

Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement (TERM)

Online Marketing of Tobacco Products

Background

Article 13 of the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) recommends banning all forms of tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship (TAPS) across all channels. Online platforms, which are more difficult to oversee than traditional media channels, pose a significant challenge to controlling and curbing tobacco marketing. Vital Strategies' Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement (TERM) is a digital media monitoring system that tracks tobacco marketing on social media platforms and news sites. This situation report is part of a series that summarizes observed examples of online tobacco marketing in Mexico. TERM does not allege or attempt to identify whether these tobacco marketing instances are in violation of local or international laws. Visit the [TERM](#) website to learn more and to view all reports.

Definitions used in this report

Astroturfing: A tactic used to create the impression of grassroots public support, when in fact the agenda is supported by a company or organization.

Front groups: Groups that advocate for policies that benefit the tobacco industry and push for the use of tobacco products. These groups do not openly declare association or sponsorship by tobacco companies.

Direct marketing: Marketing of tobacco products with clear visuals of the product and/or its use, or the product brand name.

Indirect marketing: Promotion of the tobacco company and/or product and its use through brand extension, surrogate marketing, price discounts and giveaways, and sponsorship of events or activities.

Key Highlights

- In this situation report, we highlight how tobacco industry-funded groups promote electronic cigarettes and heated tobacco products as harm reduction tools for people who want to quit tobacco use. This includes promoting panel events across Latin America on tobacco harm reduction and offering shareable advocacy content, including a petition to be sent to congress. See spotlight on pages 2-3.
- Price promotions were observed for cigars and for electronic cigarettes. See page 8.

Spotlight: How the tobacco industry is advancing the harm reduction narrative around electronic cigarettes and heated tobacco

During this period, accounts associated with groups funded by the tobacco giant Philip Morris International posted content advocating for electronic cigarettes and heated tobacco products to be seen as harm reduction tools for people who want to quit tobacco smoking. These accounts included pro-vapeo Mexico, VapeoInformado and Futuro sin Humo.

Pro-vapeo Mexico is a nonprofit organization that receives funding from Philip Morris International (PMI)'s Foundation for a Smoke-Free World.¹ VapeoInformado is a project driven by the ProVecino movement, which is funded by a grant from the PMI Foundation for Smoke-Free World, and largely operated by Marcela Madrazo, former advisor to the tobacco control office and COFEPRIS. Futuro sin Humo (Smoke-free Future)² is a PMI initiative to promote its heated tobacco products. PMI uses the astroturfing marketing tactic to make it appear as if Futuro sin Humo is a grassroots movement representing the demands of the Mexican public for "smoke-free" alternatives to cigarettes.



This post from Vapeoinformado is part of a series that compares electronic cigarettes to other tools that reduce harm of disease or injuries (e.g., condoms, helmets).

Source: Vapeoinformado Twitter



VapeoInformado promotes panel events that focus on tobacco harm reduction in different Latin American countries, such as this one from Chile.

Source: Vapeoinformado Twitter



This post from Pro-Vapeo Mexico highlights the Tenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP10) to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco control which was scheduled to take place from 20-25 November, 2023 in Panama City, Panama. It states that people who use electronic cigarettes have a right to be heard and participate in designing laws that regulate these products, and that people who use these products should not be stigmatized.

Source: Pro-Vapeo Mexico A.C. Twitter

¹ Tobacco Tactics. Foundation for a Smoke-Free World. Available from: <https://tobaccotactics.org/article/foundation-for-a-smoke-free-world/>

² Tobacco Tactics. Futuro Sin Humo. Available from: <https://tobaccotactics.org/article/futuro-sin-humo/>



This post from Pro-vapeo Mexico marks “World Vape Day,” which takes place in May each year, by framing electronic cigarette use as an issue of personal freedom. It says: “Celebrating the freedom to decide how to quit smoking.”

Source: Pro-Vapeo Mexico A.C. Twitter

¡ÚNETE AL MOVIMIENTO!

Envía tu carta al congreso para que los fumadores adultos de México tengan acceso a alternativas sin humo.

NOMBRE(S) _____

APELLIDO(S) _____

E-MAIL _____

☐ Soy mayor de edad y acepto que los datos recopilados sean utilizados como se establece en su [Aviso de privacidad](#) así como recibir comunicación por correo referente a esta iniciativa.

ENVÍA TU CARTA

Legisladores del H. Congreso de la Unión

P R E S E N T E

Estimados legisladores,

Como ciudadano@ mexican@ mayor de edad, escribo porque en este momento el Congreso analiza diversas iniciativas que definirán el futuro de cerca de 15 millones de fumadores y 1.5 millones de vapeadores en México.

