majority of interviewees believed that a smoking ban in public places would be an effective measure but they also felt that the policy would be difficult to implement. The main reasons cited were low level of self-awareness/perception, high social acceptability of smoking, and popularity of law noncompliance in Vietnam.

- **Strengthening activities against illicit trade on tobacco:**

Chart 5: Correspondents' opinions on cigarette smuggling control



As many as two-third of the correspondents believed in the effectiveness of cigarette smuggling control measures, but as with smoking bans, also thought that they would be difficult to implement it in Vietnam.

+ “*It is only possible to limit but not totally control*” (N.V.Y., deputy chief of news rooms, print media); “*The tobacco control seems to be ineffective much, illicit tobacco is till displayed for public sales*” (D.M.V., online media); “*The illicit trade in tobacco is currently very complicated. It is hard to control because the borderline is too long*” (T.H., Editor-in-chief, online media); “*It is only possible to reduce but not curb or raze completely. Firstly, as illicit trading in tobacco brings in high profits, a lot of people are ready to do; secondly, the punishment frame for illicit trade in tobacco is still not strict enough; thirdly, the domestic demand for tobacco consuming is still high; and fourthly, the tariff system and border forces are still weak at the frontier*” (correspondent M.C., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media).

The above views about tobacco smuggling are just a few out of many from the press. Whether or not such measures could succeed would depend, at least in part, on the ability of authorities to implement social and economic measures that would enhance the living standards and awareness of people living in areas sensitive to smuggling.

In addition to the above measures, the research team also asked the correspondents about their opinions on the effectiveness and feasibility of **imposing a ban on tobacco sales to minors** and **promoting consultation for smoking cessation**. Results were as followings:

Chart 6: Correspondents' opinions on ban on tobacco sales to minors

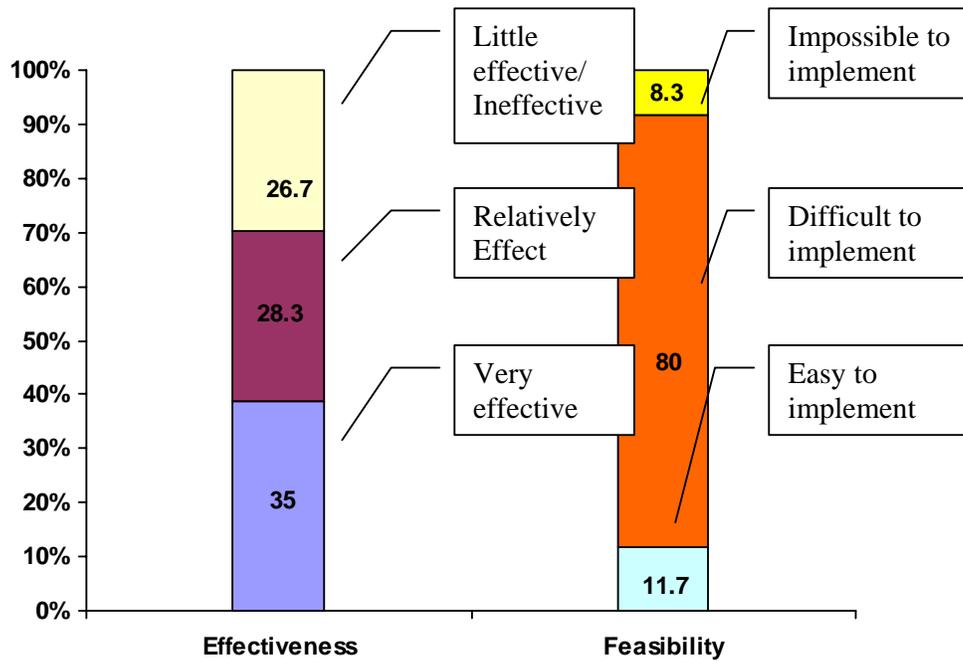
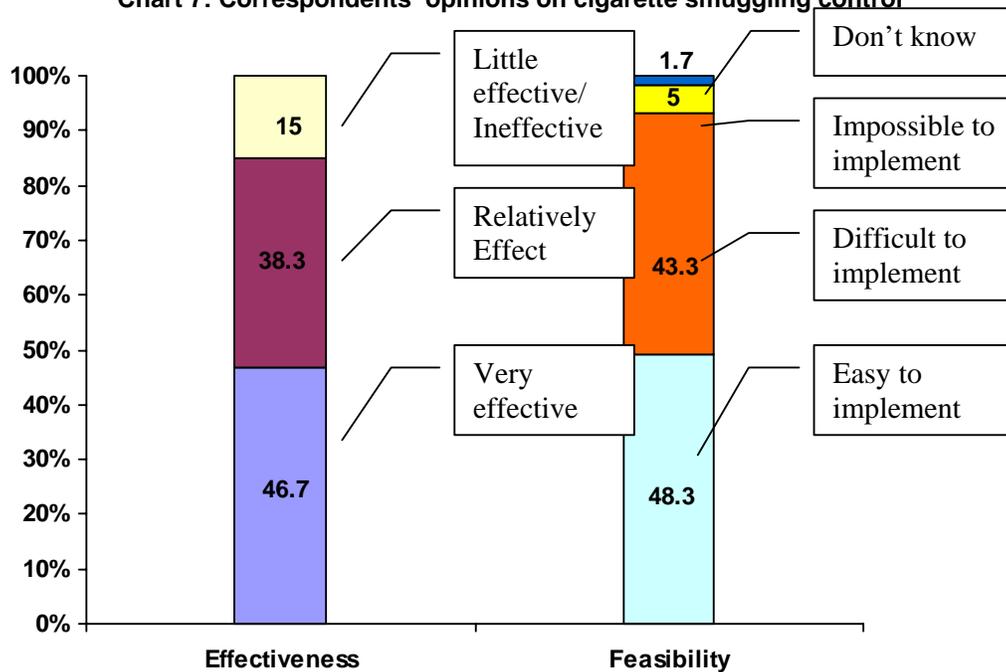


