

TERM (Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement)

Marketing Of Tobacco Products In India

Situation Report # 2
Sept. 15 – Oct. 15, 2020

Background:

Tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship is one of the factors responsible for the growth of unhealthy tobacco consumption. The World Health Organization's MPOWER technical package on tobacco control, and the international treaty, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, recommend bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship. In India, Section 5 of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act prohibits all direct and indirect advertisement of tobacco products and activity that may promote the use of tobacco products or any trademark or brand name of tobacco products.

Yet, tobacco marketing continues, globally and in India, including through online forums that are less well regulated.¹ In addition, "corporate political activity"—attempts by corporations to influence policy to promote tobacco products—has been well documented internationally as a means of promoting tobacco.^{2,3} Vital Strategies launched the Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement or TERM in June, 2019 to monitor tobacco marketing activities in India, as observed and reported online, and including those related to e-cigarettes and other non-traditional products. This situation report is part of a monthly series that summarizes observed instances of online tobacco marketing in India.

Highlights

- **Tobacco marketing by volume:** A total of 805 instances of tobacco marketing were recorded between Sept. 15 and Oct. 15, 2020. Of these, 68% were examples of surrogate marketing, 25% were events, promotions and sponsorships, 6% were direct marketing, and 1% were corporate social responsibility activities. There were no cases recorded of e-cigarettes marketing during this period. Companies that market smoking products were responsible for 57% of these activities and companies that market smokeless products did 43%.
- **Tobacco marketing by state:** Overall, 50% of marketing instances were recorded from the state of West Bengal followed by Uttar Pradesh at 26%, Rajasthan at 17%, Maharashtra at 4%, Karnataka at 2% and Delhi at 1%. For smokeless tobacco marketing, 59% of cases were recorded from Uttar Pradesh followed by 40% from Rajasthan and 1% from West Bengal. Examples of marketing for smoking products was highest at 87% from West Bengal followed

¹ https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/searo/india/health-topic-pdf/tobacco/tobaccocontrol-tobacco-imagery-in-on-demand-ott-india-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=46395209_2

² Ulucanlar S, Fooks GJ, Gilmore AB (2016) The Policy Dystopia Model: An Interpretive Analysis of Tobacco Industry Political Activity. PLOS Medicine 13(9): e1002125. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002125>

³ Hillman A.J., Keim, D., Schuler, D. (2004) Corporate political activity: A review and research agenda. Journal of Management, 30(6), pp.837-857. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jm.2004.06.003>

by 7% from Maharashtra and 4% from Karnataka. Delhi, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu recorded 1% each.

- **Corporate political activities:** Tobacco companies launched social media campaigns focused on current festivals and events such as Indian Premier League matches, and on issues such as women's empowerment, livelihood support, government initiatives and health. Of the total instances, 38% were recorded as community celebrations, 7% were focused on health, 2% were focused on conservation and 1% were focused on women's empowerment. The rest (51%) were recorded as marketing in general.
- **Tobacco marketing by channel:** A total of 49% of instances were recorded on Facebook, 33% on Instagram, 13% on Twitter, 3% on YouTube, and 2% on online news. Tobacco companies that sell smoking products used Facebook, Instagram, online news, Twitter and YouTube in 57% of cases; companies that sell smokeless tobacco used Facebook, Instagram, online news and Twitter, in 43% of cases.
- **Message framing and tone:** In 38% of cases, the marketers linked their messaging to community celebrations and Indian Premier League events. Other message frames included health (7%), conservation (2%) and women's empowerment (1%). The rest of the messages (51%) did not have any specific messaging frame. Companies that sell smoking products used a mix of messages focused on community celebrations, Indian Premier League, women's empowerment and health, whereas companies that sell smokeless tobacco mainly used community celebrations and conservation. The tone for the marketing messages was mainly neutral (93%).

Recommendations:

- Tobacco brands target online users on social media. For example, this month, tobacco companies launched social media campaigns related to the Indian Premier League. To evade the partial advertising ban on tobacco, the industry is using creative and indirect ways to promote its products. A comprehensive ban on all forms of tobacco advertising should be introduced.
- Tobacco companies are investing extensively in social media marketing, primarily through Facebook and Instagram, to bypass advertising bans.⁴ Although the advertising policies of Facebook and Facebook-owned platforms (such as Instagram) prohibit any branded promotion of vaping and tobacco products, it is primarily self-regulated. There is a need for a clear policy on social media promotion of tobacco and related products. Direct marketing of tobacco products, mainly cigars, is also a matter of concern as these products are marketed with aspirational messaging.
- Section 5 of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act clearly states that there must not be any promotion of tobacco products through direct and indirect means. However, there is extensive surrogate marketing on social media. Recently, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs⁵ has taken some steps to curb surrogate marketing and imitation advertising, but comprehensive, enforceable legislation would help to strengthen efforts to prohibit tobacco advertising, promotions and sponsorship in India.

