

TOBACCO INDUSTRY: Manipulating the Youth into a Lifelong Addiction

The tobacco industry has been rampantly strengthening its presence amongst the youth, adolescent, and adult population throughout the world by adopting a mix of marketing and product strategies aimed at hooking vulnerable people to a vicious cycle of lifelong addiction. The tobacco industry has been evidenced to cause irrevocable harm and loss to the global economy and the lives of millions of people. This industry has furthered the economic burden of low-and middle-income countries as over 80% of the world's [one billion smokers live](#).

About 90% of cigarette smokers first try smoking by the age of 18 and hence, the tobacco industry views the youth and adolescent population not just as their potential customers but as their 'future loyal customers'. Scientific evidence shows that tobacco company advertising and promotion influences young people to start smoking as these tobacco ads make smoking appear to be [appealing to adolescents](#). Transnational tobacco companies are resorting to marketing strategies of fanciful promotions, social media advertisements, and new product launches (flavors and novel products) to appeal to the youths' curious nature and risk-taking behavior, ultimately provoking them into starting a lifelong addiction. For instance, in [Malaysia, 13.8% of its total adolescent population and 10% of its total teenage population has fallen prey to various deceiving promotional marketing activities of the tobacco companies](#). The clever move of placing attractive looking cigarette packets besides the sweet counters at the local stores, introducing kiddy and lipstick cigarette packs, offering low priced packs, and launching newer youth-preferred flavored tobacco, worked well in the favor of tobacco companies as it witnessed increased usage of tobacco consumption among the young people.

Tobacco companies recruit new users during their youth by introducing them to flavored products, emerging and novel products like heated tobacco products (HTPs) and e-cigarettes, and playful product and package designs. Tobacco marketing and advertising tactics, including low-priced products, product placement in kids targeted movies, youth event marketing/sponsorship, social media ads, [attracts the youth](#) as it reflects aspirations of independence, liberation, glamour, adventurousness, social acceptability and inclusion, and being 'cool'. And in the long run, it lures young individuals to initiate smoking and vaping and prevents the existing users from quitting.

Flavored and New Novel Products: -

The tactics of developing a range of youth-likeable range of flavored products (mint, fruit, candy), launching novel products like heated tobacco products (HTPs) and e-cigarettes, introducing pocket-friendly and fanciful cigarettes packages, publishing marketing claims of reduced risk with heated tobacco products, and using multi-media channels to promote these to the young group, have been used widely by leading transnational companies to mask the deleterious long-term health effects of tobacco. Thus, enticing youth to initiate smoking and vaping as well as preventing the existing users from quitting.

The industry's use of flavors and packaging to make its way to the young people can clearly be witnessed in several Nordic countries and Estonia where the presence of [snus and snus-like nicotine products](#) is increasing, while snus is legally on the market only in Sweden and Norway. Snus is available in a great variety of tastes and packaging particularly catering for young users. Lately, strong snus-resembling [nicotine pouches](#) have also emerged on the market. In 2019, Philip Morris sought authorisation from Food and Drug Administration to market its new heated tobacco product as a [modified risk tobacco product](#) and to make marketing claims of reduced risk. However, these claims maybe misunderstood by youth, thereby increasing their risk for tobacco initiation.

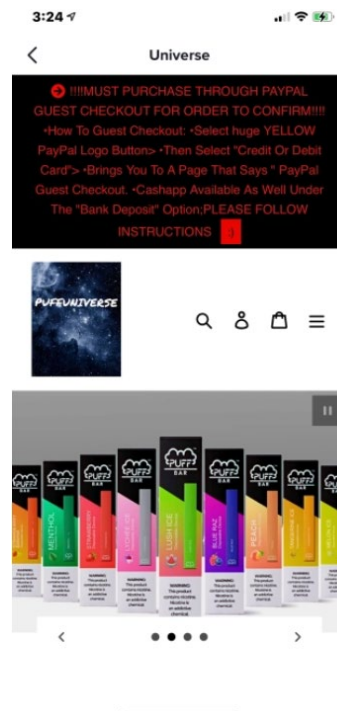


Source: Tobacco Industry: Manipulating the Youth into a Lifelong Addiction. GGTC Factsheet. Available at: <https://landing.ggtc.world/dmdocuments/FS%20Youth%20Manipulation.pdf>

Social Media Advertising: -

The use of social media among the youth population has grown multifold over the past decade and has become an integral part of their daily lives as well as an influential source in deciding their lifestyle choices. The tobacco industry has thus leveraged this medium, including platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, as an effective form of indirect promotion for its products to millions of youngsters worldwide. Recently, TechCrunch reported on how several vape sellers were using [TikTok](#) as a platform for targeting and communicating with the teenage customer base and offering them flavored disposable vapes, parent-proof 'discreet' packaging, and delivery with no ID checks.

Japan Tobacco International ran disguised adverts for its brands on [Facebook and Instagram](#), two tools which witness heavy traffic of young users, to bypass social media rules and continue publicizing their products to teenagers and young people; potentially undermining laws in a number of countries that have [banned advertising, promotion and sponsorship of tobacco products](#), in accordance with [Article 13](#) of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).