Chart 7: Correspondents' opinions on cigarette smuggling control



A majority of the correspondents thought that imposing a ban on cigarette sales to minors would help to reduce smoking, but most of them thought that it would be difficult or even impossible to carry out this policy in Vietnam. Meanwhile, the measure of promoting smoking cessation consulting would be more feasible, according to the correspondents.

7. Opinions about accessibility to information from the tobacco industry

Very few of the interviewees said that they received information from or about tobacco producers. The information, if any, as far as the correspondents revealed, was mainly about the companies' sales turnover, business performance, sponsorships, and poverty alleviation programs. Particularly, some correspondents revealed that they were once requested to write about a tobacco company's business performance.

Table 13: Accessibility to information from the tobacco industry

	Health correspondents (n = 20)	Eco-industrial correspondents (n = 20)	Socio-cultural correspondents (n = 20)	Total (n = 60)
Getting information about the tobacco industry:				
- Weekly	0	0	0	0
- Monthly	0	0	0	0
- Sometimes - Every 2-5 months	0	0	0	0
- Rarely - Once or twice per year	15%	25%	10%	18.3%
- Never	80%	75%	90%	81.7%
Taking part in the events sponsored/held by tobacco companies				
- Never	100%	95%	100%	98.3%
- Weekly	0	0	0	0
- Monthly	0	0	0	0
- Sometimes (Every 2-5 months)	0	0	0	0
- Rarely (Once or twice/year)	0	5%	0	1.7%
- Unable to remember				

Assessing the tobacco industry's contribution to the national economy, 33.9% of the interviewees replied "the industry has contributed to the economy", 30.5% said "the industry has contributed much to the economy," and 22% answered "the industry has contributed very little to the economy". Thus, the tobacco industry, in the eye of the media, still brings a lot of economic benefit to the country.

The media have said that they had not been exposed to information provided by the tobacco industry. However, taking into consideration of skills of the tobacco industry in lobbying and advocating, and the evidence from many in-depth interviews, it was more likely that the media itself was not aware about the level of its exposure to this kind of information.

