

The Influence of Institutions on E-Cigarette Retailers—A Intrinsic Case Study in E-Cig Industry

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Abstract

This qualitative research explored the current E-cig institutions in China and how E-cig retail owners perceived the E-cig related regulation under the theory foundation of institutional theory. An intrinsic case method applied in this study. Template analysis used to analyze the information of documents and interviews. In summary, the E-cig institutions have positive and negative effects on in both E-cig retail shops and E-cig industry. The study will contribute to the intuitional theory research in qualitative way and have practical meaning for E-cig retailers to identify and evaluate the institutional environment.

Keywords: institutional theory, E-cig, institutional environment, E-cig retail, E-cig industry

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

E-cigarettes are a mainstream product in new tobacco products, and their market size and sales have expanded rapidly worldwide. The number of people consuming e-cigarettes in China is also increasing year on year, with per capita consumption increasing. The composition of the E-cigarette, and in particular the presence of nicotine, is a key factor in determining the level of intuitions/regulation by national governments. In China, the attempts of laws and regulations enacted to try to effectively regulate and establish uniform auditing standards for the production process, product specifications, liquid formulations, and safety of use. It evitable have

influence on E-cig industry. This research will explore how E-cig retailers perceive and understanding intuitions/regulation and its trend.

1.2 Research Objectives

This research will explore how do E-cig retailers perceive and understand the institutions environment (including identify and evaluate the institutional environment). And what are implications in this research with the context of institutional environment in E-cig industry in China?

1.3 Methodology Outline

This study falls into the interpretivist epistemology, it is important to explore how retailer perceive and understanding the E-cig institutions which depends on the social

integrations. This qualitative research also necessitates the significance of data quality and interpretation. Interpretivism epistemological models are also compatible with this.

Intrinsic case study applied as the method the research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defined E-Cigarettes

Electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes), or electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) (WHO, 2018). E-cigarettes contain an atomizer, a battery power source and tank structure. Instead of the users of e-cigarettes inhaling smoke like in the normal cigarettes, they inhale vapour in a process called vaping (Williams, 2015, p.1563). Although there is no universally accepted definition, it is usually a product or device that resembles a traditional cigarette, where the user inhales a chemical mixture (usually a hydraulic mixture) that is electronically heated and vapour atomised into the lungs in the traditional smoking manner. Most e-cigarettes contain tobacco or nicotine, but there are a few that do not.

Electronic cigarettes (e-cig) have acquired increasing interest and acceptance as a nicotine replacement therapy (Besaratina & Tommasi, 2017). Various regulatory regimes and policies implemented on the normal cigarettes have to a greater extent improved the general market of electronic cigarettes (Levy, 2018). The E-cigarettes get stimulated when one presses a button or by taking a puff. The e-cigarettes have won the hearts of many smokers following the severe health effects of the tobacco cigarettes and the ban that has been imposed on tobacco cigarette public smoking in many countries globally.

2.2 The Development of E-Cigarettes

2.2.1 The Development of E-Cigarettes

Since 2010, E-cigarettes are a mainstream product in new tobacco products, and their market size and sales have expanded rapidly (Fuoco et al, 2014). Euromonitor data shows that global sales of new tobacco products (including e-cigarettes and heated cigarettes, including China) are estimated at US\$36.59 billion in 2019, up more than 20% year-on-year from the previous year (Chen, 2019). Hiscock (2018, pp.488-497) presented that the e-cigarette market was estimated to cost 14 billion

dollars back in the year 2019. It has been however estimated to rise and click 45 billion dollars in the next 6 years, 2026. He estimated that it will account for a compound annual increase of 17% from the year 2029 to the year 2016. Among the top manufacturers of e-cigarettes include Atria Company, PMI Company, and many other independent companies. The Reynolds American Inc alone has an approximated 70,000 e-cigarette retail stores within the United States.

2.2.2 The Development of E-Cigarettes in China

The number of people consuming e-cigarettes in China is also increasing year on year, with per capita consumption increasing. 2017 saw the number of e-cigarette consumers reach 7,365,900, an increase of 13.6% year on year. The consumer population is mainly male, and although the number of female consumers is increasing, the percentage is still minimal.

As of 2019, there are approximately 286.7 million Chinese smokers in China, and the potential market size of the industry is approximately RMB 112.9 billion. According to the "Report on Health Risks of Smoking in China 2020", there are more than 300 million smokers in China, and another 740 million non-smokers suffer from second-hand smoke; the death toll due to smoking-related diseases exceeds one million every year.

In 2018, the scale of my country's e-cigarette market was approximately 4.98 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 24.12%. Among them, the closed vapour e-cigarette market is about RMB1.943 billion, which accounting for 39.02% of the total market size; the open vapour e-cigarette market is about 3.038-billion-yuan, accounting for 60.98% of the total market size. Based on the research data presented above, it can be summarized that the future development space of the e-cigarette industry is considerable.

2.3 Institutional Theory on Organization and Market

2.3.1 The Institutional Theory and Business Efficiency

In this research, I will use the conceptional framework that presented by Yang and Su (2014) which the institution-driven efficiency in business within intuition theory, the conceptional framework shown in Figure 1. The institution-driven efficiency.

Based on this framework, this research will explore how E-cig retailers precepted the institutions environment (only research on identify and evaluate the institutional environment).

