

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**THE MALAYSIAN GENERATION END GAME:
CONTENT ANALYSIS OF ONLINE NEWS
COVERAGE, GENERATIONAL PERCEPTION
AND EXPERT OPINION**

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ABSTRACT

Background: The Generation End Game (GEG) strategy bans tobacco sales to people born after 2007 to reduce tobacco usage. The measure aims to reduce Malaysia's smoking rate to 5% by 2040 and prevent adolescents from being addicted to tobacco. **Aims:** This study aims to examine how Malaysian online news articles responded to the proposed Generation End Game (GEG) policy following the announcement of a plan to impose a generational smoking ban for individuals born in 2007 and later. It also seeks to analyse the perceptions of Malaysians who commented on these news articles via social media. Additionally, the study aims to explore smoking behaviour and assess the baseline knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of young adolescents regarding the proposed GEG policy. It further investigates changes in adolescents' knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions after a comprehensive briefing on the GEG policy, and explores the determinants influencing their views. Finally, the study aims to assess tobacco control experts' perceptions of the proposed GEG policy. **Methods:** *Part 1-* A netnographic approach was employed to examine public discourse surrounding the GEG policy by analysing comments from Malaysians on social media platforms and Malaysian-based online news portals over a two-year period from January 2022 to January 2024. The ten most prominent Malaysian-based online news portals were identified, and relevant data were extracted using NCapture and subsequently imported into NVivo for analysis. An inductive approach and thematic content analysis were utilised to identify emerging themes and patterns. *Part 2-* A quantitative method was adopted through the administration of pre-and post-test questionnaires to secondary school students born in 2007 and later across all states in Malaysia. Information regarding the GEG policy was provided between the two assessments to evaluate changes in knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions. *Part 3-* Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with expert panellists to explore their acceptance of and perceptions toward the GEG policy. These interviews aimed to gain nuanced insights into expert perspectives and the potential implications of policy implementation. **Results:** *Part 1-* A total of 441 news articles and 7450 commentaries were analysed. Media sentiment towards the GEG policy shifted over time, with 52.2% of articles showing support during the initial announcement, dropping to 42.1% at the time of the official announcement, and further declining to 37.8% after the policy was removed from the Bill. *Part 2-* The response rate was 97.6% (n=731). 17.8% of the participants had an experience with tobacco use, and the majority initiated tobacco use at the age of 13-14 years old. The adolescents' knowledge, attitude, and perception increased after receiving informational videos on GEGs (p<0.001). *Part 3-* Five main themes (benefits, implications, suggestions, challenges, and comparison) and 21 subthemes with 46 key insights were identified. **Conclusion:** The online news articles were mainly written with a positive slant towards supporting the GEG policy in Malaysia. It suggests that the media played a role in supporting the health policy. Early education and awareness of the GEG policy are needed to ensure that the generations understand and are more supportive in the future. Expert panels mentioned that political influence is vital in the GEG's future implementation. Notably, the policy has the potential to significantly reduce smoking rates, which could consequently decrease the risk of general and oral diseases in the long term. The subsequent elimination of the GEG provision from the bill signifies a notable policy shift. If the GEG or a comparable approach is re-evaluated in the future, these insights will be crucial in informing its enhancement, dissemination, and strategic implementation.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

One of the most significant risk factors for Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) is tobacco use. Since the 1980s, smoking-related diseases have been the leading cause of death in Malaysia, accounting for thousands of reported deaths each year (ITC, 2012). In an effort to lower the number of tobacco-related deaths and pave the way for a tobacco-free future, policymakers have been actively searching for solutions. Malaysia thus joined the World Health Organisation (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) mission and designated 2040 as the year of the endgame of tobacco (MOH, 2021b). Tobacco endgame strategies seek to rapidly and permanently reduce smoking prevalence to the minimal viable levels. Tobacco endgame targets are precise, with quantifiable results that signify the end of the pandemic in a given region (WHO, 2003).

The Malaysian government has set a target to lower the prevalence of current tobacco smoking to 15% or less by 2025 and pledged to achieve the goal of smoke-free Malaysia by 2040, which entails reducing tobacco availability and smoking prevalence to the minimum achievable level. Malaysia has made several amendments to the Control of Tobacco Product Regulations (2004) since the ratification of the WHO FCTC. Some of the amendments include the implementation of pictorial health warnings and smoke-free public places, increasing cigarette taxes, and banning cigarette promotion and sponsorship by tobacco companies (P.U.(A)324/2004, 2004; ITC, 2012; MOH, 2021a; P.U.(A)324/2004, 2021). Despite this, smoking prevalence did not significantly decrease between 2011 and 2023. The National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2023 reports that the total prevalence of smoking among Malaysians aged 15 and older was 19.0%, with a higher percentage of smoking prevalence among males (35.7%) than females (0.9%) (NHMS, 2023). This proportion was slightly lower than the 21.3% and 22.8% figures recorded in NHMS 2019 and NHMS 2015, respectively, and 23.1% in the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS) 2011 (GATS, 2012; NHMS, 2015; NHMS, 2019). Additionally, Malaysia,