Condom Merchandising and Availability in Vietnam: Changing Taboos

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HIV In Vietnam

249,660 reported HIV cases
197,335 people living with HIV
52,325 AIDS-related deaths

(Ministry of Health 2012)
Abortion In Vietnam

300,000 abortion cases per year among the 15-19 age group

Highest abortion rate in Southeast Asia

Fifth highest abortion rate in the world

(Tu Du Hospital & MDS 2013)
Family Planning in Vietnam
‘Social evils’

**Figure 1:** Top five locations where male clients reported accessing sex workers, compared with locations where male clients report engaging in sexual acts with sex workers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>% of men report accessing sex workers</th>
<th>% of men who had sex with sex workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hotel/guest house</td>
<td>86.1</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street/park/public area</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massage parlor</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brothel</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karaoke bar</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*USAID (2011)*
Condom availability in non-traditional outlets

**THE SURPRISE**

An adventure of Mr. One

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I'm Lucky This Time. My Partner Is Really Excited, And We Practice New Things Everyday.

Hey! I Was Thinking About You.

Hey! I Have Just Bought A New Surprise.

Tonight, We'll Celebrate.

So...

What's The Nice Surprise?

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OH, WHO TELLS YOU SO?

THAT'S IT! IT DISINFECTS AGAINST DISEASES SO WELL, WE'LL FORGET THE CONDOM!

SOMEONE, IT'S NEW. MAYBE YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT ITS EFFECTIVENESS.

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NO!

You Are Wrong This Time. Lubricants Cannot Protect Us If Used Without A Condom.

Remember to use a latex condom whenever you choose to have anal sex. Lubricants alone are not sufficient to protect against HIV infection as you are still exposed to bodily fluids.

You can use lubricants along with water-based condoms to reduce condom breakage and enhance pleasure.
Where are condoms conventionally purchased from?

- Hole in the wall pharmacies
- Walk in pharmacies
- Convenience stores
- Condom boutiques
Changes in Traditional Retailing Outlets
Changes in Traditional Retailing Outlets
Understanding Social Taboos - Condom

• Condom’s “double burden” as a social artifact – birth control & unconventional sexual activities (Wilson & West 1981)

• Condom is a *conversationally* restricted taboo – “unmentionable” (Wilson & West 1992)

• Taboos are contagious – people carrying condoms are taboo people (Wilson & West 1981)

• Taboos are created and destructed
Condom Purchasing Embarrassment

- PoP display and store nature have an impact on purchasing behaviour.
- High embarrassment level associated (Dahl 2001).
Condom Retailing Embarrassment
The question

What are the merchandising methods of condoms in pharmacies, convenience stores and condom boutiques in urban Vietnam?
The Approach

• Structured observation – 21 retailers
• Follow-up interviews – 10 retailers
Sampling

Figure 2: Administration map of Ho Chi Minh City

Le (2009)
Findings

• 14 out of 21 stores displayed condoms openly
• All convenience stores and condom boutiques display condoms openly
• 6 out of 10 pharmacies keep condoms in locked cases or do not display them at all

“Cultural sensitivity”

“Discretion”

“People aren’t embarrassed to ask for it”

“Condoms are just secondary products”

“We do it when the manufacturers give us the money and the decoration materials. When the contract is over, there’s no benefit for us, so we don’t display it. It may embarrass the customers”
Findings

“People are more open-minded these days”

“They like us because we don’t judge them”

“People like to discuss about condoms with us”
Implications

• Normalization of condoms seems to be happening Vietnam
• Pharmacies still remain least customer-friendly
• Condom purchasing embarrassment coping techniques in Vietnam is socially specific – and contrast their Western counterparts
What’s next?

• More research to validate embarrassment coping techniques & their cultural specificity

• Research on people’s willingness to talk about condoms as a validation for condom’s taboo status destruction

• Research on people’s condom shopping behaviour, store awareness and preference – the customer’s perspective

• Social marketing for sexual and reproductive health aiming at pharmacy owners