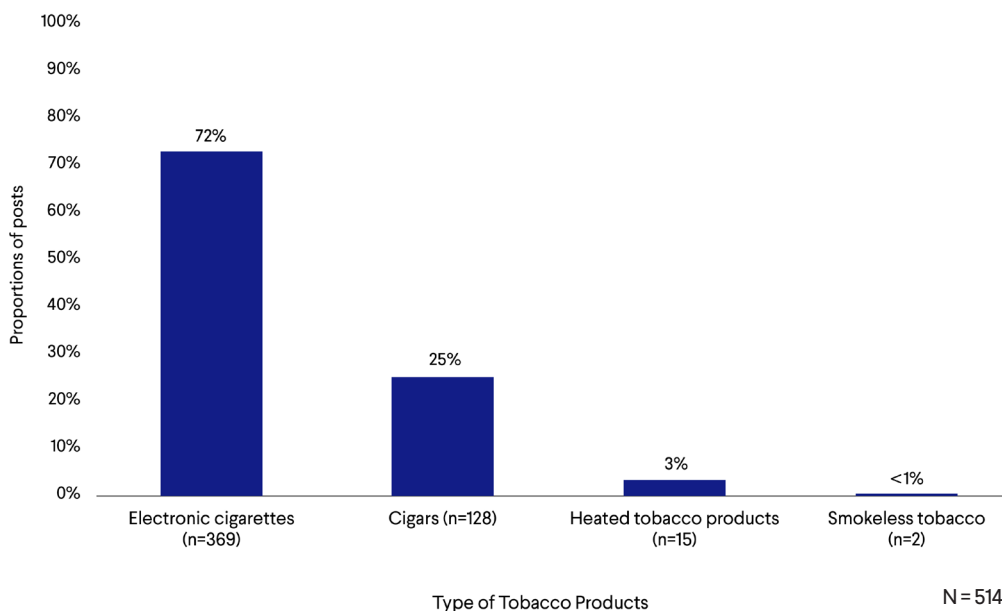
The Futuro sin Humo website encourages people to advocate for alternatives to cigarettes by sharing its content with their social media networks or directly with legislators. This includes a shareable video targeted at congress and a petition letter that people can sign, which is then sent to legislators.

Source: Futuro sin Humo website

Detailed Insight

How much marketing was observed? Between April 1 to July 31, 2023, there were 514 marketing instances from 29 social media accounts documented by TERM. The most observed marketing was for electronic cigarettes (72% , Figure 1), followed by cigars (25%). There were a few instances of marketing from Philip Morris International's Futuro sin Humo (Smoke-free Future) initiative promoting IQOS heated tobacco products and from the IQOS brand account in Mexico (3%). Smokeless tobacco products were marketed by a third-party retailer of cigar products.