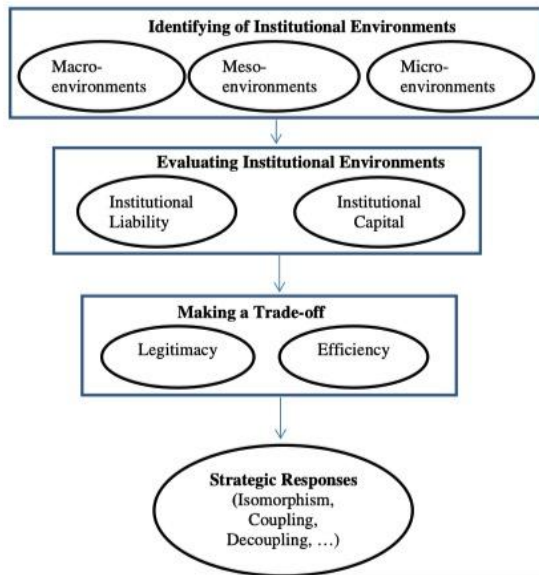


Figure 1. The institution-driven and legitimacy-embedded efficiency (Yang & Su, 2014)

Institutional theory, according to Scott (2008), has matured. There has been experienced a serious and relatively comprehensive study on institutional theory in the field of corporate marketing. The globalization has made commercial marketplaces even more complicated and contradictory as a result of being an open system. Numerous academics have advocated for further research on institutional theory in corporate marketing (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2010).

There are two areas should be mentioned in interrelated field of institutional theory related to the legality and efficiency of the commercial marketing field (Yang & Su, 2014). Firstly, the area focused on the creation and conceptualization of numerous institution-based constructs and their connections with other well-established theories, such as transaction cost economics and resource-based views (Yang & Su, 2014).

The second perspective is to investigate the effects of institutional settings on performance from an interactive standpoint (Yang & Su, 2014; Yang &

Wang, 2011). These interactive perspectives look at how businesses adapt their strategic responses to institutional limitations and capitalize on institutional capital. Different institutional pressures and processes (such as regulating, validating, and habitualization) elicit strategic business activities, which have an impact on firm performance (Tillquist, 2000; Michel et al, 2019).

Many businesses seek legitimacy while preserving efficiency as a means of gaining competitive advantages in an institutionally distinct market (Michel et al, 2019; Palmer et al, 2015; Yang & Su, 2014). While institutions can impact business decision-making in many ways, firms' strategic reactions to institutional pressure are a result of institutional pressure they perceive (Yang & Su, 2014).

When it comes to game rules, institutions are the go-to place. When firms compete in the market, knowing institutional settings will help them. In order to characterize institutional settings, organizational theorists have devised a variety of classification systems based on the level of analysis involved. Moreover, when managers consider these institutional settings, they may analyze and evaluate their effects on company strategy. It's a fundamental question: Do institution settings restrict or facilitate firms' ability to develop competitive advantages? Institutional settings present both problems and possibilities, according to relevant research (Scott, 2008). As a result of mistrust and market uncertainty, institutional responsibility negatively impacts efficiency.

Indeed, businesses with institutional capital may be able to achieve competitive advantages through their adaptive efforts and investments in reducing institutional liabilities (Yang & Su, 2014). In order to obtain societal approval, firms may invest in building broad relationships with many stakeholders; firms may also adopt strategic activities such as lobbying, co-optation and membership in order to encourage collaboration (Walker & Rea, 2014). The accumulation of institutional capital in this way increases barriers for new entrants and helps firms win the market.

2.3.2 Institutional Theory with This Study

This study will institutional theory as the foundational theory to explore how E-cigarette

regulations impact on retailers' business marketing. It will focus more on the fluence of macro institutional environment on retailers' business, the perception of E-cig regulation of retailers and the potential opportunities and risks that institution environment.

I will use the conceptional framework that presented by Yang and Su (2014) which presented in Figure 1 above, to explore how E-cig retailers precepted the institutions environment (including identify and evaluate the institutional environment).

2.4 The Diverse E-Cig Institutions Among Countries

2.4.1 The Diverse E-Cig Institutions Among Countries

Since the commercial production of e-cigarettes began in 2004, especially in recent years, many non-tobacco enterprises into the field of electronic cigarettes, tobacco companies have increased their investment in the field of electronic cigarettes through acquisition or independent research and development, the global electronic cigarette market has shown accelerated development.

With the rapid expansion of the market scale and the rapid increase in product types, governments in various countries are paying more and more attention to e-cigarettes, and the tendency to control them is becoming stronger. However, due to the different understanding of e-cigarettes as a new product and too many controversies, the control philosophy, control methods and control measures of governments on e-cigarettes show great differences.

The European Commission adopted a proposal to amend the 2001 version of the Tobacco Products Directive (TPD) On 19th December, 2012 that introducing for the first time regulatory proposals for products that had not been specified by that date—e-cigarettes and herbal products for smoking (Berteletti, et al, 2017).

The requirements for e-cigarettes under the new TPD Directive), which came into force in 2014, include limits on nicotine concentration levels, packaging and labelling rules, and guidelines to prevent smoking by children, which will be implemented in 2019 for cigarettes and cigarette own tobacco and in 2024 for cigarettes and tobacco products other than cigarettes (Ward, 2020).

