

Anelize Moreira: ACT Brazil

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I am an investigative journalist who monitors the tobacco industry. This monitoring tracks the industry—specifically regarding Brazil's status as one of the world's largest tobacco producers and exporters—and how it operates within the regulatory landscape. Because of this, the industry exerts significant influence over policies, Congress, the judiciary, and regulatory bodies. PMI launched a campaign called "Vaping Influencer Mobilization." This campaign was deployed on social media and was, fortunately, exposed by users themselves, who pointed out that it was designed to sway the public consultation held by ANVISA (Brazil's health regulatory agency) regarding the potential ban on electronic cigarettes. PMI was using this campaign to influence public opinion, and the scheme was eventually exposed.

Here in Brazil, these tactics are often used brazenly by allied lawmakers and influencers who act as industry defenders. This frequently happens when the government or legislative bodies present evidence against the industry. I recall an early attack we faced around 2010, which revealed a network of fake accounts—"haters"—flooding social media with negative comments. This story eventually became a book.

I was working on this at the time, tracking those accounts, and the result was a book titled "Voices Silenced." Two investigative journalists investigated the tobacco industry's defenders and uncovered the scheme. That book, published here in Brazil, served as a direct response to those tactics. Another attack occurred during our monitoring of media outlets. This happened right around the time I joined ACT. We were monitoring media partners of the tobacco industry—journalism outlets sponsored by the industry—that were publishing copy-pasted content and propaganda. They were essentially running the industry's talking points as news stories. Profiles were blocked. The agency provided systematic monitoring and shared information with ACT and the government.

Amid this government interference, the agency noticed attempts to disrupt operations—it wasn't just a computer failing; it wasn't a technical issue. What really alarmed us was the immediate blocking of the CP [Corporate Profile]. I had set up a profile under the name GINFA to monitor LinkedIn activity. I noticed a mobilization—actions driven by the industry and its unscrupulous regulators, who were sharing information with allies. They were generating social media content and pushing a specific narrative—an investigative angle focused on reporting events while primarily highlighting pro-government actions. These were the two situations we faced.

The agency was flooded with disinformation here in Brazil—particularly regarding e-cigarettes, the illicit market, and product taxation—while remaining vigilant and navigating around the need for direct collaboration.