Figure 1
Volume of Marketing by Product

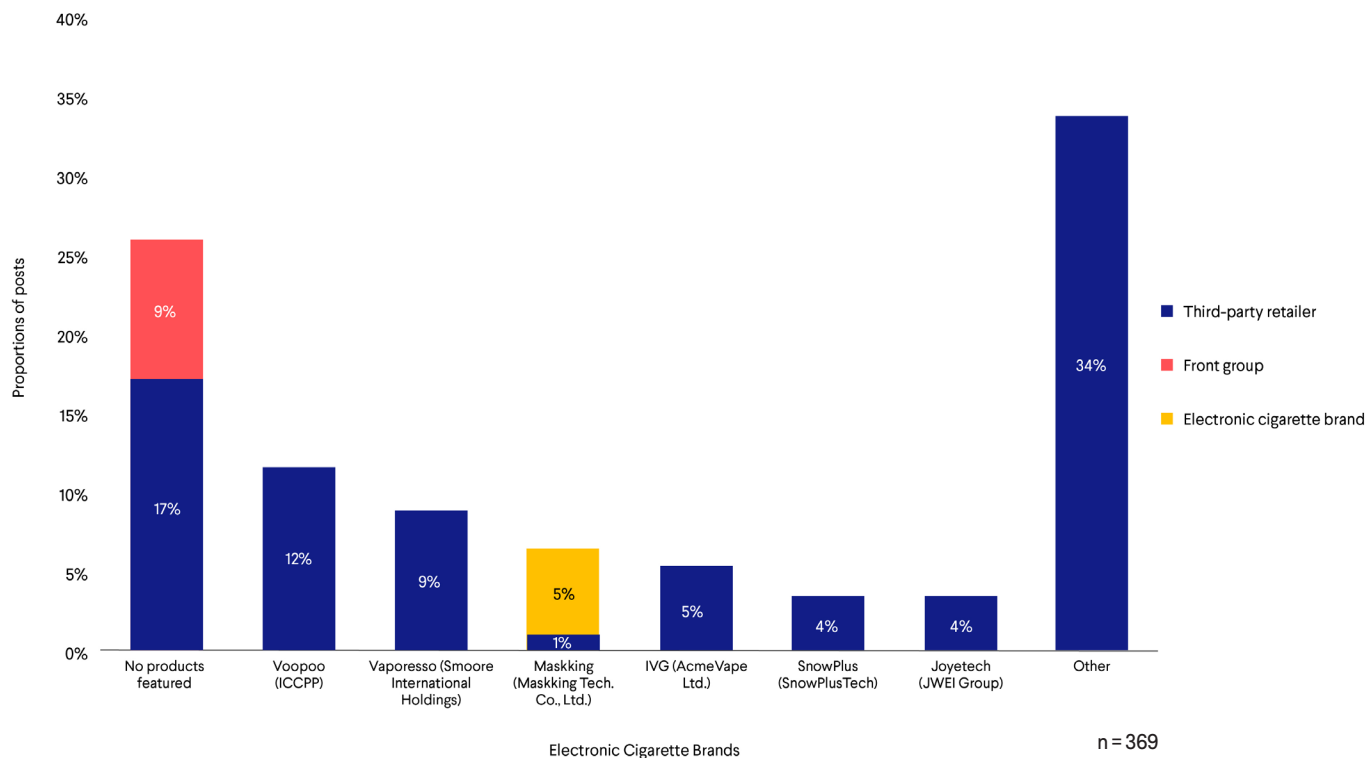


Who are the key players? The electronic cigarette brands that were marketed most frequently were VOOPOO (12%, Figure 2) and Vapresso (9%) by third-party retailers. This was followed by Masking products, which were promoted both by the official Masking store in Mexico, which functions as a brand because it only promotes Masking content, and by third-party retailers (6%).

There was a lot of variety in the electronic cigarette and e-liquid brands that were marketed (Figure 2). The “other” category (34%) included 55 brands of electronic cigarettes and e-liquids promoted by third-party retailers. Marketing in support of electronic cigarette use from the Pro-Vapeo México and VapeoInformado accounts (9%) and marketing from third-party retailers (17%) that did not mention specific brands was also observed.

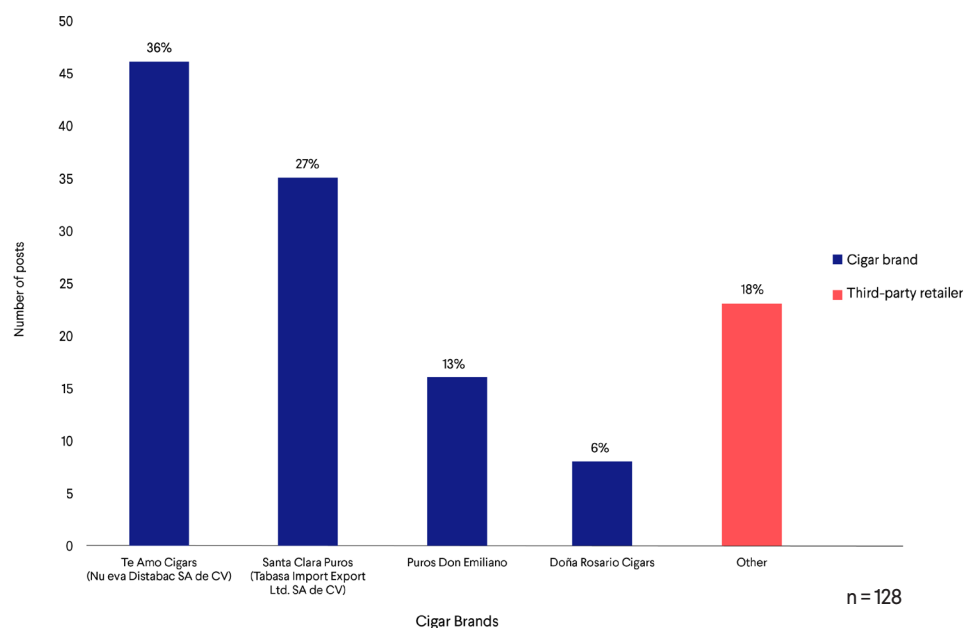
Cigars were mostly marketed by brand accounts. The majority of observed cigar marketing was for the brand Te Amo Cigars (36%, Figure 2a), followed by marketing for Santa Clara Puros (27%).