Table 14: The media view about the tobacco industry's contribution to the national economy

Opinion	Health correspondents (n = 20)	Eco-industrial correspondents (n = 20)	Socio-cultural correspondents (n = 20)	Total (n = 60)
- Contribute nothing				
- Contribute very little	15%	15%	30%	20%
- Contribute	35%	25%	40%	33.3%
- Contribute much	40%	45%	15%	33.3%
- No idea/ no answer	0	10%	10%	6.7%
- Other ideas	0	5%	5%	6.7%

The senior journalists delved into analyzing the contributions of the tobacco industry in the comparison with its negative effects on the country:

+ *“With simple regard to finance and tax contribution, I think that the industry has contributed much to the national economy and brought in a lot of jobs to the community. However when the money is viewed in comparison with its bad effects, the issue should also be given careful thought to”* (N.T.L., Chief of news rooms, radio);

+ *“In Vietnam, tobacco companies, every year, pay tens of thousands of billion dong of tax, which is a huge source of income for the government. From this source, the government has invested in other fields or even poverty alleviating.”* (B.K., Managing editor, print media);

+ *“There are two undeniable contributions from the tobacco industry: the first is financial contribution (tax); the second is job creation, in which all the stages of growing, processing, manufacturing, distributing... use a lot of employees”* (D.T., Chief Representative, print media);

+ *“The industry has much contributed to but also harmed the economy”* (H.T., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media);

+ *“The industry has contributed to the economic and social development of the country on some extent. The matter is how to balance between this development and public interests”* (H.D., Managing editor, online media);

+ *“It is undeniable that the industry is very profitable. Its contribution is presented by tax payment. If simply considering the economic efficiency and job issues, we could support the tobacco industry. However, we are considering tobacco production activities from public health view and the general development of the country, which shows that there are also many other profitable industries and industrial crops. We should weigh the pros and cons, and select the least harmful alternative”* (K.H., Chief Representative, print media);

Some respondents asserted that the tobacco industry had contributed to the economy and, even in some localities, to poverty alleviation and job creation. However, the majority rejected developing this contribution into policies and guidelines:

+ *“It’s wrong. As in the development, there are many other crops not only alleviating poverty but also bringing in more economic and social interests than tobacco such as industrial or pharmaceutical crops”* (B.K., Managing editor, print media);

+ *“It is one way but not the way which should be chosen for alleviating poverty since there are many other ways”* (H.D., managing editor, online media);

+ *“This idea is only situational for every stage of economic and social development. Considering the tobacco industry as the main source of income and the momentum for local economic development is, as I think, only a short-run solution. The local economy could be spurred by other sources. It is even possible to restructure crops and livestock, why do we take tobacco with so many harms as the main source of income”* (P.V.B, Chief of editor room, print media);

+ *“The tobacco industry has been a considerable supply of jobs; however, in the long run it is unacceptable to maintain it. Back to the past when people in Tay Bac grew poppy and Binh Da lived on making firecrackers, it was thought that if the ban came into effect, the whole villages would die. But so far they are still alive”* (H.N., Deputy chief of news room, television);

Most respondents felt that the tobacco industry had made at least some contribution to the national economy. This could be explained by the fact that the media has not received enough information about tobacco-related economic loss at the national, household and individual levels

Table 15: The opinion about social and charity activities of tobacco companies

Opinions	Health correspondents (n = 19) Missing value =1	Eco-industrial correspondents (n = 20)	Socio-cultural correspondents (n = 19) Missing value =1	Total (n = 58) Missing value=2
Information about charity events sponsored by tobacco companies				
- Not know	85%	80%	90%	85%
- Know	15%	20%	10%	15%
Opinions about the aims of charity events sponsored by tobacco companies				
- It is the way tobacco companies show their kindness	16.6%	30%	15%	15.5 %
- It is the way tobacco companies promote themselves	94.7%	75%	94%	82.7%
- Other opinions	16.6%	30%	10%	17.2%

8. Tobacco control information accessibility

Almost one-third of the interviewees participating in the semi-structured survey said that they had never received any information about tobacco control. Of the 20 health correspondents, noticeably, two had never accessed tobacco control information, one received it once a week, 12 received it every month, four sometimes received it, and one rarely received it. Thus, among the *correspondents responsible for health coverage, including t tobacco issues, there remains a lack of accessibility to information about tobacco control.*

Table 16: Accessibility to information about tobacco control

	Health correspondents (n = 20)	Eco-industrial correspondents (n = 20)	Socio-cultural correspondents (n = 20)	Total (n = 60)
- Weekly	5%	0	5%	3.3%
- Monthly	60%	5%	5%	23.3%
- Sometimes (every 2-5 months)	20%	5%	10%	11.7%
- Rarely (once or twice/year)	5%	40%	45%	30%
- Never	10%	50%	35%	31.7%

The major sources of tobacco control information were tobacco control agencies (32.1% of the correspondents received information from this source), conferences (21.4%) and reports (21.4%).