⁴ <https://brandequity.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/digital/puff-the-social-dragon-is-social-media-turning-into-the-final-frontier-for-cigarette-brands/66047530>

⁵ <https://consumeraffairs.nic.in/sites/default/files/file-uploads/latestnews/Draft%20guidelines%20for%20stakeholders%20consultation.pdf>

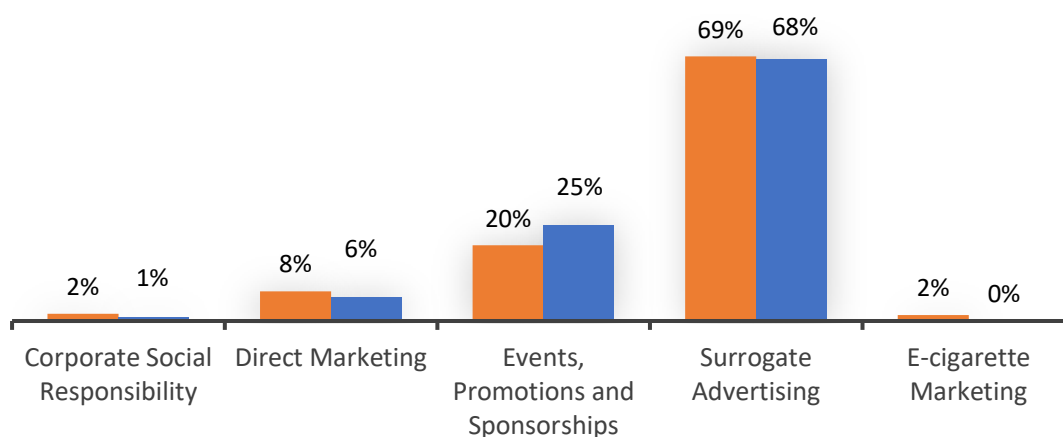
- Depicting tobacco use on online streaming platforms and on films and television is likely to have a promotional effect.⁶ Rules about the depiction of all forms of tobacco products and on all platforms (online and offline) should be strictly enforced. Recently, the Ministry of Health wrote a letter to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting calling for health disclaimers on tobacco products to be made mandatory for online streaming platforms when depicting tobacco products or their use.
- The tobacco industry is continuing its tactic of promoting itself as “socially responsible” by contributing through corporate social responsibility initiatives and aligning with Government of India’s flagship programs. The Ministry of Health has recently adopted a code of conduct restricting officials and staff from collaborating with the tobacco industry. The code of conduct is in line with the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Article 5.3.

Detailed Insights

Volume of Tobacco Marketing

- A total of 805 instances of tobacco marketing activities were recorded between Sept. 15 and Oct. 15, 2020. The main kinds of marketing activities included surrogate marketing, events, promotions and sponsorships, and direct marketing. Of the total, 549 (68%) were instances of surrogate marketing, 200 (25%) were events, promotions, and sponsorships, and 49 (6%) were direct marketing.
- Companies that sell smoking products were responsible for 57% of these marketing activities, compared to 43% for companies that sell smokeless products. There were no recorded cases of tobacco marketing by e-cigarette companies.

Chart 1a: Tobacco industry marketing activities in India (Sept. 15–Oct. 15, 2020)

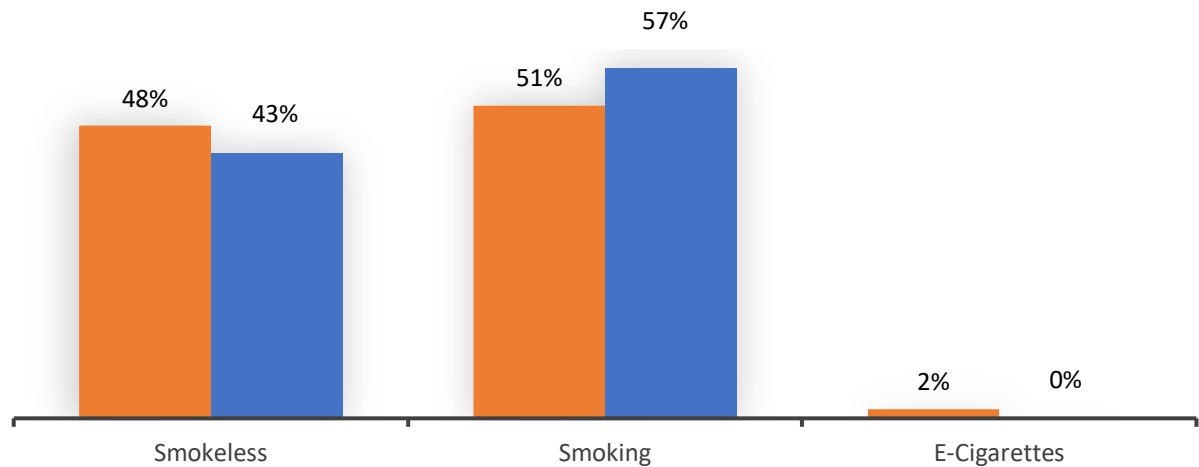


Number of instances (Sept. 15–Oct. 15, 2020): 805

Year to date number of instances (Aug. 15–Oct. 15, 2020): 1,377

⁶ https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/searo/india/health-topic-pdf/tobacco/tobaccocontrol-tobacco-imagery-in-on-demand-ott-india-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=46395209_2

Chart 1b: Total instances of tobacco marketing in India by product type (Sept. 15–Oct. 15, 2020)