Figure 2
Electronic Cigarette Brands Being Marketed



Note: The "No products featured" category refers to general PR posts from third-party retailers and front groups. The "Other" category comprises 55 electronic cigarette and e-liquid brands that each represent <10 marketing instances, as well as 17 marketing instances that contain a variety of products or images of electronic cigarettes without any identifiable brands.

Figure 2a
Cigar Brands Being Marketed



Note: The "Other" category comprises 8 cigar brands that represent <5 instances each, as well as 10 marketing instances that contain multiple or unidentifiable products.

Where were products marketed?[‡] Most marketing was observed on Facebook (65%, Figure 3), followed by Instagram (27%). There was some marketing observed on Twitter (8%). Facebook was the predominant platform used to market electronic cigarettes (69%, Figure 3a), followed by Instagram (20%) and Twitter (11%). For cigars, Facebook was the predominant platform (57%, Figure 3a), followed by Instagram (43%). Marketing for heated tobacco products was mostly observed on the IQOS Mexico Instagram page (80%, Figure 3a) and via the Futuro sin Humo Mexico Facebook page (20%). Smokeless tobacco was marketed via the Facebook and Instagram page of a third-party retailer.

Figure 3
Platforms Used for Marketing

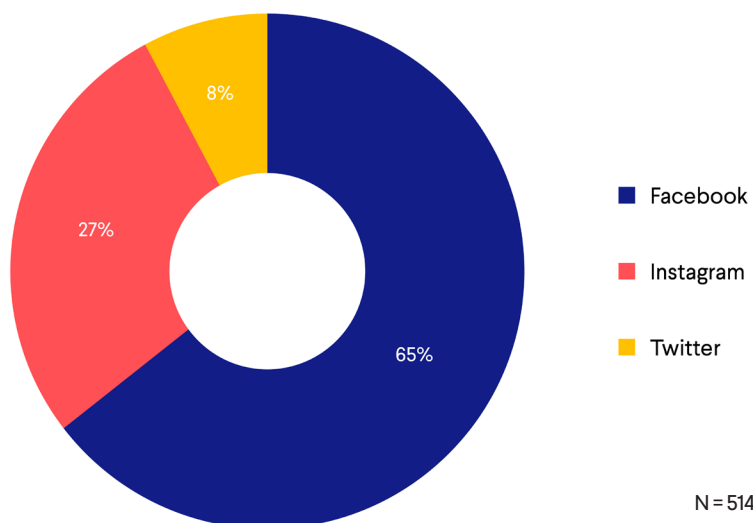
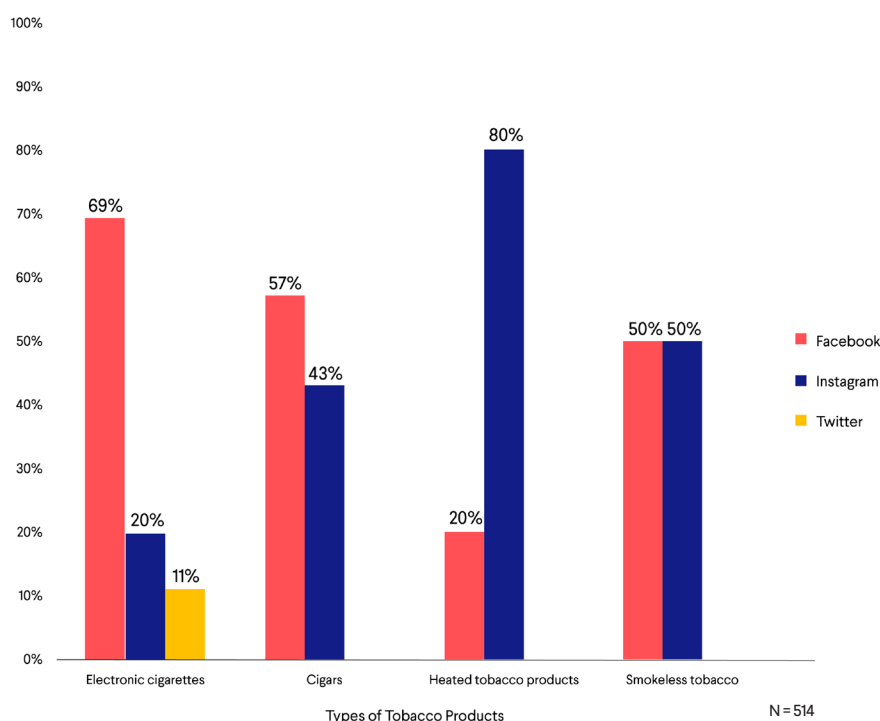