In response to the question “Have you read/watched/heard any article/report/news related to tobacco control in the past month?” most of the correspondents had not really paid attention to the information that was available. Out of every 2 correspondents, 1 replied “yes” and 1 answered “no” on average.

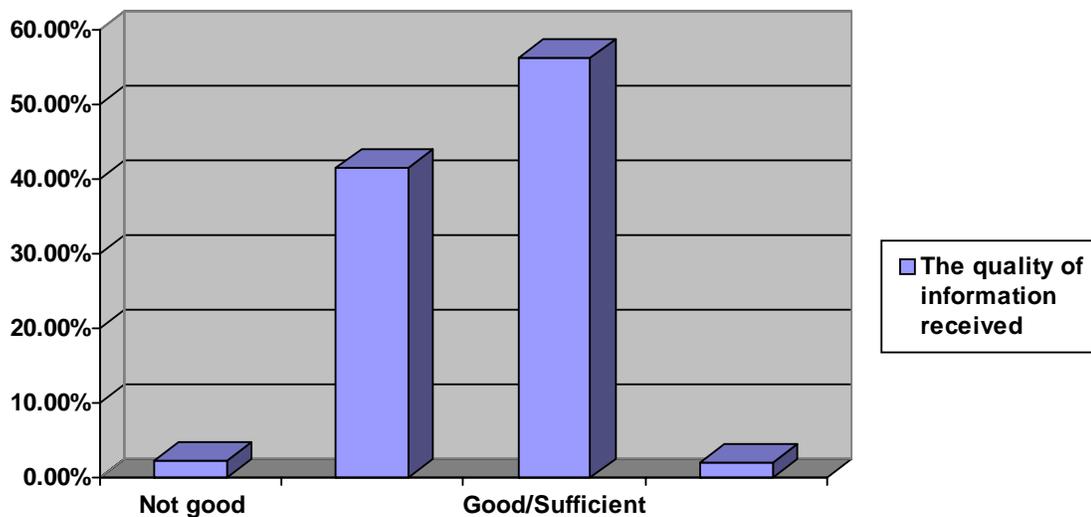
Table 17: The information accessibility to tobacco control from the media for the past month

	Health correspondents (n = 20)	Eco-industrial correspondents (n = 20)	Socio-cultural correspondents (n = 20)	Total (n = 60)
Not read/watched/heard any article/report/news related to tobacco control	50%	50%	40%	46.7%
Read/ watched/ heard articles/reports/news related to tobacco control and able to describe the contents	45%	50%	45%	46.7%
Unable to remember	5%	0	15%	6.7%

- According to the correspondents, the information provided to the media focused on tobacco’s health hazards, anti-smoking activities in Vietnam and other countries, and tobacco control policies.
- Evaluating the quality of tobacco control information received, most correspondents commented that it was average (56.1% said that “the information is good and sufficient”, 39% said that “the information is not good enough”). Half of the health correspondents said that the information received was not good enough.

There was still a significant number of reporters, including health and social reporters, who did not access tobacco control information regularly. This is further evidence of low coverage by media on tobacco control issues

Chart 8: Opinions of the health correspondents about the quality of tobacco control information received



- In order to better support the FCTC implementation and tobacco control activities in Vietnam, as suggested by leaders of the press agencies, the media should be provided with the following information:
 - + “Tobacco control agencies should provide the media with general information about tobacco hazards, figures and measures successfully implemented by other countries

to have a positive impact on individual self-respect: why is it possible in other countries but not here?" (H.Y., Chief of news rooms, print media);

+ "The media should be provided with high quality information about illicit trade of tobacco, smoking prevalence, and tobacco control activities" (B.V.K, Deputy editor-in-chief, print media);