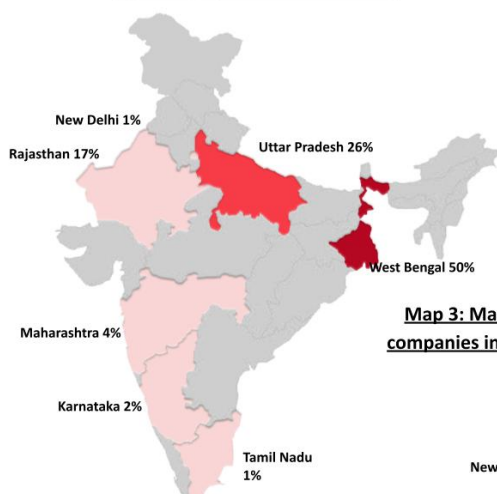
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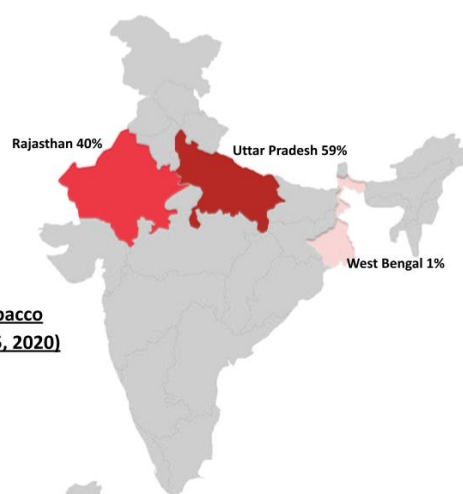
Tobacco Marketing By State

- Most instances of tobacco marketing were observed in the states of West Bengal (50%) and Uttar Pradesh (26%) followed by Rajasthan and Maharashtra. It could be because ITC Limited is headquartered in West Bengal and that a majority of smokeless tobacco companies, mainly pan masala companies, are located in Uttar Pradesh.
- A total of 59% of marketing instances by smokeless tobacco companies were from Uttar Pradesh followed by 40% from Rajasthan, while 87% of marketing instances by smoking tobacco companies were from West Bengal followed by 7% from Maharashtra and 4% from Karnataka.

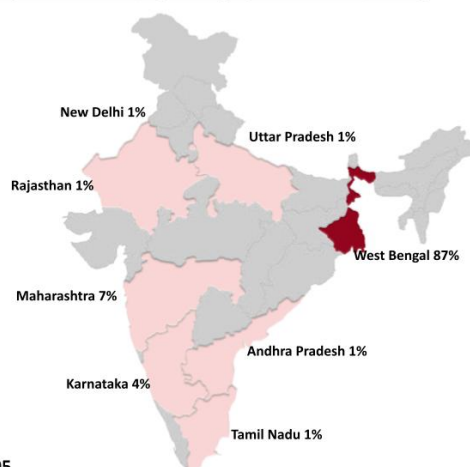
**Map 1: Tobacco industry marketing activities in India
by state (Sept. 15–Oct. 15, 2020)**



Map 2: Marketing activities by smokeless tobacco companies in India, by state (Sept. 15–Oct. 15, 2020)



Map 3: Marketing activities by smoking tobacco companies in India, by state (Sept. 15–Oct. 15, 2020)



0% 25% 50% 75% 100%
Number of instances (Sept. 15–Oct. 15, 2020): 805

Marketing Violations recorded Sept. 15 to Oct. 15, 2020

Many – if not all -- of the instances of tobacco marketing observed this month were in violation of current regulations, as noted below.

Table 1: Type of marketing activities leading to violations

Marketing tactics	Applicable Regulation	Summary
Direct Marketing	Section 5 (1) of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act	There were 49 instances of direct marketing recorded during the period. Cigars were directly marketed on social media, mainly Facebook, depicting the qualities of a well-made cigar in addition to messaging cigar smoking as aspirational. In many posts, order details were also provided for customers.



**Indirect Marketing
(Surrogate
marketing and
Events,
promotions, and
sponsorships)**
**Section 5 (1) of the
Cigarettes and
Other Tobacco
Products Act**

There were 749 instances of indirect advertising observed. Smokeless tobacco products were most often marketed indirectly through surrogate products. Messaging tended to highlight features such as taste and packaging. The advertising, promotion and sponsorship activities were particularly timed around Indian Premier League events, during which the surrogate promotion of tobacco products was very high. Indirect messaging of surrogate tobacco products uses a variety of online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, online news and YouTube. None of the observed instances of indirect marketing featured celebrities or influencers.


**Corporate Social
Responsibility
Activities**
**WHO Framework
Convention on
Tobacco Control
Article 5.3**
**Section 5 of the
Cigarettes and
Other Tobacco
Products Act**

There were seven instances recorded of corporate social responsibility activities by tobacco company. ITC Limited is the primary driver of corporate social responsibility activities by tobacco companies. Messaging was mainly focused on livelihoods, health and agriculture. The use of online news media and social media was prominent.