There is a high level of acceptance of e-cigarettes, with the TPD to be incorporated into domestic legislation in May 2016 and regulated by a more friendly approach to e-cigarettes. In Finland: as of 2016, only nicotine-free vapes are allowed to be sold, with nicotine products sold as prescription drugs (Gruszczynski, 2019). Strict controls on e-cigarette marketing and retail channels.

2.4.2 The E-Cig Institutions Under the Influence of COVID-19

The COVID-19 has had a major impact on human economic and social development and on the development of the world's tobacco industry (Munthali et al, 2020). The embargo bans disrupted tobacco retailing under the COVID-19 fighting. The epidemic has led governments to impose embargoes to varying degrees, with the commercial retail sector bearing the brunt of the negative impact. While most governments were quick to prioritise the continuity of the tobacco supply chain, a few governments took a broad-brush approach, reducing or even banning the sale of tobacco products. South Africa, for example, banned the sale of tobacco from 27th March to 17th August (Heng, 2021).

Several countries have been strengthened tobacco control in public places. The growing concerns about health and well-being and the risks of smoke transmission in the context of the epidemic are requiring governments to adopt new restrictions on the use of tobacco products, including new tobacco products, and to extend smoke-free areas to more public places.

Another new regulation is to raising tobacco taxes. The epidemic has led to a huge increase in public spending and a reduction in revenue for governments and raising tobacco taxes is both a tobacco control initiative and a means of alleviating financial difficulties (Flor et al, 2021). The German government had proposed a plan to introduce new tax rates on tobacco and nicotine replacement products in April, 2020. The draft measure was first published by the German Ministry of Finance in February. The amendments will come into force on 1 July 2022 (Gredner et al, 2020).

According to Euromonitor International's data (extraction date: March 20, 2021), global cigarette sales will experience a significant decline in 2020,

and new products such as e-cigarettes and heated cigarettes will continue to slow their growth.

2.4.3 The E-Cig Institutions and Trend in China

The National Health Commission's "China Smoking Hazards Health Report 2020" is the first heavy blow to the e-cigarette industry, but Ao, (the secretary-general of the e-cigarette industry committee) believes that it will only have a short-term impact on the secondary market share price, and will not affect the e-cigarette industry (Zhao et al, 2020). The future development of the electronic cigarette industry. The e-cigarette industry will increasingly standardize and develop healthily.

As of June 1, 2021, there is only one industry standard related to "electronic cigarettes" on the industrial standards consultation website, which is the "General Technical Requirements for Electronic Cigarette Liquid Products" promulgated by the Shenzhen Municipal Market Supervision and Administration Bureau. No relevant industry standards have been promulgated yet. In 2019, the National Standards Program "Electronic Cigarettes" and "Gas Chromatography Method for the Determination of Nicotine, Propylene Glycol and Glycerol in Electronic Cigarette Liquids" have been reported and implemented by TC144 (National Tobacco Standardization Technical Committee), and the competent authority is the National Tobacco Monopoly Bureau, the implementation has not yet been released. Overall, industry regulatory standards need in China need to be further clarified to further regulate the development of the e-cigarette industry.

From the perspective of industry control policies, in China, because E-cigarettes do not contain tobacco products and do not touch China's tobacco taxation policy, the current Chinese market for E-cigarette products is mixed (Meng, 2020). In August 2018, the State Administration for Market Regulation and the State Tobacco Monopoly Administration issued the "Notice on Prohibiting the Sale of Electronic Cigarettes to Minors", requiring domestic market entities not to sell electronic cigarettes to minors. Policy trends indicate that China has begun to create a healthy and standardized e-cigarette environment.

In China, laws and regulations have not been

enacted to effectively regulate and establish uniform auditing standards for the production process, product specifications, liquid formulations, and safety of use. However, China is also taking reference from other countries' policies on the regulation of e-cigarettes and is currently seeking comments at the legislative level (Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, 2020).

After the news was released, the e-cigarette industry wailed, and the share price of the e-cigarette industry shook violently. Many industry insiders believe that this means that e-cigarettes have finally been "incorporated" and will be regulated by special regulations in the future or will quite to the era of barbaric growth. This research aims to explore how E-cig regulations impact on retails based on the institutional theory.

2.4.4 Research Questions

According to the reviewed literatures above, the development of E-cig influence by institutional change. This research will be exploring the current intuitions in China and how E-cig retailers understand the of current intuitions.

The research questions emerged as:

- (1) What the current E-cig intuitions existed in China?
- (2) How retailers perceive and understanding the current E-cig institutions
- (3) What suggestions of E-cig regulations that retailer propose?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Philosophy

The research philosophy has been regarded as the fundamental task; it is founded on the research system and is also linked to the nature and knowledge development (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The research philosophy within this study is guided by the research onion which presented by (Saunders, 2016). The research onion is present in Figure 2.

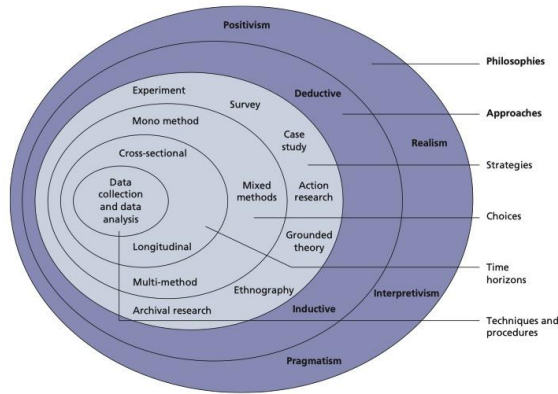


Figure 2. Research onion (Saunders, 2016).