+ "The media should be given certain support to and provided with specific information about smoking violation, punishment and other typical news..." (D.M.V., online media);

+ "The competent authorities should provide correspondents with more complete information about current tobacco production in our country to help them understand that although tobacco is an economically efficient goods, it also has serious effects on the society" (K.H., Chief representative, print media);

+ "The content of information should be more practical. We should not cover news too far from the real life. For example, the information provided by foreign organizations about cancer and smoking in public places in their countries, which have social and economic conditions very different from Vietnam, is alien and unconvincing. Thus, in order to improve the quality of mass media information, correspondents should be provided with more exact and practical data and information" (M.C., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media);

+ " Surely the media still have to rely on some certain agencies responsible for providing high quality information and data of tobacco so that the media can get statistics and reports" (H.D., Managing editor, online media);

+ "The media need specific figures: how many ex-smokers are there in Vietnam? How much money do smokers spend on tobacco annually? How many deaths come from tobacco related diseases? When competent authorities discover illicit trade in tobacco, they should immediately inform the media so that the media can cover the news and warnings in time" (B.K., Managing editor, print media);

+ "Tobacco control agencies should frequently provide the media with messages for every certain period. The information can be study results conducted by those agencies" (B.K., Managing editor, print media);

Opinions about the quality of information received on tobacco control were mixed. Common opinions expressed were that the information was inadequate in both quantity and quality, with uncertain reliability/applicability. Specific information and research results were also mentioned as an important information requirement for anti-smoking media coverage.

9. The role of tobacco control agencies and their coordination with the media

- To address the "indifference" of the media to tobacco control, as suggested by leaders of the press agencies, tobacco control agencies should further develop their leading and coordinating roles:

+ "The source of information for the media should be more frequent. Tobacco control agencies should be sources where correspondents can get all information related to tobacco. Currently, whenever anything arises, correspondents do not know where to ask" (T.H., Editor-in-chief, online media);

+ "Those agencies play a very important role. They should actively launch campaigns or actively contact with the media to wage propagating campaigns. They should guide and coordinate propagating activities" (H.T., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media);

- + “One can not “make” bricks without “straw”. At present I don’t think “make” is a problem to us but we hardly have any “straw”. A lot of information is not really practical. There is still not general information about the smoking prevalence, lung diseases and cancers in Vietnam, for example. Thus, where can we get practical information for the readers” (M.C, deputy editor-in-chief, print media);
- + “Tobacco control agencies should develop legal procedures and propose tobacco control measures and policies to the government” (C.T.T, deputy chief of news room, print media)
- “Active coordination” on the part of the tobacco control agencies was desired by 100% of the correspondents:
 - + “Tobacco control agencies should have a more overall view of tobacco. They should, for example, have market information of how many tobaccos are consumed currently and studies on the quantity of tobaccos consumed in localities. To regions in which smoking has become an embedded and popular habit of life, the media should approach to them to collect the facts and give necessary warnings. Furthermore, tobacco control agencies should also embrace the violation of the ban on tobacco advertising, the illicit trade in tobacco... and timely inform the media to coordinate with them in propagating. Currently, all the above matters are almost self-studied and propagated by the media without any influence from control agencies. Those agencies should also study to work out effective measures in tobacco controlling and the media will, then, seek for and heat up social forums around the issue” (K.H., Chief representative, print media);
 - + “Tobacco control agencies should frequently inform and cooperate with the media and avoid the fact that only when the World No Tobacco Day comes, meetings and conferences about tobacco are held to invite the media” (B.K., Managing editor, print media);
 - + “They should actively contact the media. As actually events in Vietnam is currently taking place with great quantity, speed and variety, the media are sometimes carried away by hot issues of the day and forget long but killing issues of tobacco” (M.C., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media).
 - + “About organization, tobacco control agencies should have a section in charge of information so that it is possible to have actions and moves to link and coordinate among agencies. For example, while life insurance companies have media experts and sections, why haven’t tobacco control agencies got yet? However as far as I know, perhaps they have already got but there is no coordination or document requesting the media to propagate the issue, which means that performance hasn’t come up to requirements. In short, it is definitely necessary to have specialized staff responsible for following, keeping good relations and coordinate closely with the mass media” (P.V.B., Editor-in-chief, print media);

Overall, the media expect that tobacco control agencies should be a reliable source of information for them and should provide them with regularly updated information about tobacco control.