ITC distributes masks to ryots

STAFF REPORTER

 GUNTUR, SEPTEMBER 19, 2020 04:42 IST
 UPDATED: SEPTEMBER 19, 2020 02:22 IST

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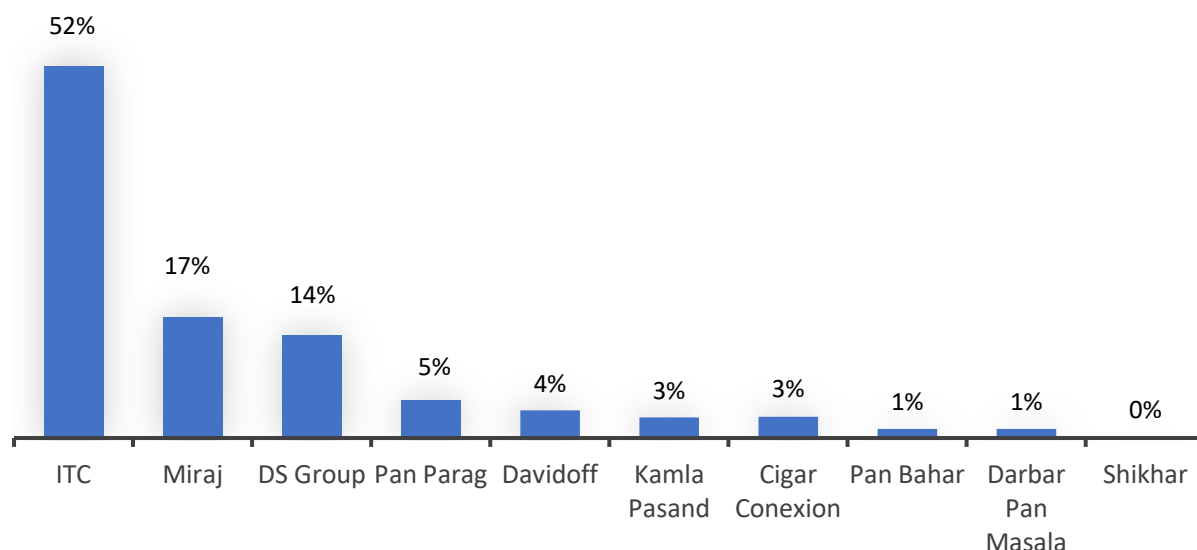
The ITC-Agri Business Division, as part of its CSR activities, is providing the necessary and basic safety tools like masks and sanitisers to farmers. ITC manager Bhanuprasad Reddy went to fields and distributed masks to the farmers while asking them wear masks at work all the time. ITC Vinukonda team has conducted multiple village-level awareness programmes among farm workers. They have distributed masks, face shields and sanitizers to 6,000 farmers and farm workers.

Marketing by Tobacco Companies

- In India, ITC Limited leads the marketing activity by all tobacco companies, 418 (52%) instances were recorded during this reporting period.

- The other instances recorded were by smokeless tobacco companies: Miraj, 136 (17%); Dharampal Satyapal Group; 116 (14%); and Pan Parag, 42 (5%).

Chart 2. Total instances of tobacco industry marketing in India, by company (Sept. 15–Oct. 15, 2020)



Number of instances (Sept. 15–Oct. 15, 2020): 805

Corporate Political Activities

- Corporate political activities observed during this report's period included corporate social responsibility efforts by tobacco companies to provide livelihood support. The period also saw a number of tobacco promotional messages linked to Indian Premier League, public festivals and community celebrations.

Table 2. Instances of observed corporate political activities by the tobacco industry.

Categories of Corporate Political Activities	Observed Activities
Manipulating information Messaging that questions credibility of public health measures; timing campaigns with the current public sentiment and festivals	ITC Limited along with smokeless tobacco companies, mainly Dharampal Satyapal group, Pan Parag and Miraj launched social media campaigns timed at Indian Premier League and important days such as Daughter's Day, Gandhi Jayanti, Tourism Day and International Day of Peace. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Iss IPL, har ball jaegi boundary ke bahar Kamla Pasand remembers #MahatmaGandhi

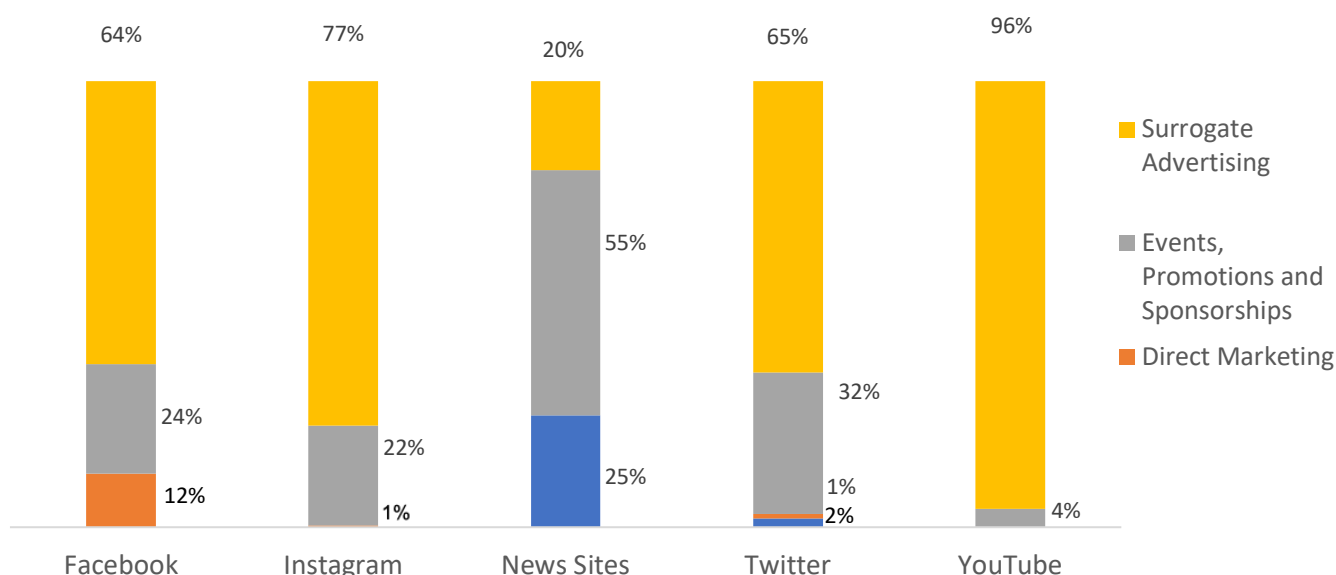
Influencing policies <i>Support to government schemes, provide livelihood incentives, provide technical support to policymakers to further tobacco consumption.</i>	<p>ITC Limited provided livelihood support and distributed masks to farmers under its corporate social responsibility activities. ITC aligned with the government's "Atma Nirbhar Bharat" initiative.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nation First: Sab Saath Badhein • Citizen-led Sunfeast India Run raised Rs. 3.12 crore
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⁷ Mialon, M., Gaitan Charry, D., Cediell, G., Crosbie, E., Scagliusi, F., & Perez Tamayo, E. (2020). 'I had never seen so many lobbyists': Food industry political practices during the development of a new nutrition front-of-pack labeling system in Colombia. Public Health Nutrition, 1-9. doi:10.1017/S1368980020002268