Ontology and epistemology were identified by Bryman (2016) as the most widely utilized philosophical assumptions in the field of social research. Ontology refers to the belief that reality functions in one of two ways: as something objective to its participants or as something subjective to its members. Ontology is made up of objectivism and subjectivism as a result of this (social constructivism).

Epistemology is concerned with the theory of knowledge in a certain field of study, whereas ontology is concerned with assumptions about the nature of reality and its features (Creswell, 2007). There are two main research viewpoints, positivism and interpretivism, which are characterized by whether human factors have a role in the production of social knowledge (Blumberg et al., 2014). Interpretivism study tends to place a greater emphasis on human behavior in the context of society. Through study, interpretivism allows researchers to obtain a better and broader knowledge of research issues.

This study falls into the interpretivist epistemology, because it is important to explore how retailer perceive and understanding the E-cig institutions which depends on the social integrations. This research also exploring how retailers perceive the influence of E-cig institutions and to gain their deeper understanding of their business under E-cig institutions.

3.2 Research Approaches

3.2.1 Inductive

The goal of deductive research is to see if an existing theory can be applied and validated in a

specific situation (Hyde, 2000). Researchers generally start with the basis of past research in a certain subject, then derive questions/hypotheses, and then test if the theory is correct (Bryman, 2012).

Inductive approaches, in contrast to deductive approaches, seek to build or produce comprehensive theory (Kanika, 2015). Inductive research begins with a set of observations in the area of study. The researchers will explore certain preliminary hypotheses/questions based on data analysis patterns and regularities. Finally, based on preliminary hypotheses/questions, the researcher obtains and produces the conclusion and theory (Kanika, 2015). In this research, it related to exploring the deep understanding of retails on E-cig institutions. Therefore, there is necessity of a deep understanding of context and a rich data collection. And the inductive approach is more likely to suit for this study.

3.2.2 Qualitative

Quantitative research is the gathering of numerical data (Kanika, 2015). As a consequence, it relies on statistics as evidence to evaluate a hypothesis, which is consistent with a deductive research method (Kanika, 2015). Qualitative research, on the other hand, is concerned with the meanings, ideas, and descriptions of things rather than the statistics (Kanika, 2015). What, how, and why questions are often addressed in qualitative research (Kanika, 2015). Because the study aim is to attempt to grasp the significance of a social phenomenon, qualitative techniques were used (Kanika, 2015).

The qualitative approach is employed in this research, because it is better to address the research questions which means the data from the E-cig retailers' perceptions, experience and stories are more meaningful than numbers. It is necessary for the study to do field work in order to engage with merchants in person in order to capture their views of E-cig institutions influence. This research also necessitates the significance of data quality and interpretation. Interpretivism epistemological models are also compatible with this.

3.3 Research Design

According to Saunders et al., (2016), a research strategy is a collection of processes for answering a research question and achieving research goals.

In the area of social science, there are five major qualitative research strategies: historical research, action research, ethnography, grounded Theory, and case study (Saunders et al., 2009). The research subject has a lot to do with the research methods you choose (Creswell, 2012).

This research is to explore how E-cig retailers perceive and understand initiation influence in the context of China. Case study is a suitable research method for this study, given the research subject and the Chinese setting. Yin (2003) distinguishes our case study strategies single case, multiple case, holistic case and embedded case. Grand et al (2014) presented that intrinsic case study—where the researchers do not have to select the case. For example, researching the evaluation of the process of implementing an innovation in an institution. An intrinsic case study is a study of a case, within a person, a particular group, a profession, a department, or an organization, in which the case is the focus of the investigation. Therefore, in this study an intrinsic case study will be used to explore a particular group: the E-cig retailers in Chinese context and the E-institution influence on them.

The case study includes two phases: 1) document analysis and 2) interviews. Document analysis applied to the current E-cig intuitions in China and interviews used to explore the perceived institutions of E-cig retailers.

3.4 Data Collection

The data of this research will be collected by documents and semi-structured interviews.

The documents will be collected under the official published document of government in China. The interviews' participant within this intrinsic case study is the business owners within E-cig retail industry. The specific group the participant can benefit to explore the deep understanding of institutions effect with E-cig industry. For qualitative research and case study method, semi-structured interview has been wide use to collect data

To access the potential participants, as the researcher, I plan to go to the E-cig retail shop to have direct contact with them and make explanation of my research to them. Finally, I will invite them to attend my research by deliver a participant information sheet to them. After

permission, I will make an arrangement with them to conduct a face-to-face semi-structured interview. All participation is totally volunteering by potential participants.

3.5 Data Analysis and Coding

Template analysis is a commonly used general method for organizing and analyzing qualitative data in a variety of research contexts and subjects, particularly in the business and management fields (King & Brooks, 2016). Template analysis may be used in a variety of organizational contexts in business and management research, including as major multinational corporations, health services, educational institutions, SMEs, the volunteer sector, and so on (King and Brooks, 2016).

Template analysis is a method for analyzing and organizing textual material, such as interview transcripts, observational field notes, and pre-existing organizational papers, into a hierarchical framework. Because all the data in this study came in textual form through semi-structured interviews, template analysis could aid in the proper analysis and structuring of the qualitative data.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) stated six-phase frame for doing a template analysis, include 1) become familiar with the data; 2) generate initial codes; 3) search for themes; 4) review themes; 5) define themes; 6) Write-up. The data analysis in this research will be conducted based on the six steps which presented above.