10. Solutions for greater communication efficiency in tobacco control

- **News coverage on tobacco control:**
 - + **Quantity:** More than half of the interviewees said that they had not written any article on tobacco control over the past 6 months. Of the 20 health correspondents interviewed, 3 had not written any article over the past 6 months; 14 had written from

1 to 5 articles, 1 had written from 5 to 10 articles; and 2 had written more than 10 articles.

Table 18: Articles written about tobacco control over the past 6 months

Opinion	Health correspondents (n = 20)	Eco-industrial correspondents (n = 20)	Socio-cultural correspondents (n = 20)	Total (n = 60)
- Not write any news/articles on tobacco control	15 %	80%	65%	53.3%
- Write 15 articles	70%	20%	30%	40%
- Write 5 - 10 articles	5%	0	5%	3.3%
- Write more than 10 articles	10%	0	0	3.3%

“News coverage on tobacco control is now just trendy and comes up simultaneously when any campaign is launched and then comes down in silence” (H.D., Managing editor, online media);

“News coverage on tobacco control is not so much as on other issues in terms of quantity” (D.M.V., online media);

“In small quantity and around the World No Tobacco day only” (B.K., Managing editor, print media);

“The least in terms of quantity” (B.K., Managing editor, print media);

“The quantity of news and articles on tobacco control was relatively large 5 years ago. Currently, it has declined a lot and the issue has not enjoyed the priority over other issues such as HIV...” (K.H., Chief Representative, print media);

P.T, Deputy Editor in chief, online media, personally gave other comments stemming from facts in his workplace: *“In general, the quantity is large but the way to write is not new and keeps repeating. We give priority to the issue in our office and have at least 4 to 5 articles per month”*

+ Quality: *“Monotonous, boring, repetitive and unattractive”* were comments from leaders of the press agencies about the quality of tobacco control information.

“I sometimes read them but have a feeling of having already known all. Almost articles give general information of tobacco related mortality and diseases” (H.T., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media);

“The quality is low and draws very few readers because the way of propagating is still unattractive” (B.K., Managing editor, print media);

“Propagating is superficial” (T.H., Editor-in-chief, online media);

“Current articles on tobacco control are still superficial. Most of the correspondents only report what they receive from information providers but not put efforts in developing them into attractive propagating messages” (H.D., Managing editor, online media);

“News and articles on tobacco control are still one way and focus on hazards only” (B.V.K, Deputy editor-in-chief, print media)

- The leaders of the press agencies also recommended some solutions to the media itself in covering news on tobacco control :

“The public need good examples. If we use some certain examples, a person of the public who was formerly a heavy smoker has successfully quit smoking, for instance, those examples will bring in some certain effects” (H.T., Deputy editor-in-chief, print media);

“Tobacco control agencies should select a media firm or a newspaper and cooperate with them in estimating the cost of propagating, gauging the efficiency, monitoring and controlling how many people read and know the articles per annual and how many people quit smoking after reading them...” (Correspondent H.Y., Chief of news rooms, print media);

“There should be attractive sources of facts and materials. The deeper the materials are, the more interesting the articles will be. Furthermore, it is necessary to coordinate interagencies and interprofessions such as art and literature...” (P.V.B., Editor-in-chief, print media);

“I can see that they are very good at activities of protecting the environment and wild animals. There are even clubs of environmental correspondents, ICT for instance. If correspondents are members of those clubs, in addition to day-to-day work, their sense of initiative in information as well as self-consciousness will be enhanced.” (D.M.V., online media);

“It is necessary to diversify their ways of communication, for example, tobacco managing agencies should coordinate with anti-smuggling forces and once any smuggling has been discovered, the anti-smuggling agency will inform the tobacco control agency and then the tobacco control agency will inform the media. The information should be specific to avoid monotone. When talking about tobacco hazards, the information should not cover general harms but a specific person who has died after years of smoking or become broke because of tobacco. This kind of information will be very vivid and convincing to others” (B.K., Managing editor, print media);