Source: TikTok is being used by vape sellers marketing to teens. TechCrunch. Available at: <https://techcrunch.com/2021/01/26/tiktok-is-being-used-by-vape-sellers-marketing-to-teens/>

Event Marketing/Sponsorship: -

Organizing campaigns, which attracts large young crowds (such as sporting events, musical concerts, fundraiser campaigns, etc.), is one of the effective and longstanding modes of advertising tapped by several youth-related brands. Further, since such events are generally broadcasted across nations, it assures an expanded brand exposure and a high audience volume.

Sponsoring sports events, especially motorsports, is particularly appealing to the youth because of the sports' association with adventure, excitement, glamour, risk, and a feeling of high. Since direct branding of cigarette products on cars, team uniforms, trackside, etc., is strictly restricted and banned in many countries, tobacco companies have now adopted a new approach to [motorsports sponsorship](#). Formula One (F1) and Grand Prix motorcycle (MotoGP) are the most viewed sports in the world and tobacco giants, PMI, BAT, and Imperial Tobacco, have indulged in sponsoring various racing teams of these third-party events as a medium of [indirect advertisement to the young population](#). BAT Racing team used sponsorships in sports events as a central marketing operation to reach boys and young men in emerging markets in Asia with minimal regulations or negotiated exemptions. Since cigarette advertising on television is not permissible in the US, tobacco companies turned to sponsor broadcast sports events to expose their brands in auto racing. This tactic serves their purpose of catching the eyes of potential customers from all age groups at a single go and enhancing their brand image.

PMI and BAT now use corporate mission statements and associated branding to link their 'potentially reduced risk' products to F1 and MotoGP racing teams. Public relations statements from the tobacco companies focus on corporate social responsibility (CSR), and technological collaboration and innovation, rather than product brands.



IQOS Party, Southern/Eastern Europe (2017)

Source: Tobacco Industry: Manipulating the Youth Into a Lifelong Addiction. GGTC Factsheet. Available at: <https://landing.ggtc.world/dmdocuments/FS%20Youth%20Manipulation.pdf>

Masking the Damage: -

While the government bodies of countries attempt at implementing newer policies and restrictions at local, regional, and national levels, the tobacco industry actively lobbies against evidence-based life-saving tobacco control measures. It intends to gain an influential seat at the policymaking table and pre-empt regulation or secure incentives from the government by making contributions or offering partnerships to the government and its officials. Further, by pulling up so-called 'socially responsible' activities through various sectors of society, the tobacco companies have been able to fetch the credibility and legitimacy it needs to grow its roots in the young market. The tobacco industries have been noted to exploit the vulnerability of governments and their people to enhance their business during the difficult times of pandemic by indulging in [Covid-19 related CSR activities](#). In March 2020,

BAT Bangladesh provided personal protective equipment (PPE) to public hospitals, and they were backed by the Ministry of Industries who wrote to several agencies asking them to cooperate with the operation of BAT and JTI during the Covid-19 shutdown. In April, BAT Kenya contributed 300,000 liters of sanitizers to various government agencies and in lieu of this, the government listed tobacco products as essential commodities. The industry rolled out its charity, endorsed by senior officials, after which the industry obtained approval to continue production during the national lockdown. This is a textbook tobacco industry tactic to use its CSR activities to establish a strong positive public image and exert influence over policymakers; ultimately building a profitable business.

Ultimately these activities detract from the obligation to make the tobacco industry accountable for all the harms caused and shift the entire focus to the disguised doings of the tobacco industry.

The key to stopping the tobacco industry and interference and preventing its deleterious health harms is the implementation of the world's first public health treaty- WHO FCTC- and its various clauses and guidelines. Governments from across the globe have ratified the implementation of WHO FCTC's Article 5.3 to protect themselves from the tobacco industry's tactics and interferences. This clause essentially conveys *"In setting and implementing their public health policies with respect to tobacco control, Parties shall act to protect these policies from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry in accordance with national law"*. Besides one of the guidelines under Article 5.3 calling for de-normalizing the conduct of the tobacco industry's CSR activities, article 13 of this treaty considers such CSR activities as a form of promotion and sponsorship and therefore following the treaty calls for ban on all such tobacco-related CSR-promotion activities.

Decades of manipulative marketing of cigarettes and tobacco products have already exposed millions of young people to the long-lasting health harms of lifelong addiction, and the tobacco industry continues to use these tactics to exploit the vulnerable youth globally.

Additional Reading:

1. [Tobacco Industry: Manipulating the Youth into a Lifelong Addiction. GGTC, August 2020.](#)
2. [Big Tobacco's Revival of Sports Advertising: Deceptive Marketing to Lure Youth to Addiction. GGTC, 2020.](#)
3. [WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic 2021: addressing new and emerging products. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021.](#)
4. [FCTC Article 5.3: Ending Promotions to Adolescents. Mary Assunta, GGTC; 5 June 2021.](#)
5. [How The Tobacco Industry Undermines Cessation. GGTC, May 2021.](#)
6. [Tobacco Industry Accountability and Liability in the Time of COVID-19. STOP, 28 July 2020.](#)
7. [Crooked Nine: Nine Ways the Tobacco Industry Undermines Health Policy. STOP, 26 September 2019.](#)
8. [Addiction at any Cost: Philip Morris International Uncovered. STOP.](#)