Coding is a crucial element in qualitative data analysis. It contributes to identifies categories or themes that might assist explain the phenomena under investigation (Basil, 2003). The process is fluid, at least in the early phases, when features are searched in the data, and initial codes are frequently updated as the research proceeds. Template analysis in this study will be used to analysis the document and in views' content.

The interview and field notes were transcribed verbatim in Chinese since some participants were not proficient in English. As a result, the transcripts were carefully reviewed many times in order to get acquainted with the material.

3.6 Ethical and Confidential Issues

In order to execute these data collecting activities

in the spirit depicted, it is necessary to respect the culture and preserve the beliefs and values of the community in which the data gathering will take place. The etiquette that will be used must reflect the highest level of respect and humility. To encourage interviewers to complete the questions, they should be phrased in a friendly manner. The recorded interview will be kept on an encrypted device and used solely for academic purposes.

4. Findings

4.1 Findings from Document Analyses

4.1.1 Source of Documents

Relating to the document, it was founded from different units within Chinese government. The nine collected contained the E-cig related intuitions and regulations since E-cig emerged from 2018 to 2020.

4.1.2 Content of the Documents

The content of nine document and E-cig related contents summarized at Table 1.

Table 1. The institutions of E-cig from 2018 to 2021 in China

| Published data | Department | Name of policy/regulations | Main content |
|----------------|--|--|---|
| 08.2018 | State Tobacco Monopoly Administration State Administration of Market Supervision and Administration | Notice on Issuing the Special Inspection Action Plan for the Electronic Cigarette Market | The dilution of e-cigarettes by minors poses a major health and safety risk, and market themes must not sell e-cigarettes to minors. |
| 10.2018 | Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government | Policy Address Report 2018 | Change from restricting the sale of e-cigarettes to minors to a total ban on e-cigarettes. |
| 01.2019 | Hangzhou Municipal People's Government | Hangzhou Regulations on Smoking Control in Public Places | Explicitly prohibit the use of e-cigarettes in indoor public places and public transportation in the administrative area of Hangzhou. |
| 01.2019 | Shenzhen Municipal People's Government | Shenzhen Special Economic Zone Regulations on Smoking Control | Make it clear that the use of e-cigarette products is within the scope of smoking. |
| 02.2019 | Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government Food Hygiene Bureau | Smoking (Public Health) Bill 2019 | It is recommended to prohibit the import, sale, sale, distribution and promotion of alternative smoking products, including e-cigarettes. Offenders can be fined up to 50,000 Hong Kong dollars and imprisoned for half a year. |
| 11.2019 | State Tobacco Monopoly Administration State Administration of Market Supervision and Administration | Notice on further protecting minors from e-cigarettes. | Do not sell electronic cigarettes to minors. Close all online sales channels for e-cigarettes. |

| | | | |
|---------|--|--|--|
| 07.2020 | State Tobacco Monopoly Administration State Administration of Market Supervision and Administration | Notice on Issuing the Special Inspection Action Plan for the Electronic Cigarette Market | Continue to clean up e-cigarette Internet sales channels, online sales and electronic vending machines. |
| 10.2020 | The 22nd Meeting of the Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress | Minors' protection law | Parents or other guardians of minors shall not indulge or instigate minors to smoke, including e-cigarettes. |
| 03.2020 | Ministry of Industry and Information Technology | Decision on Amending the Implementation Regulations of the Tobacco Monopoly Law of the People's Republic of China (Draft for Solicitation of Comments) | For new tobacco products such as e-cigarettes, refer to the relevant regulations on cigarettes in these regulations. |

4.1.3 Document Analysis

All document will used template analysis as the method to analysis.

The initial template of document showed in Table 2.

Table 2. The initial template of document analysis

| |
|---|
| Theme: The current E-cig institutions |
| 1. What the current E-cig intuitions existed in |

China?

1.1 Type of intuitions.

1.2 Key points of intuitions within each type of institutions.

Based on the document content that presented in 4.1.2. the final template of document emerged in Table 3.

Table 3. The final template of document analysis

| a) Type of intuitions. | Key points of intuitions. |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1.1.1 Industry regulations | 1). To prohibit the sale of electronic cigarettes to minors. 2). To prohibit all Internet sales channels, online sales and electronic vending machines for E-cigarettes. 3). Applying cigarette regulations to e-cigarettes. |
| 1.1.2 Local regulations | 1). Prohibit the import, sale, sale, distribution and promotion of electronic cigarettes, 2). Point out that the use of e-cigarette products is within the scope of smoking. 3). Prohibit the use of e-cigarettes in several public places, |
| 1.1.3 Law | 1). Do not allow and instigate minors to smoke, including e-cigarettes. |

There are three type intuitions in China that contains industry regulations, location regulations

and law. The attention of minors attracted powerful control, both industry regulation and

law emphasized that the prohibition of E-cig to minors. Moreover, all online channel of E-cig has also been forbidden. Industry regulation and local regulations stated that E-cigarettes are applicable to cigarette regulations, before introducing regulations specifically for e-cigarettes with the aim of strengthened the control of e-cigarettes.