“Managing agencies should provide the media with more opportunities and occasions to recall, emphasize and affirm the tobacco hazards. Certainly, the media should also frequently look for and exploit new topics of tobacco” (correspondent K.H., Chief Representative, print media);

“There will be very few articles without funding. As far as I know, previously, the Ministry of Public Health provided the media with a certain budget annually. Although the amount was not large, it was attached to the responsibility of the editorial offices and they were, therefore, more interested in propagating. Now they only talk about tobacco when they really like to” (correspondent B.K., Managing editor, print media);

“One of the most common forms that environmental protectors have done is to establish a network of pressmen (Clubs are now too trite). In a press agency, health issues are certainly assigned to a certain section in which tobacco issues are assigned to one or two certain correspondents. All of those correspondents should take part in a network which will propagate, train and provide them with information and hold writing contests about tobacco among them... It is necessary to change the form of conveying information, not only limited to articles or news but also poems, music, plays, films... In those works, it is not necessary to mention how tobacco is harmful or how nicotine is...we should return to how to smoke civilly” (H.D., Managing editor, online media);

“How interesting the media is depends on the individual correspondent, his experiences, richness in information, and knowledge of tobacco. The first step should be done is to provide short courses training the media in writing about tobacco control like it has been done in writing about the environment, economy and AIDS/HIV control...this is the shortest and, perhaps, the most specific measure to

equip correspondents with basic skills in writing about tobacco. Though how details of the articles are depends on the individual writer since writing is personal, it is still necessary to be equipped with the foundation or base, which is in short supply in our country” (N.V.Y., deputy chief of news rooms, print media)

- Two-thirds of the correspondents felt that information about tobacco-related diseases was the most important to communicate to the public. Thus, they believed that health issues should be treated as the first priority in propagating and raising public awareness about tobacco hazards. This response helps to explain why the media feels that existing information about tobacco control is “monotonous, simple, repetitive and unattractive” - correspondents are generally unaware of wide range of information that does already exist, and the need to diversify and enrich the content of tobacco control information in newspapers. Only 26.7% of the interviewees thought that it was important to communicate the hazards of passive smoking, and only 5% said that tobacco hazards to the economy and environment should be covered.

Table 19: The most important issues in tobacco control that should be communicated to the public

	Health correspondents (n = 20)	Eco-industrial correspondents (n = 20)	Socio-cultural correspondents (n = 20)	Total (n = 60)
Tobacco related diseases	55%	75%	70%	66.7%
Passive smoking related diseases	40%	10%	30%	26.7%
Tobacco hazards to the economy	10%	0	5%	5%
Tobacco hazards to the environment	10%	0	5%	5%
Supporting tobacco control policies	30%	15%	20%	21.7%

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

An analysis of the results of the qualitative and quantitative study on the media concerns about the FCTC and tobacco control activities leads to the following conclusions:

- Media access to information related to tobacco control is still limited. Health reporters received the most information, while economic and social-cultural reporters received the least. The major sources of tobacco control information are tobacco control agencies (32.1% of the correspondents got information from this source), conferences (21.4%) and reports (21.4%). The information provided to the media focused on tobacco’s health hazards, local and international anti-smoking activities, and tobacco control policies.
- All of the correspondents are aware of the health hazards of smoking and passive smoking. However, only half of the interviewees thought that tobacco could harm the economy and environment. Attention should, therefore, be given to the provision of information on those tobacco hazards for the media.
- The correspondents expressed concern about the current smoking situation in Vietnam but some thought that the country’s smoking prevalence was declining. Many correspondents believed it was unfair to rank smoking issues at a lower priority level than other health issues. Generally, media support to tobacco control in Vietnam was strong.

- Although awareness of the existence of a national tobacco control policy was high, there is evidence that in-depth awareness is low. There were still a significant number of correspondents who were not aware of the national commitment to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and even fewer reporters were aware of its details. A considerable number of correspondents still did not believe in the effectiveness of some key tobacco control measures such as increasing taxes on tobacco or introducing pictorial health warnings. Many doubted the feasibility of the measures in Vietnam such as a smoking ban in public places, prohibition of cigarette sale to minors, and strengthening control over illicit trade of cigarettes. They also pointed out some barriers to FCTC implementation in Vietnam including low public awareness, tobacco industry's tactics, and a lack of resources.

