Technical Report on Tobacco Marketing at the Point-of-Sale in Bucharest, Romania

Product Display, Advertising, and Promotion around Primary and Secondary Schools
Written by:
Mark Spires, MPH
Ashley Grant, MPH
Joanna Cohen, PhD

Produced November 2016 by:
Institute for Global Tobacco Control
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
2213 McElderry St., Fourth Floor
Baltimore, MD 21205 USA
www.jhsph.edu/igtc
www.globaltobaccocontrol.org

This work was supported with funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies’ Bloomberg Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use (www.bloomberg.org).

Copyright 2016 Institute for Global Tobacco Control

Suggested Citation:

For more information, please contact:
igtc@jhu.edu
**Background and Introduction**

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death and disease across the globe.\(^1\) Although global estimates of tobacco marketing expenditures are not available, US cigarette manufacturers alone are estimated to have spent over 26 billion US dollars between 2011 and 2013 on advertising and promotion.\(^2\) Tobacco companies use deceptive and predatory marketing practices to increase consumption of their products, and to make tobacco use appear glamorous or socially acceptable while dismissing the products’ adverse health effects.\(^3\) Article 13 of the World Health Organization’s (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) calls for a comprehensive ban on all forms of TAPS, including the retail display of tobacco products.\(^4\) Evidence shows that the tobacco industry responds to partial TAPS bans that regulate only certain types of TAPS strategies (such as television or radio) by re-directing their resources to market their brands on unregulated channels such as the point-of-sale (POS).\(^5\) Numerous longitudinal studies have demonstrated that exposure to tobacco product advertising and promotion increases the likelihood that youth will start to smoke.\(^6\) The display of tobacco products at the POS has the same effect and influence on behavior as traditional media advertising.\(^7\) Marketing in retail environments specifically has been shown to increase the likelihood of smoking initiation among youth.\(^8\) One study found that stores where adolescents frequently shop may contain nearly three times as many marketing materials and shelf space for popular tobacco brands.\(^9\)

Romania became a party to the FCTC on 27 April, 2006.\(^10\) Among Romania’s just over 21.5 million residents,\(^11\) an estimated 37.4% of adult men, and 16.7% of adult females use tobacco daily,\(^12\) with 18.4% of boys, and 10.4% of girls using tobacco products.\(^13\) Of students who currently use tobacco products, 71.1% buy cigarettes in a store.\(^13\)

Currently, Romanian law does not prohibit point-of-sale advertising or the display of tobacco products at the point-of-sale. However, the law prohibits the advertising of tobacco products in press and other printed publications and the distribution of tobacco products to those under the age of 18, as well as restricts the sponsorship of events or activities by the tobacco industry.\(^14\) Additionally, outdoor advertising (including billboards) for tobacco products is banned. Romania’s laws do not align with the FCTC and the Article 13 Guidelines with respect to point-of-sale product display and advertising.

**Methods**

This report describes a study about tobacco marketing at the point-of-sale in Bucharest, Romania. The work was led by the Institute for Global Tobacco Control (IGTC) at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (JHSPH). IGTC partnered in Bucharest with the Clearpoint Communications Associates (CCA) who provided guidance and context about the sampling framework. IGTC designed the survey instrument and data collection protocol. Study team investigators trained 6 university students to conduct the fieldwork and submit daily reports for review in real-time. The study team was in Bucharest for training and data collection to troubleshoot any logistical or technical issues. Data cleaning, validation, and analysis were carried out by IGTC.
**Sampling Approach**

This study surveyed tobacco retailers in Bucharest, Romania’s capital and largest city with a population of over 1.6 million.¹¹ One hundred and twenty-one schools were selected within the city boundaries, with consideration for the (1) retail density, (2) school density, and (3) ease of accessibility for data collectors traversing the cities via public transportation (Figure 1). Each school was assigned a unique identification code. An online mapping and distance tool was used to define a sampling area radius of 250 meters surrounding each school, ensuring that none of the sampling areas overlapped. The study surveyed a convenience sample of supermarkets, convenience stores, small, independent grocers, kiosks/newsstands, gasoline stations, cafes or bars, mobile street vendors, sidewalk vendors, and tobacco shops within each sampling area that sold tobacco products.