4.2 Findings from Interviews

4.2.1 The Participant Demographic Profile

Six semi-structured interviews have been

conducted within this research. All interview recorded by encrypted recording equipment and transformed to transcript to word edition and finally reserved in encrypted electronic folder. The name of participant has been coded to avoid the personal identified.

About the participant information, a participant demographic profile presented in Table.4. Pseudonyms were used to represent participants' names, that is "O1, O2, O3 ..." respectively, letter "O" signifying the owner of E-cig retail shops.

Table 4. The participant demographic profile

| Coded name | Age | Highest education level | Personal Roughly Cost on E-Cig (per month in Yuan) | Position | Gender |
|------------|-----|-------------------------|--|------------------------------------|--------|
| O1 | 35 | Bachelor | ¥1000 | Owner of E-cig retail shop | Male |
| O2 | 29 | Bachelor | ¥1000 | Owner and CEO of E-cig retail shop | Male |
| O3 | 31 | Bachelor | ¥800 | Owner of E-cig retail shop | Male |
| O4 | 25 | Bachelor | ¥600 | Owner of E-cig retail shop | Male |
| O5 | 26 | Bachelor | ¥700 | Owner of E-cig retail shop | Male |
| O6 | 30 | Bachelor | ¥600 | Owner of E-cig retail shop | Male |

All participants are male and owns retail shop by themselves. They spend ¥600 to ¥1000 to E-cig product per month.

4.2.2 Theme One: The Perceived E-Cig Institutions/Regulations and Its Trend in China

Finding within interviews will be classified into 4 themes to analysis. The initial template of interview under themes and sub-themes that presented in Table.5.

Table 5. Initial template of template analysis of interviews

| Theme | Sub-theme |
|---|---|
| 1. The perceived E-cig institutions / regulations and its trend in China. | |
| 2. Influence of Chinese E-cig institutions / regulations to retail | 2.1 Positive influence on retail shops. |

| | |
|---|--|
| shops. | 2.2 Negative influence on retail shops. |
| 3. The influence of E-cig institutions / regulations trend to E-cig retail industry | 3.1 Positive influence on E-cig industry. 3.2 Negative influence on E-cig industry. |
| 4. Retailers' suggestions on E-cig institutions/regulations. | |

The first theme is to explore how E-cig retail owners understand the current intuitions and regulations in the context of China. The Table 6. Shown the summarized key points of theme one based on the personal view of owners.

Table 6. Theme one: The perceived E-cig institutions/regulations and its trend in China

| |
|-----------|
| Theme one |
|-----------|

| | |
|---|--|
| 1. The perceived E-cig institutions / regulations and its trend in China. | a) The forbidding of all online sale channels. |
| | b) For minors, the sale of e-cigarettes is prohibited |
| | c) There is no specific policy yet. |
| | d) The State and Tobacco Bureau will gradually strengthen e-cigarettes |

The key points of theme one summarized above. Firstly, several participants stated that they know the E-cig cannot sale to minors. Also, they perceived the banned online sale channel. O3 described E-cig that:

"...it cannot be sold to minors, and it is forbidden to sell to minors. Young people must not be given a smoking guide, and e-cigarette advertisements are not allowed around schools. There is also one point that can't be sold through Internet."

There is no common standard regulation on E-cig control, however the government make several attempts to control, and the universal control institution is processing. O4 presented this view that:

"The official policy hasn't come out yet, and the people predict that it will come out at the end of the year (2021)."

The reason of why the universal institutions now

published, O2 gave his opinion that:

"I think that the country has not yet issued a policy, but it is actually hesitating to allow that institution or department to regulate management."

The government has only now begun to pay attention to how to regulate this market. The original lack of control will cause many problems, such as counterfeit products, substandard manufacturers and substandard products.

A noble point needs to be mentioned that O1 predicted the new policy direction:

"The name of China's state-owned tobacco company is China Tobacco. My view is that the Chinese government agency manages this matter. I predict that China Tobacco, as a state-owned company, will acquire or merger E-cigarette companies in the current market in the future. All E-cigarette companies will become state-owned companies or joint venture."

In March this year (2021), the government issued a solicitation of opinions on the control of e-cigarettes. It means the control of e-cigarettes will be strengthened, and new policies will be released soon. O2 and O1 proved the view.

4.2.3 Theme Two: Influence of Chinese E-Cig Institutions/Regulations to Retail Shops

Theme two aims to explore the positive and negative effect of E-cig policies and regulation. Both sides effected emerged from participant's interview content.

Table 7. Theme two: Influence of Chinese E-cig institutions / regulations to retail shops

| Theme | Sub-themes | |
|---|---|--|
| 2. Influence of Chinese E-cig institutions / regulations to retail shops. | 2.1 Positive influence on retail shops. | a) Propaganda of national policies is conducive to enhancing the visibility of e-cigarettes. b) The national policies will reform the entire e-cigarette sales system in the future, and gradually develop the profits. c) Simplify the sales management process of retail stores. d) The cancellation of e-cigarette online sales channels has given more customers in offline stores of e-cigarettes. |
| | 2.2 Negative influence on retail shops. | a) Retailers may increase some costs. But the cost pressure is more borne by manufacturers. b) The opening of e-cigarette stores will be affected.eg. shopping malls may not allow E-cigarettes to open stores. |

Regarding the positive influence, when national policies and regulation publish, the report from mainstream news media tend to increase the

exposure of e-cigarettes, thereby enabling more people to understand e-cigarettes. This may bring more customers and potential customers to the

e-cigarette retail industry. O1 described this benefit that:

"It is a promotion for the retailer's market. The national policy is that the sales of e-cigarettes have been renamed, for example: e-cigarettes are recognized by the state, and there are corresponding control systems. Consumers have expanded their knowledge of this product, making consumers more at ease. This is good news for e-cigarette retailers."