Tobacco Marketing Activity by Channel

- Social media was the primary channel during this report's period for tobacco marketing in India; 90% of all instances of tobacco marketing (direct and indirect) were on social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. Direct marketing of tobacco products is also mainly done through social media, primarily via Facebook and Instagram. The news media were the primary channels for reports of tobacco industry-sponsored corporate social responsibility initiatives.
- Marketing of smokeless tobacco and smoking tobacco was done via a variety of social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube.

**Chart 3a: Tobacco industry marketing activity on social media in India, by channel
(Sept. 15—Oct. 15, 2020)**



Number of instances (Sept. 15—Oct. 15, 2020): 805

Chart 3b. Marketing activities by smoking tobacco companies in India (Sept. 15–Oct. 15, 2020)

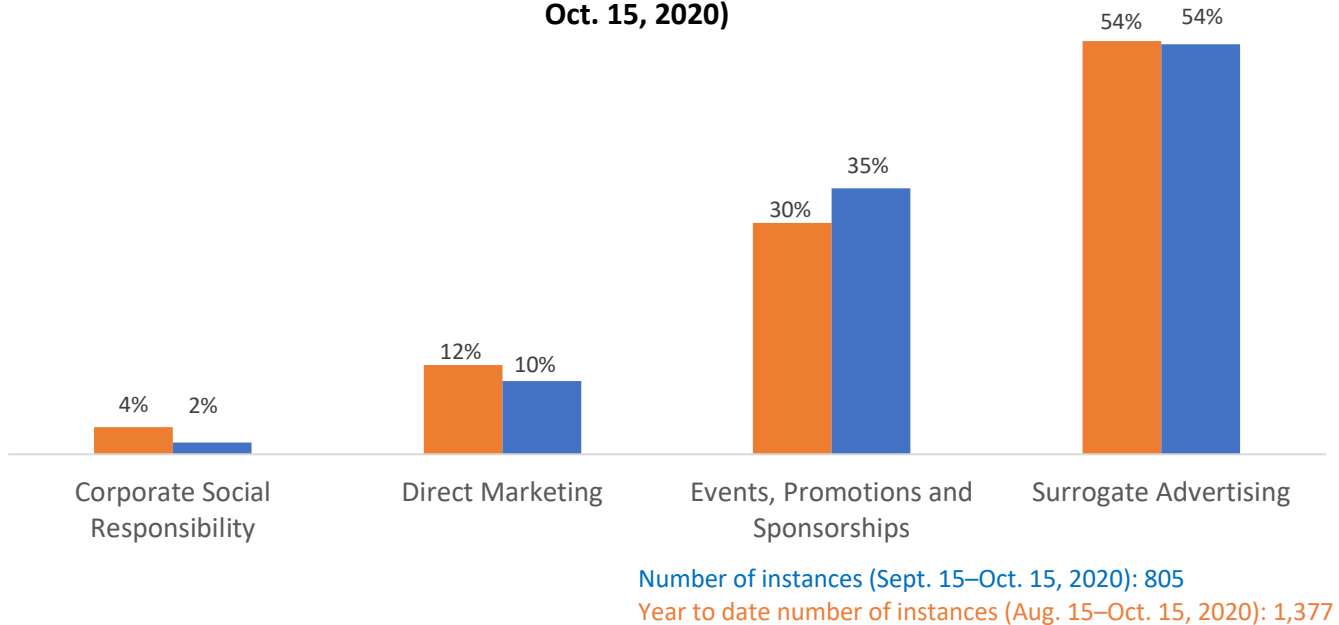
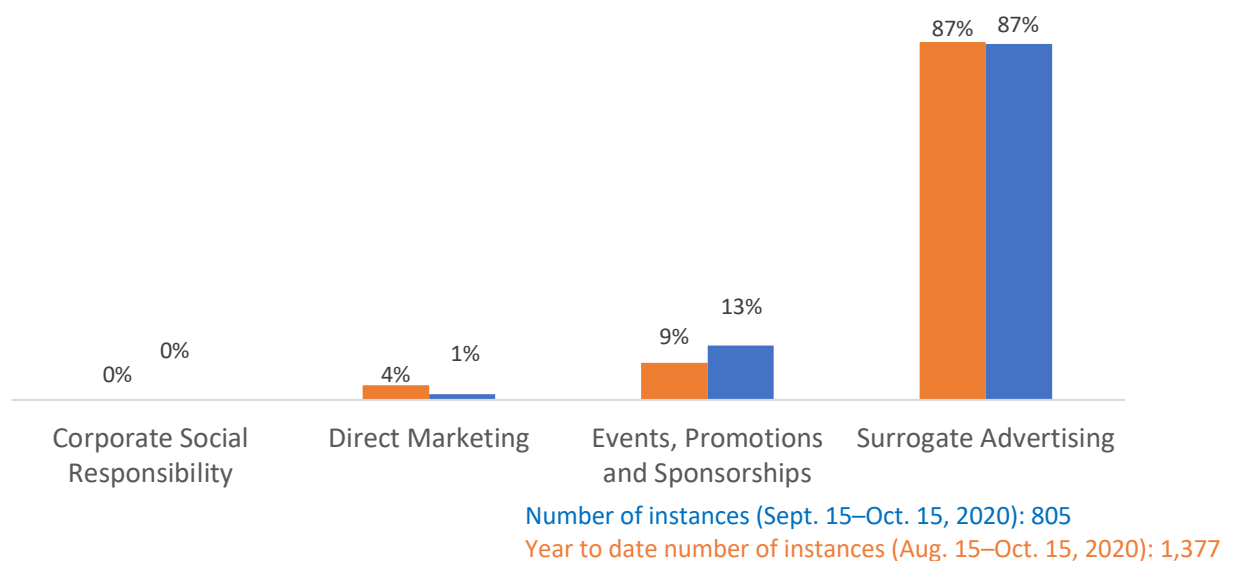