**Figure 1. Selected Schools in Bucharest (n=119)**

![Map of selected schools in Bucharest](image)

**Survey Instrument**

The survey instrument was designed to address key components of Romania’s tobacco control law that allow or regulate different types of tobacco product placement, promotion, health warnings, and sales restrictions, as well as known trends in POS marketing that may target youth (Figure 2). The survey also asked whether the store was within eyesight of the school and provided fields for data collectors to enter the sampling area code, retailer address, name brands of tobacco products displayed or advertised, and other notes or comments about the retailer.
**Figure 2. Survey Instrument Content**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Product Placement</strong></th>
<th><strong>Signalisation and Visibility of Health Warnings</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cashier zone</td>
<td>Signage with clear health warning labels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behind the cashier zone</td>
<td>Signage that sales are prohibited to youth under 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanging from the ceiling</td>
<td>Visible pack warning labels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye level of children</td>
<td><strong>Advertising and promotion</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On a power wall</td>
<td>Dimensional packaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near sweets, snacks or soda</td>
<td>Mention of flavors (menthol or otherwise)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On a branded stand or cabinet</td>
<td>Free tobacco product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With toys</td>
<td>Discounts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Display or Ad Characteristic**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Signalisation (digital or otherwise)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Promotional gifts</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of lights</td>
<td>Imitation tobacco products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of videos</td>
<td>Free games or computer games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tobacco brand sponsoring of event</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection Protocol**

Observations and photos were collected from retailers during normal business hours from July 27-29, 2016. Each data collector received a packet of sampling area maps including the unique school identification code and space to record the addresses of tobacco retailers in that area (Appendix A). Street names and radii boundaries were clearly visible on all sampling area maps, and data collectors were instructed to use nearest intersections and landmarks to stay within the confines of the radii boundaries. Data collectors began identifying points-of-sale within the sampling area by using the maps to follow a spiral-walking pattern, observing all streets within the 250-meter radius. All supermarkets, convenience stores, small, independent grocers, kiosks/newsstands, cafes or bars, and tobacco shops were selected for observation. The school code, address, school visibility, and store type were still recorded at locations that did not sell tobacco products. Data collectors wrote the address of each tobacco retailer they observed on the corresponding sampling area map.

Observational data and photos of tobacco product displays or ads were recorded and uploaded to a cloud-based database in real-time within Magpi, a mobile data collection application installed on smartphones. The mobile app was able to capture the date, geographic coordinates, and data collector name for each record uploaded to the dataset. The order of questions and format of response options were designed to facilitate rapid and discrete observation by data collectors. Data collectors also carried paper copies of the survey to use as an alternative to the mobile app in the event of any technical issue. At the end of each day, data collectors reported the address and sampling area code of each retailer they observed by entering information into a spreadsheet hosted on Google Drive. The study team reviewed these reports daily in order to check the uploaded dataset and ensure that the mobile software application was functioning properly.

**Training**

Six university students attended a full day of training to use the study protocol on July 26, 2016 – immediately before the data collection period. The study team explained in detail the purpose of the study, the current tobacco control law, the survey content, key terms and definitions, the Magpi software application, and data collection procedures. Data collectors were instructed to behave as customers in order to discretely observe the retail environment and capture photos. In order to estimate the placement of products at the eye-level of children, each data collector used a measuring
When using tape to identify a 1-meter reference point on their body. The data collection team were oriented to the Romanian tobacco control policies and trained to recognize related point-of-sale advertising, promotion, and/or sponsorship. During the training, data collectors participated in a field test of the study protocol to practice using the survey, mobile app, and data collection procedures in nearby retailers.

**Results**

There were a total of 100 school sampling areas observed. Data collectors observed 589 retail outlets within a 250-meter radius of schools – 150 of which were located within eyesight of the school. 419 retailers (71%) observed sold tobacco, of which 113 were within eyesight of the school. Of the 100 school sampling areas, 99 contained at least one retailer that sold tobacco products.

Regarding the display of signage indicating that sales are prohibited to youth under 18 years: of the tobacco retailers observed (305), 145 (35%) displayed signage that sales are prohibited to youth under 18 years. A lower compliance rate (27%) was found for those retailers that sold tobacco within eyesight of the school (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Number of Retailers with Age Restriction Signage and Product Display, Advertising & Promotion Visible from Outside the Store**

![Figure 3](image)

Tobacco products were often displayed in or near the cashier zone (Figure 4). The majority (59%) of product displays at point-of-sale were accentuated with the use of lights (Figure 5). Additionally, health warning labels that appear on these products were not visible on just under one quarter of displayed products observed.
Figure 4. Number of Retailers with Tobacco Product Displays

![Bar chart showing the number of retail locations where tobacco products are displayed, categorized by location and comparison between retailers within 250m of the school and all retailers.]

Figure 5. Tobacco Products Accentuated with the Use of Lights

![Images of tobacco product displays using lights and other visual tactics.]