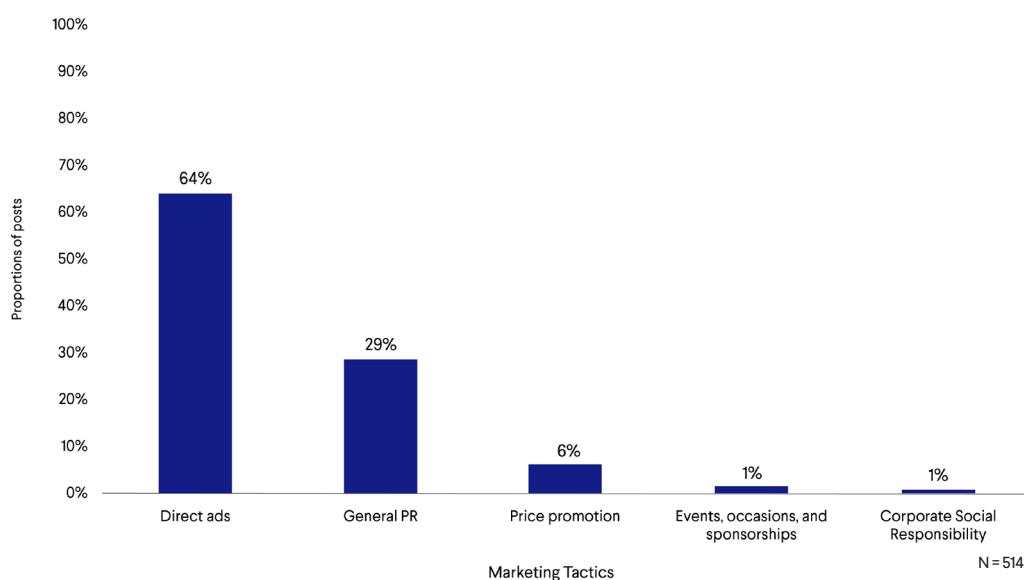
Figure 3a
Platforms Used for Marketing by Product Type



[‡] TERM relies heavily on text-based searches and is not able to capture any content that solely contains images. This may lead to an undercounting of marketing content on heavily visual media such as YouTube or TikTok.

What marketing tactics were used?* Since most content was from cigar brands or electronic cigarette retailers, the most common marketing tactic observed was direct ads that clearly feature product images for sale (64%, Figure 4). This was followed by general PR (29%), which included marketing electronic cigarettes as harm reduction tools and sharing third-party retailer store locations. Cigar brand accounts also shared company milestones and history. Price promotions for cigars included discounts and product samplers, including for Father’s Day, while flavored electronic cigarettes were price discounted (6%).

Figure 4
Marketing Tactics Used



Examples

Direct Ads



This third-party retailer promotes an e-liquid that has blueberry cheesecake flavor.

Source: Vapers Café Monterey Facebook



This post promotes heated tobacco products as part of a trendy “smoke-free” lifestyle. Young models are shown using the product while socializing. The caption states “you are part of the best trend: a smoke-free lifestyle.”

Source: IQOS Mexico Instagram

* See Appendix Table 1 for definitions of marketing tactics.

Price Promotion



Joe Joe Cigars
Sampler de la semana!!
✓ Precio especial.
✳ Envío nacional \$200.
📍 CDMX MTY Reynosa Matamoros Tampico
Matamoros con servicio al día siguiente.
Pedidos WhatsApp <https://wa.link/bg3pj4>

This cigar brand has a special weekly promotion and offers nationwide shipping. Product orders can be made through Whatsapp.

Source: Dona Rosario Cigars Facebook



This third-party retailer is promoting 3 pieces of flavored electronic cigarettes for a discounted price. This specific product has bubble lemon flavor which appeals to young people.

Source: La Vaperia Vape Shop Facebook

General PR



This post showcases the pride and cultural heritage of cigar making. It is part of a series highlighting the company's tobacco leaf farmers and cigar-making process.