Chart 3c. Marketing activities by smokeless tobacco companies in India (Sept. 15 - Oct. 15, 2020)



Message Framing and Tone

Frequently Used Messages

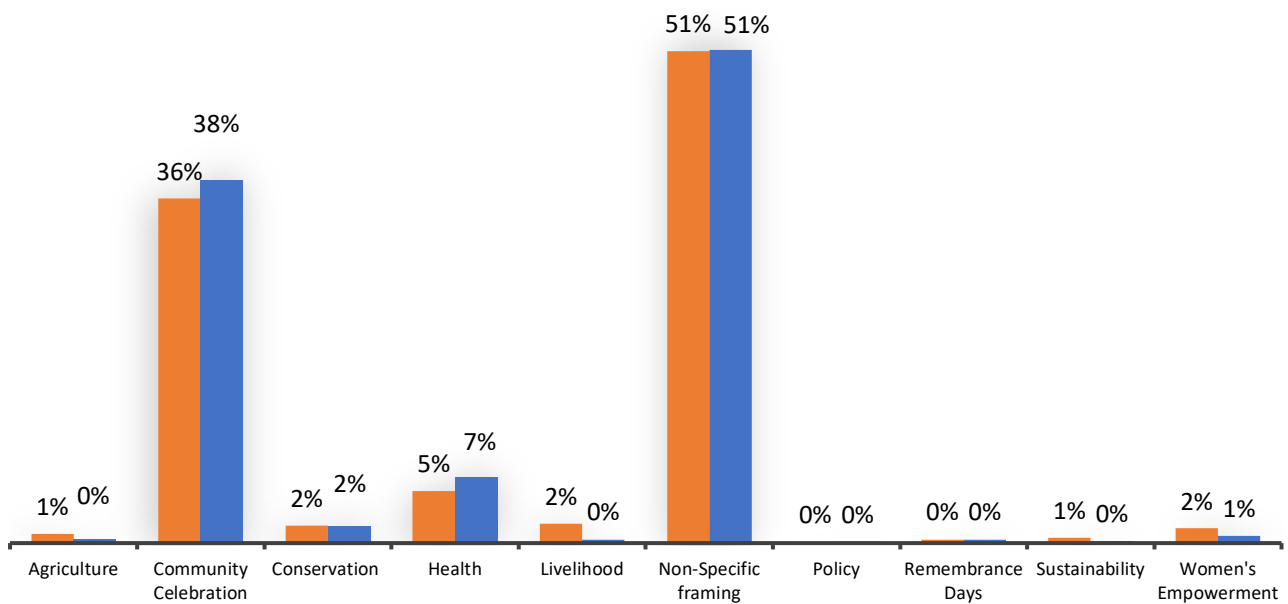
A "word cloud" analysis of communication messages enables the identification of words that were most frequently used on all the accessed online platforms. The word cloud analysis of this month's tobacco marketing messages reveals that the words most often used this month pertain to Indian Premier League, public religious festivals, and deities worshipped at the time. The common evocation of cricket suggests that the marketing was directed at youth and cricket fans.



Framing of Marketing Messages

- A total of 304 (38%) tobacco marketing messages during this reporting period were framed with a festive tone linked to Indian Premier League and community events and celebrations; 55 (7%) messages were framed with a focus on health, 14 (2%) were on conservation and 6 (1%) on women's empowerment.
- Smokeless tobacco companies mainly focused on community celebrations, with 144 (41%) instances recorded during the period. Marketing of smoking products was also focused on community celebrations, with 160 (35%) instances recorded, and message framing on health, with 42 (9%).