Moreover, for retailers, national policies will reform the entire E-cigarette sales system in the future and tend to gradually gain more profits. O2 illustrated the benefit of E-cig intuitions that:

"In the future, the products that consumers face must have quality assurance, and then include one is quality assurance, and the other is that its pricing will become more and more stable, so that the income of e-cigarette retailers will become stable."

For the sale control to minors, intuitions are more possible to simplify the sales management process of retail stores. Indeed, the cancellation of e-cigarette online sales channels has given more

customers in offline stores of e-cigarettes. O6 made an example on simplify retail shops management that:

"Customers who purchase e-cigarette products in retail stores with their ID cards can effectively prevent minors from buying e-cigarettes."

Considering the negative of the institutions of E-cig, two points shown: retailers may increase some costs and the opening of E-cigarette stores will be affected. However, O1 pointed that the cost pressure is more borne by manufacturers, rather than retailers. The regulation related to the forbidden smoking inside building might lead the shopping mall do not allow E-cig shop setting in their place.

4.2.4 Theme Three: Influence of Chinese E-Cig Institutions/Regulations to E-Cig Retail Industry

Theme three consider the positive and negative effect of E-cig institutions on E-cig industry.

The temple analysis of this theme shown at Table 8.

Table 8. Theme three: The influence of E-cig institutions / regulations to E-cig retail industry

| Theme | Sub-themes | |
|--|---|---|
| 3. Influence of Chinese E-cig institutions / regulations to E-cig industry | 3.1 Positive influence on E-cig industry. | <p>a) The production process and quality are guaranteed, and the industry is regulated.</p> <p>b) E-cigarette manufacturers that operate illegally will be screened out, and fake e-cigarettes will also be cracked down.</p> <p>c) Standardize the control of the e-cigarette industry, and more people will be willing to try e-cigarettes.</p> |
| | 3.2 Negative influence on E-cig industry. | <p>a) Government policies will affect capital injection into the e-cigarette industry.</p> <p>b) The negative public opinion orientation of E-cigarettes affected by policies hinders the development of the E-cigarette industry.</p> |

Both side of influence existed within E-cig industry. In positive side, as a category of tobacco, e-cigarettes are unified under the national management, which is beneficial to the prospects of e-cigarettes, because its production process and quality are guaranteed, and the industry is also regulated and measurable. Participant O2 and O3 present this point.

Furthermore, E-cigarette manufacturers that operate illegally will be screened out, and fake

e-cigarettes will also be cracked down. O4 pointed this view and presented that *"it is benefit to the long-term sustainable development"* in E-cig industry. The standardize the control of the e-cigarette industry might attract more people's willing to attempt E-cigarettes. O6 pointed his view to support this:

"E-cigarettes are gradually replacing some people's habit of smoking cigarettes, and more people will be willing to try e-cigarettes. Now there are more and

more people smoking e-cigarettes, mainly because it is convenient, and secondly, it is safer because there is no open flame."

4.2.5 Theme Four: Retailers' Suggestions on E-Cig Institutions/Regulations

In theme four, the suggestions of E-cig institutions and regulations which pointed by participants will be discussed. The template for presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Theme four: Retailers' suggestions on E-cig institutions/regulations

| Theme | |
|--|---|
| 4. Retailers' suggestions on E-cig institutions/regulations. | <p>a) Regulate the source of E-cigarettes: manufacturers.</p> <p>b) Regulate the e-cigarette industry as soon as possible, crack down on non-standard products and manufacturers.</p> <p>c) Supporting the development of e-cigarettes and control tobacco taxes.</p> |

Regarding to the suggestions that pointed by owners, O1 and O2 focus on to regulate the source of E-cigarettes: manufacturers. They also

mentioned to issue licenses and permits to E-cigarette manufacturers and retailers for standardized management. O3 pointed to government should speeding regulating process, because there are still irregular products circulating in the market. O6 recommended government institutions and regulations to support the development of E-cigarettes and control tobacco taxes. At the same time, he also recommended that tobacco taxes need to be controlled within a reasonable range.

5. Discussions

5.1 Discussions on Findings

The initial conceptual framework for the research on the influence of intuitions on E-cig retail in China was draw from the gap in the literature. With the specific interest, the in-depth qualitative research was conducted in the context of China. The document analysis, in-depth interviews and three research questions were identified.

Research Question (RQ)1: What the current E-cig intuitions existed in China?

Research Question (RQ) 2: How retailers perceive and understanding the current E-cig institutions

Research Question (RQ) 3: What suggestions of E-cig regulations that retailer propose?

The theme of the template analysis with the consistency of research questions.

Table 10. shown the consistency between themes, research questions and conceptual formwork.