Translation: #PeopleThat Are Relentless

Source: Santa Clara Puros Facebook

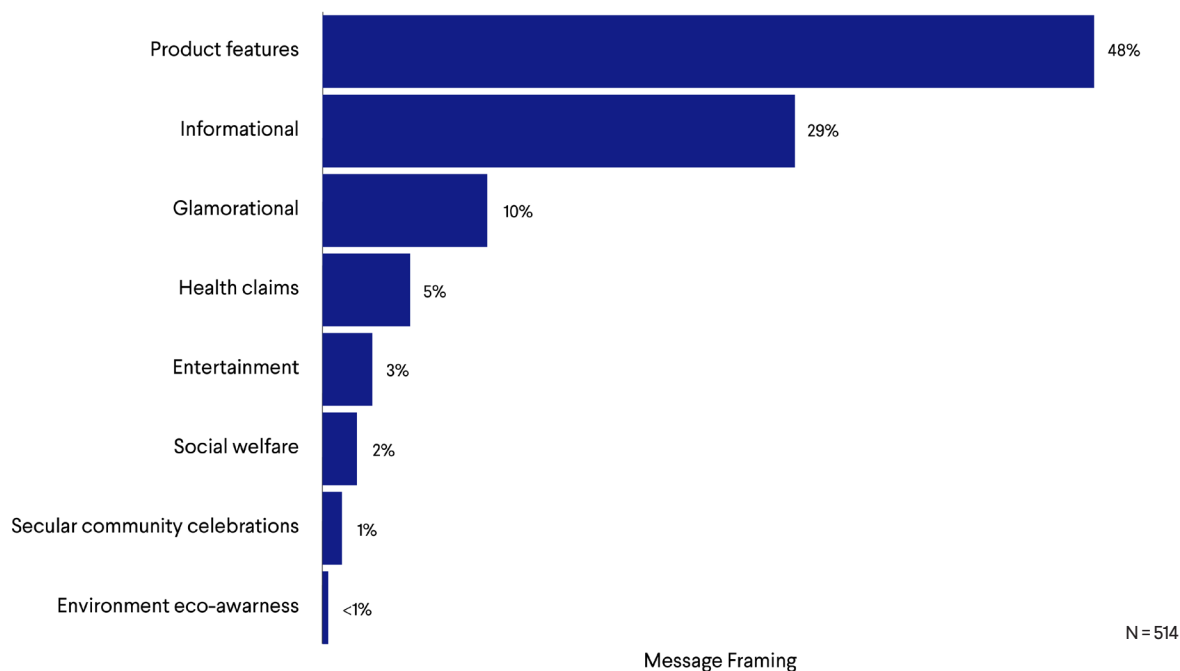


This post encourages readers to follow the third-party retailer's Instagram account for promotions and product updates.

Source: Vapers Café Monterrey Facebook

What messaging was used?* Overall, marketing messages mostly focused on product features (48%, Figure 5), which for cigars included the rich flavor and variety available in a sampling box, and for electronic cigarettes included e-liquid flavor, device design and battery power. This was followed by sharing information (29%), such as cigar brand accounts discussing the history of their companies and offering details about price promotions and electronic cigarette retailers providing general information on new products or store locations. Some accounts directed viewers to blogs that focused on topics like electronic cigarettes and public health and Mexico's ban on electronic cigarettes. Electronic cigarettes were marketed using glamorous models (10%). Messaging that made health claims was also observed for electronic cigarettes (5%).

Figure 5
Message Framing Used



** See Appendix Table 1 for definitions of message framing.

Examples

Product features



This post from a third-party retailer describes the practical features of electronic cigarettes such as their comfortable design and portability.

Source: ecig.mx Facebook

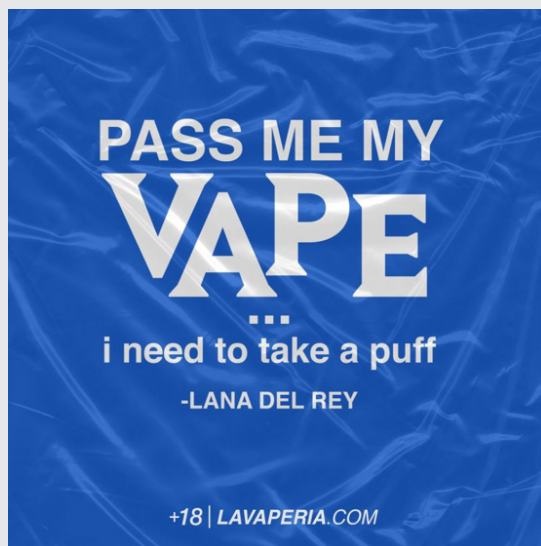
Informational



This post celebrates the 55th anniversary of the cigar company Santa Clara and provides important milestones in its corporate history.