Chart 4a. Total instances of tobacco industry marketing in India, by message framing (Sept. 15–Oct. 15, 2020)

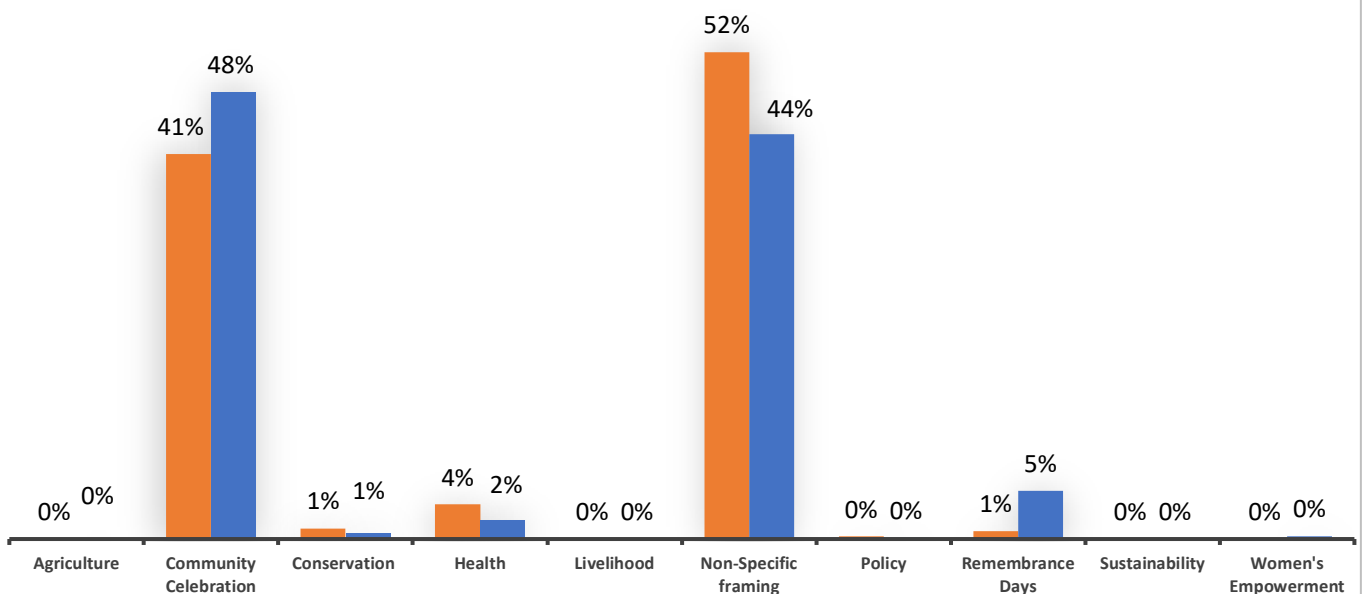


Number of instances (Sept. 15–Oct. 15, 2020) = 805

Year to date number of instances (Aug. 15–Oct. 15, 2020) = 1377

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Chart 4b. Instances of tobacco industry marketing by smokeless tobacco companies in India, by message framing (Sept. 15–Oct. 15, 2020)

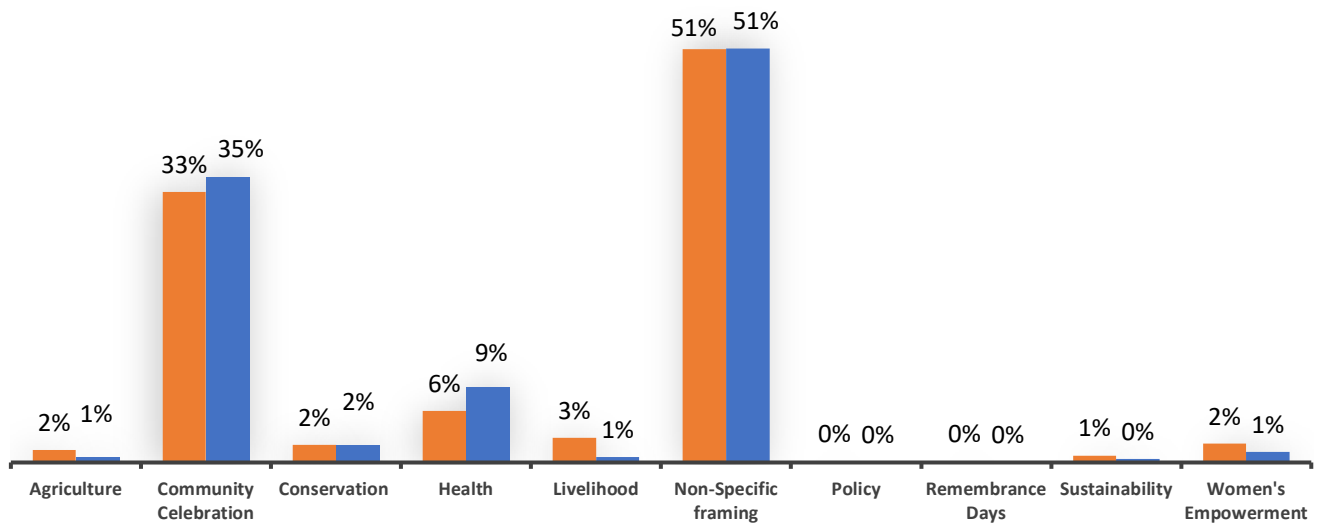


Number of instances (Sept. 15–Oct. 15, 2020) = 805

Year to date number of instances (Aug. 15–Oct. 15, 2020) = 1377

⁸ Non-specific framing refers to marketing instances that do not fall under specific categories.