Table 10. Relation between Key themes, research questions and the conceptual framework

| Theme | Indicative Research Question | Indicative Concepts |
|---|---|--|
| Document- Theme one: The current E-cig institutions | Research Questions 1: What the current E-cig intuitions existed in China? | -E-cig institutions in China -Development of E-cig in China |
| Interviews-Theme one: The perceived E-cig institutions / regulations and its trend in China. | Research Question 2: How retailers perceive and understanding the current E-cig institutions | -In situational theory -Identify and evaluate the institutional environment -business efficiency |
| Interviews-Theme two: Influence of Chinese E-cig institutions / regulations to retail shops. | Research Question 2: How retailers perceive and understanding the current E-cig institutions | - In situational theory -Identify and evaluate the institutional environment |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| Interviews-Theme three: The influence of E-cig institutions / regulations to E-cig retail industry | Research Question 2: How retailers perceive and understanding the current E-cig institutions | - In situational theory -Identify and evaluate the institutional environment |
| Interviews-Theme four: Retailers' suggestions on E-cig institutions/regulations. | Research Question 3: What suggestions of E-cig regulations that retailer propose? | - In situational theory - Identify and evaluate the institutional environment |

5.1.1 The Current E-Cig Intuitions in China

There are three types of institutions under the current nine intuitions in China. The three types contain industry regulations, local regulation and laws. The E-cig related institutions in legal level only existed at Minors' protection law to control minors to use E-cigs. As Meng (2020) presented that E-cigarettes do not contain tobacco products and do not touch China's tobacco taxation policy, the current Chinese market for E-cigarette products is mixed (Meng, 2020). The current institution focuses on the issues of E-cig online channels and the connect with minors.

In China, laws and regulations have not been enacted to effectively regulate and establish uniform auditing standards for the production process, product specifications, liquid formulations, and safety of use. However, China is also taking reference from other countries' policies on the regulation of e-cigarettes and is currently seeking comments at the legislative level.

5.1.2 The Perceived E-Cig Institutions/Regulations and Its Trend in China

Owners perceived E-cig institution consist with the current the current E-cig intuitions in China. All participants known the E-cig regulations' key points: fforbidding of all online sale channels and not allow to sale to minors. There is a trend that the State and Tobacco Bureau will gradually strengthen e-cigarettes. Retailers identified the institutional environment properly which can benefit to build business efficiency (Yang & Su, 2014).

5.1.3 Influence of Chinese E-Cig Institutions/Regulations to Retail Shops

Positive and negative effect of E-cig policies and regulation. Both sides effected emerged from participant's interview content. Scott (2008)

pointed Organizational behavior, structure, strategy, governance, and process are all influenced by institutional settings. Managers strive for legitimacy while retaining efficiency in order to obtain a competitive advantage. For positive effect, propaganda of national policies is conducive to enhancing the visibility of e-cigarettes; the national policies will reform the entire e-cigarette sales system in the future, and gradually develop the profits. The cancellation of e-cigarette online sales channels has given more customers in offline stores of e-cigarettes. Many businesses seek legitimacy while preserving efficiency as a means of gaining competitive advantages in an institutionally distinct market (Michel et al, 2019).

The institutions might be limited the retail shop, such as the limitation of retail shops' location. Owners need to address institutional influences in flexible way. The regulation of E-sig has influence on retailers' behaviors. Although when retailer facing the negative effect, to acquire legitimacy and mobilize their social, economic, and political resources in order to adapt to institutional contexts in order to improve company performance, businesses must obey established rules, conventions, and belief systems (Yang, Su & Fam, 2012). A firm's institutional obligations and capital balance tends to influence the trade-off between legitimacy and efficiency that it makes along the route. It's therefore a manager's most difficult duty to balance efficiency and legitimacy.

5.1.4 The Influence of E-Cig Institutions/Regulations to E-Cig Retail Industry

The positive and negative effect of E-cig institutions have influenced E-cig industry.

Institutions control economic activity by establishing game rules that govern production, trade, and distribution (Walker & Rea, 2014). This

point responding to the negative effect of E-cig institutions on E-cig industry: government policies will affect capital injection into the e-cigarette industry. The uncertain factors tend to influence investors behavior and finally influence the development E-sig industry. Therefore, the other negative effect on E-cig industry has been reasonable. It is the negative public opinion orientation of E-cigarettes affected by policies hinders the development of the E-cigarette industry.

Within positive effect area of E-cig institutions, the production process and quality are guaranteed, and the industry is regulated. Indeed, businesses with institutional capital may be able to achieve competitive advantages through their adaptive efforts and investments in reducing institutional liabilities (Yang and Su, 2014). A specific governance structure may play a dual purpose of both legitimizing and protecting efficiency through the building of firm institutional capital.

In order to obtain societal approval, firms may invest in building broad relationships with many stakeholders; firms may also adopt strategic activities such as lobbying, co-optation and membership in order to encourage collaboration (Walker & Rea, 2014). The institutions tend to benefit to build the competitive advantage on E-cig industry.

5.1.5 Retailers' Suggestions on E-Cig Institutions/Regulations

Retailers suggested that to rregulate to E-cigarettes manufacturers and to crack down on non-standard products and manufacturers. Owners hope the retailed official policies and institutions publish soon, because they want to reduce the uncertain of E-cig industry. Once the institution and regulation emerge, the capital injection tend to flow to E-cig industry.

Also, the control E- tobacco taxes mentioned by participants. During the COVID-19, many countries increased the tobacco taxes, E-cig included as well. For retailers, the tax has been closed to their business and profit. Therefore, they recommended the E-cig tax maintain in a rational range.

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