Source: Santa Clara Cigars Facebook

Glamorization



This post refers to the lyrics of a song from popular singer Lana Del Rey. Referring to popular artists creates an association with glamor and coolness, which makes products more appealing to youth.

Source: La Vaperia Vape Shop Facebook

Health claims



In a series of posts, VapeoInformado describes electronic cigarettes as harm reduction tools for people who wish to quit tobacco. This post compares the use of electronic cigarettes with the use of seatbelts which can be life saving in the event of a crash.

Source: VapeoInformado Twitter

Appendix Table 1. Definitions for marketing tactics and message framing identified

Marketing tactic	Type of marketing strategy used, which captures the intention of the marketing (to sell products, create brand endearment/loyalty, etc.)
Corporate social responsibility	Pairs the company/brand or product with socially responsible activities (e.g., water conservation projects, financing vaccination drives).
Direct marketing	Promotes the sale or use of tobacco products in a straightforward manner; shows images of the product.
Events, occasions, sponsorships	Pairs the company/brand or tobacco product with events, occasions, sponsorships and contests (e.g., product sponsorship of sports events, live concerts, holiday greetings).
General profile raising	Intended to raise the profile of the brand/company but does not fall into any of the other categories (e.g., brand/company wishing a happy new year).
Price promotions	Promotes the sale or use of tobacco products and new nicotine and tobacco products through price discounting (e.g., 10% off).
Message framing	Underlying theme around which the whole message of the post is built.
Entertainment	Posts that promote the product as being entertaining and fun. This category also includes posts that use entertainment-related content including memes, funny videos or jokes.
Environment eco-awareness	Any post that addresses climate change, conservation, sustainable development goals, or encouraging people to support environmental causes.
Glamorization	Posts that associate use of products as aspirational, luxurious or part of an ideal, fashionable lifestyle.
Health claims	Posts that present the product as healthier than other products or as being less harmful than conventional tobacco products.
Informational	Posts that instruct viewers how to use a product. This category also includes posts that provide background information on the company.
Product features	Posts that primarily emphasize the available choices of product flavors and design including device colors, as well as technical specifications of the product. Posts without any text descriptions or keywords that only display the product are also included in this category.
Secular community celebrations	Posts that offer celebrations or greetings for non-religious social and sporting events that are celebrated globally or nationally. This category also includes content celebrating achievements or honoring the memory contributions of those who passed away.
Social welfare	Posts that showcase activities sponsored or supported by company/brand that are meant to improve their public image. Any posts associating the company with social welfare schemes, livelihood initiatives, women's empowerment, entrepreneurship, educational scholarships, etc.

Appendix Table 2. List of accounts observed from April 1-July 31, 2023

Account names	Platform	Type of product	Type of account	Marketing instances	URL
vaperscafemty	Facebook	Electronic cigarettes, E-liquids	Third-party retailer	92	https://www.facebook.com/559502872873537/posts/602636468560177
ecig.depot	Facebook	Electronic cigarettes, E-liquids	Third-party retailer	58	https://www.facebook.com/836481601245369/posts/851306529762876
lavaperiamx	Facebook	Electronic cigarettes, E-liquids	Third-party retailer	51	https://www.facebook.com/lavaperiamx/videos/again-daymax/581584503889110/
Purossantaclara	Facebook	Cigars	Smoking product brand	35	https://www.facebook.com/534624195354620/posts/1468447870651356?substory_index=1468447870651356
kapitalsmokeandvapor	Facebook	Electronic cigarettes, E-liquids	Third-party retailer	22	https://www.facebook.com/513320660794435/posts/766922315434267
maskkinghighmexico	Facebook	Electronic cigarettes	E-cigarette product brand	20	https://www.facebook.com/545989490864927/posts/750309063766301
TabacosSanAndres	Facebook	Cigars	Third-party retailer	16	https://www.facebook.com/204085655333842/posts/299709355771471
DonaRosarioCigars	Facebook	Cigars	Smoking product brand	15	https://www.facebook.com/486384316826010/posts/718364750294631
donemilianomx	Facebook	Cigars	Smoking product brand	8	https://www.facebook.com/498934705572000/posts/686941336771335
teamo.cigars	Facebook	Cigars	Smoking product brand	6	https://www.facebook.com/473102285038756/posts/573337528348564
vaporalamexicanamx	Facebook	Electronic cigarettes, E-liquids	Third-party retailer	5	https://www.facebook.com/321638506635113/posts/736336301831996
Futuro Sin Humo México	Facebook	Heated tobacco products	Front group	3	https://www.facebook.com/300436018941222/posts/571678548483633
centralsmokeandvape	Facebook	Electronic cigarettes, E-liquids	Third-party retailer	4	https://www.facebook.com/534279685369822/posts/767778642019924