Chart 4c. Instances of tobacco industry marketing by smoking tobacco companies in India, by message framing (Sept. 15–Oct. 15, 2020)



Number of instances (Sept. 15–Oct. 15, 2020) = 805

Year to date number of instances (Aug. 15–Oct. 15, 2020) = 1377

Tone of Messages

- The marketing messages of 98% of the direct marketing instances were positive in tone toward tobacco products. All corporate social responsibility marketing messages were neutral in tone, followed by surrogate advertising (99%) and events, promotions and sponsorships (99%)

The tone of each marketing message was coded as “positive,” “neutral” or “negative.” Direct marketing messages were all highly positive. Indirect marketing messages were neutral in tone. This could be a strategy to avoid the violation of tobacco control laws. For example:

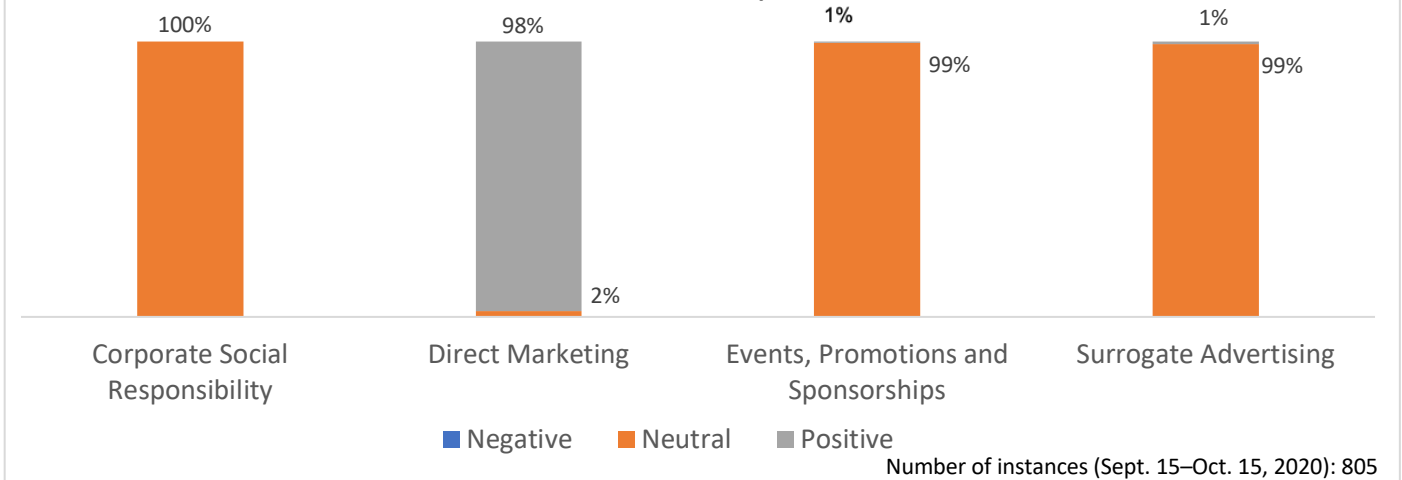
(Direct marketing)



(Indirect marketing)



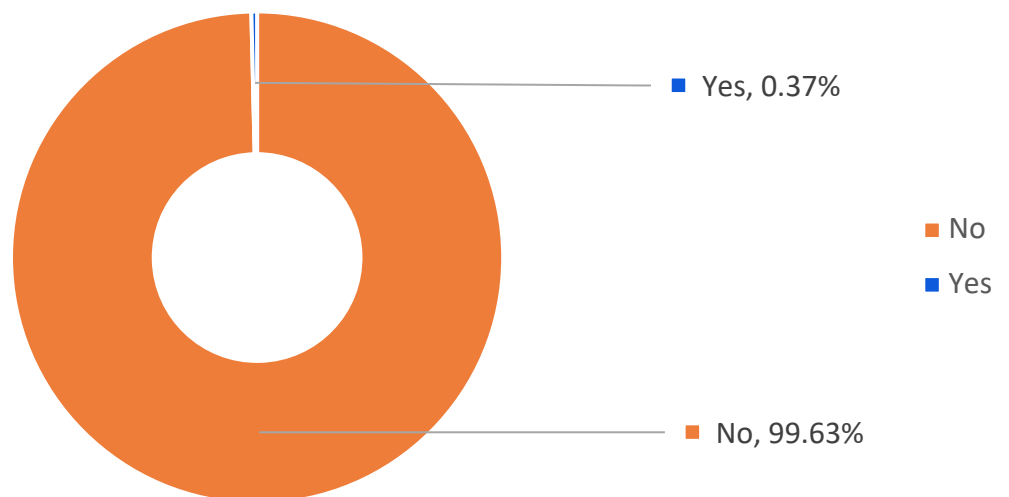
Chart 5. Tone of marketing messages by tobacco industry in India (Sept. 15 - Oct. 15, 2020)



Government Mention in Tobacco Marketing

- ITC Limited organized a virtual citizen-led movement to support people who have lost jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Sports Authority of India was associated with the event as part of its Fit India Movement.

Chart 6. Government mentions in tobacco marketing instances



Number of instances (Sept. 15–Oct. 15, 2020): 805

Methods: This report summarizes information gathered through specified keyword searches from all publicly available online news sites, including the online websites of leading media houses such as Times of India and Hindustan Times, among others, and social and digital platforms, including but not limited to Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and forums. The information is then machine coded, and human checked systematically for instances of direct and indirect marketing by source. The analysis is currently restricted to content in English and Hindi. Full detailed methodology, including coding, is available upon request.

For more information:

Vital Strategies website: <https://www.vitalstrategies.org/>

Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/termindia/>

Vital Strategies' Media Beacon: <https://www.mediabeacon.org/#language>

Vital Strategies' Social Media: <https://www.facebook.com/vitalstrategies/> ; <https://twitter.com/VitalStrat>