There are two reasons that might be cited for the fact: either the FCTC and its scientific basis have not been introduced properly to media, or this could be the "outcome" of tobacco industry propaganda. What ever the reason is, this poses a challenge to tobacco control policy advocates, as the media in Vietnam is a strong tool for tobacco control policy advocacy. If the media does not believe or have confidence in the effectiveness and feasibility of tobacco control policies, they would not be able to help tobacco control advocates to gain support for tobacco control policies and or to educate the public to comply with the policies and regulations.

- According to the media personnel, it is due to the nature of the issue as well as the typical media activities that make the media pay less attention to propagating the FCTC and tobacco control. News coverage on the issue only appears occasionally when there is a campaign. The quality of news/articles on tobacco-related issues was limited to "average" or lower, and was described as being a "monotonous, boring repetition of facts". This was attributed to: (i) the nature of the issue (tobacco may not kill smokers immediately; economic and environmental losses caused by tobacco are hard to see); (ii) insufficient awareness of tobacco hazards among correspondents; (iii) correspondents being unenthusiastic about the issue and unable to find out new things about the issue; and (iv) almost all the correspondents believing that only information about tobacco-related diseases should be disseminated.

Ideas collected from the correspondents show that tobacco control agencies play a significant role in propagating the FCTC as well as tobacco control activities. Those agencies need to learn to cooperate more with the media.

- Finally, the media personnel interviewed reporting having had little direct information exposure to the tobacco industry. Any information, as revealed by correspondents, was primarily about the companies' sales turnover, business performance, sponsorship, and poverty alleviation programs. However, through in-depth interviews with senior journalists, it was revealed that many of them recognized the economic contribution of the tobacco industry to the economy and were worried that some strong tobacco control measure such as raising taxes or printing health warnings may affect this contribution. This demonstrates that the media personnel themselves were not aware enough about the lobbying skills of the tobacco industry as well as their exposure to this kind of information. It also showed that the media was not educated enough about the economic losses caused by tobacco.

Recommendations for enhancing the media awareness of tobacco control and improving the quality of tobacco related news coverage.

1. To tobacco control agencies:

- To increase regular cooperation with the media and provide the media with more scientific information relating to tobacco control issues, information provided to the media should focus more on the negative economic and environmental effects of tobacco as well as on benefits and effectiveness of tobacco control policies stated in the FCTC.

- To assist correspondents to disseminate information about the FCTC and tobacco control by establishing a network of key players in the issue, tobacco control advocates need to provide regular seminars and training courses (training courses should initially focus on health correspondents. From the experiences of training in some fields such as environment, economics, gender equality, HIV/AIDS, and the bird flu, the most suitable duration for such a training course is one week. The training could consist of two parts: increasing knowledge about tobacco hazards and tobacco control policies (in which the effectiveness of some major tobacco control measures should be emphasized) and providing the necessary updated skills for correspondents to improve the quality of tobacco control information) ;
- To train correspondents in writing about tobacco control and providing them with frequent information, it is necessary to actively cooperate and set up a network of correspondents in charge of propagating tobacco control, including not only health but also economic and socio-cultural correspondents ;
- To actively launch and maintain regular media campaigns on tobacco control, it is necessary to hold writing contests on tobacco for correspondents to encourage and promote media concerns about the issue.

2. To the media:

- Content: The content of articles about tobacco control should be richer and more diversified. It should not only be limited to tobacco hazards but should include information about advancing to a tobacco free environment and a culture and politeness in smoking. Especially, it is necessary to raise public awareness of tobacco hazards and build a 'say No to tobacco' attitude for each citizen;
- Form: It is necessary to diversify the mediums for communicating information and use different channels of influence and approach (examples, stories)
- Quantity: The number of news/articles about tobacco control should be increased by providing specialized pages, special subjects, or maintaining regular items.

3. To Government:

The government should have a mechanism and budget to enable the media to develop their important role in tobacco control. It is also necessary to support long term projects with appropriate investment in terms of budget and human resources to encourage and promote media involvement in addressing tobacco hazards.