Of particular interest and concern was the presence of tobacco products near sweets, snacks, or soda: over half (62%) of all tobacco retailers were observed displaying their tobacco products alongside sweets, snacks, or soda (Figures 6 and 7).
Figure 6. Tobacco Products Displayed with Sweets, Snacks, or Soda

Figure 7. Display of Tobacco Products near Sweets, Snacks, or Soda by Location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Retailer within eyesight of school (n=113)</th>
<th>Retailer not within eyesight of school (n=305)</th>
<th>All retailers (n=419)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the cashier zone</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behind the cashier zone</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanging from the ceiling</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye level of children</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On a power wall of tobacco products</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On a branded stand or cabinet</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Any of the above</strong></td>
<td><strong>75</strong></td>
<td><strong>183</strong></td>
<td><strong>258</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As stated above, the current law in Romania allows for direct advertising at the pint-of-sale and other locations within the retail environment. So it was expected that a high number of advertising signage would be observed. Signage, in one form or another was observed at 85% (n=357) of observed stores (Figure 8). Of note was the use of lights to accentuate signage (observed at 59% of retail outlets), and the use of English words as part of the advertisement (observed at 65% of retail outlets). Of concern was the lack of health warnings visible on signage, absent on 21% of all signage observed.
Of further concern was the presence of other products with tobacco branding at tobacco retailers (12%).

Promotional activities were observed at just over a quarter of all tobacco retail outlets observed, with ‘contests or competitions’ making up 92% of all observed promotional activities (Figure 9).

Figure 8. Advertising Signage at Point-of-Sale

Figure 9. Promotional Activities at Point-of-Sale
Kent and L&M were the most frequently displayed brands of tobacco products at the point-of-sale at observed retail outlets, followed by Marlboro and Pall Mall (Figure 10).

**Figure 10. Tobacco Brands Displayed at the Point-of-Sale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brands Displayed at the POS</th>
<th># of Retailers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kent</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L&amp;M</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pall Mall</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlboro</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winchester</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**
This study identified numerous examples of retail outlets that display and/or advertise tobacco in close proximity to schools and thus are easily accessible by students. When displaying these products, many did not properly display the graphic warning labels on product packaging, contravening Romania’s current law, thus allowing the tobacco industry to utilize their product packaging as a form of advertising when displayed to the public. Additionally, the majority of these displays were accentuated by the use of lights, attracting the attention of potential customers, particular youth.

Around half of all tobacco retailers observed near schools displayed tobacco products at the point-of-sale alongside products that appeal to children, such as candy and soda. Also, of concern was that only 35% of observed stores displayed signage that sales are prohibited to youth under 18 years, contravening current laws.

As expected, advertisement signage was observed at the vast majority of observed stores. Again, as with the product displays, lights were used to accentuate advertisements. Disturbingly, mandatory health warnings were only visible on under a fifth of all signage observed. The inclusion of health warnings on all advertisement signage is part of Romanian law.

**Limitations**
This study used a convenience sample of schools in two large cities. Therefore, the results may not be representative of all types of tobacco retailers or generalizable to all areas of Romania.

**Conclusions**
This study demonstrates that harmful products are displayed and advertised in areas that are visible and accessible to minors. Additionally, non-compliance with regards to the display of health warnings on advertisement signage, as well as the display of signage indicating that sales of tobacco products are prohibited to youth under 18 years directly counteracts the purpose of current Romanian tobacco control laws put in place, in part to protect youth from the harms of tobacco use. A complete ban of tobacco product display, advertising, and promotion in retail locations would comply with FCTC recommendations and more effectively protect the public, and more particularly youth from tobacco products.
Key Terms and Definitions

**Advertising signage**: branded print or digital/electronic media such as posters, banners, flyers, or shelf liners that are intended to promote awareness and favorable opinions of a tobacco brand or product

**Brand stretching**: the presence of non-tobacco items that carry a tobacco brand name

**Cashier zone**: directly on top of, in front of, or to the side of the counter or cash register where consumers make a purchase

**Eye level of children**: placement of products 1 meter or less from the ground

**Power wall**: an excessive display of tobacco products showing multiple packs on multiple shelves

**Product display**: physical packs of tobacco products that are visible to potential consumers
Appendix A. School Sampling Area Map

219, Școala Gimnazial “Adrian Păunescu”, Aleea Valea Praheii Nr. 1, Bucharest, Romania

Please record the address of each store you observe. If needed, continue lettering and addresses on next page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A.</th>
<th>F.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>G.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.</td>
<td>J.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References