thehighclub smokeshop	Facebook	Electronic cigarettes, E-liquids	Third-party retailer	3	https://www.facebook.com/553235043504405/posts/593417962819446
TheSmokeShop Mexico	Facebook	Electronic cigarettes, E-liquids	Third-party retailer	1	https://www.facebook.com/479445761071207/posts/566903642325418
vapelab.mx	Facebook	Electronic cigarettes, E-liquids	Third-party retailer	1	https://www.facebook.com/696439722090232/posts/761605048907032
teamo_cigars	Instagram	Cigars	Smoking product brand	40	https://www.instagram.com/reel/CuVeIZPtnR0/
vaperscafemty	Instagram	Electronic cigarettes, E-liquids	Third-party retailer	35	https://www.instagram.com/reel/CuC8okotadr/
kapitalsmoke andvapor	Instagram	Electronic cigarettes, E-liquids	Third-party retailer	25	https://www.instagram.com/reel/Ct-PcdagN7/
iqos_mx	Instagram	Heated tobacco products	Heated tobacco product brand	12	https://www.instagram.com/p/CtSckawsU5v/
puros_sanandres	Instagram	Cigars	Third-party retailer	8	https://www.instagram.com/tv/CuI3zhxpFk/
donemilianomx	Instagram	Cigars	Smoking product brand	8	https://www.instagram.com/p/CuOglRjsAqP/?img_index=1
ecigmexvapeshop	Instagram	Electronic cigarettes, E-liquids	Third-party retailer	6	https://www.instagram.com/p/CuqYaZOLJLH/
centralsmokeandvape	Instagram	Electronic cigarettes, E-liquids	Third-party retailer	5	https://www.instagram.com/reel/Cu-xt6tPF1x/
lavaperiamx	Instagram	Electronic cigarettes, E-liquids	Third-party retailer	2	https://www.instagram.com/p/CshKKQ_rE5S/
provapeomexico	Twitter/X	Electronic cigarettes	Front group	17	https://twitter.com/provapeomexico/status/1679556466607267853
VapeoInformado	Twitter/X	Electronic cigarettes	Front group	16	https://twitter.com/VapeoInformado/status/1683995196944441345
HighnessVaping	Twitter/X	Electronic cigarettes, E-liquids	Third-party retailer	7	https://twitter.com/HighnessVaping/status/1650592160943579144
VapelabMx	Twitter/X	Electronic cigarettes, E-liquids	Third-party retailer	1	https://twitter.com/HighnessVaping/status/1650592160943579144

Methods

The Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement (TERM) is a digital media monitoring system that offers rapid, qualitative insights into online tobacco marketing. The primary purpose of TERM is to identify instances of tobacco marketing, a known public health risk. TERM does not allege or attempt to identify whether these tobacco marketing instances are in violation of local or international laws.

This report summarizes information gathered by the [Radarr](#) platform, an artificial intelligence-driven monitoring tool from publicly available posts on social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and TikTok, and from online articles on news sites. Instances of tobacco marketing on social media are identified using keyword-based queries and through the regular monitoring of social media accounts that were identified purposively via input from tobacco control experts, market research data and keyword searches. News articles are identified by tracking the top 20 newspapers based on circulation in English and the commonly spoken language in each country through their social media accounts, RSS feeds and Google Alerts and via LexisNexis if behind a paywall. Data coding is first conducted automatically and is then reviewed by Vital Strategies researchers using a theory-driven codebook.

The analysis is currently restricted to content in English and Spanish. Data restrictions and privacy laws followed by social media platforms may lead to undercounting of marketing activity. [Read our full methodology here.](#)

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About the Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement

Vital Strategies' Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement (TERM) is an AI-powered, human-expertise-driven digital media monitoring system built in response to the tobacco industry's exploitation of the power of digital platforms. TERM tracks and analyzes tobacco marketing online using news and social media listening. It packages findings into actionable, easy-to-read reports for governments, media, tobacco control advocates and others. TERM is currently operating in India, Indonesia and Mexico.

About Vital Strategies

Vital Strategies believes every person should be protected by an equitable and effective public health system. We partner with governments, communities and organizations around the world to reimagine public health so that health is supported in all the places we live, work and play. The result is millions of people living longer, healthier lives. To find out more, please visit www.vitalstrategies.org or Twitter [@VitalStrat](#).

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