

TERM

Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement

Online Marketing of Tobacco Products: India

March 2021

Background:

Tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship promotes tobacco consumption and discourages cessation. The World Health Organization's MPOWER technical package on tobacco control and the international treaty, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, recommend banning 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, including activity that promotes the use of tobacco products or their trademark or brand name.

Despite this, tobacco marketing continues to be widespread, globally and in India, particularly in online forums that are less regulated.^{i,ii,iii} Vital Strategies launched the Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement or TERM in June 2019 to monitor tobacco marketing activities.¹ This situation report is part of a monthly series that summarizes observed examples of online tobacco marketing in India. It covers the period **Feb. 16 to Mar. 15, 2021.**

Highlights of the Month

- **Tobacco marketing by volume:** There were 770 cases of tobacco marketing online this month. Of these, 83% were cases of surrogate advertising, 12% were events, promotions and sponsorships and 5% were direct marketing of tobacco products. Of the total observed tobacco marketing, 58% was for smoking products and 42% was for smokeless products. No marketing for e-cigarettes was recorded during this period.
- **Tobacco marketing by state:** Overall, 54% of the observed marketing originated in West Bengal, followed by Uttar Pradesh (24%), Rajasthan (17%), Maharashtra (4%), and Karnataka (1%). Marketing of smoking tobacco products originated in West Bengal (92%), Maharashtra (6%) and Karnataka (2%). Marketing of smokeless tobacco products originated in Uttar Pradesh (58%) and Rajasthan (42%).
- **Tobacco marketing by channel:** Of the total observed tobacco marketing, 48% was on Facebook, 37% on Instagram and 14% on Twitter. Smoking tobacco products were marketed through Facebook (50%), Instagram (33%) and Twitter (8%). Smokeless tobacco products were marketed through Facebook, (40%), Instagram (39%), and Twitter (21%).

¹ For the avoidance of any doubt, while this Report notes instances of tobacco product marketing, it does not attempt to identify violations, nor does it allege violations, of the aforementioned regulation.

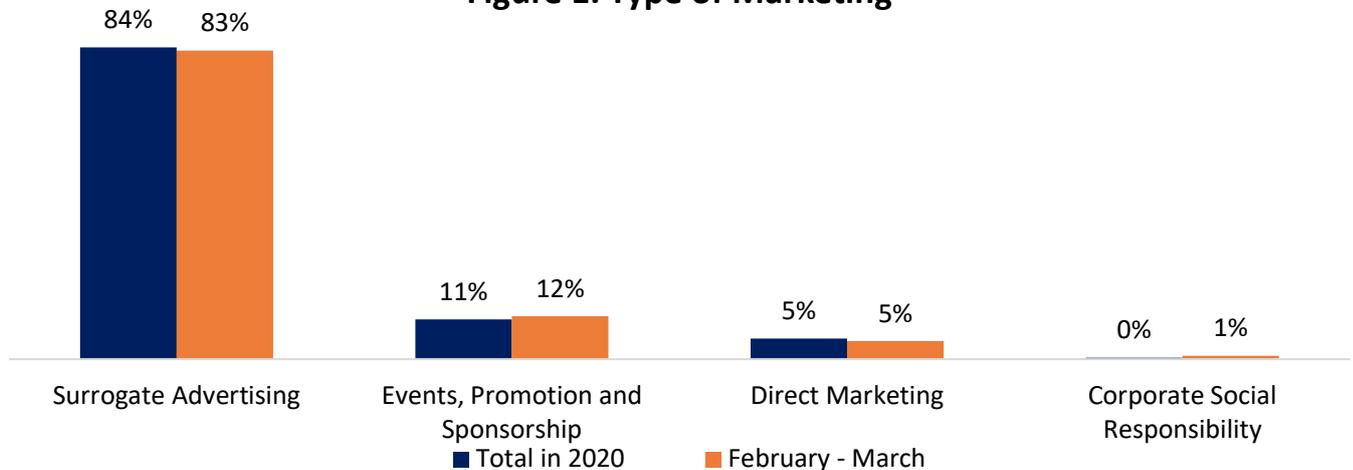
- **Message framing:** Of the total observed tobacco marketing, 38% had messages related to recreation² and 30% to community celebration³. Other prominent messages focused on the economy (2%) and remembrance days (1%). Smoking tobacco products were marketed using messages focused on recreation and community celebration. Smokeless tobacco products were marketed using messages focused on community celebration, recreation and remembrance days.

Detailed Insights

Volume of Tobacco Marketing

- A total of 770 tobacco marketing activities were recorded between Feb. 16 and Mar. 15, 2021. The main marketing activities included surrogate marketing, events, promotions and sponsorships and direct marketing. Of the total marketing activities observed, 83% were surrogate marketing, 12% were events, promotions, and sponsorships and 5% were direct marketing.
- Of the total marketing activities observed this month, 58% were for smoking tobacco products and 42% for smokeless tobacco products. There was a slight increase in the marketing of smoking products this month compared to previous months in 2021. There were no recorded cases of tobacco marketing by e-cigarette companies.

Figure 1. Type of Marketing



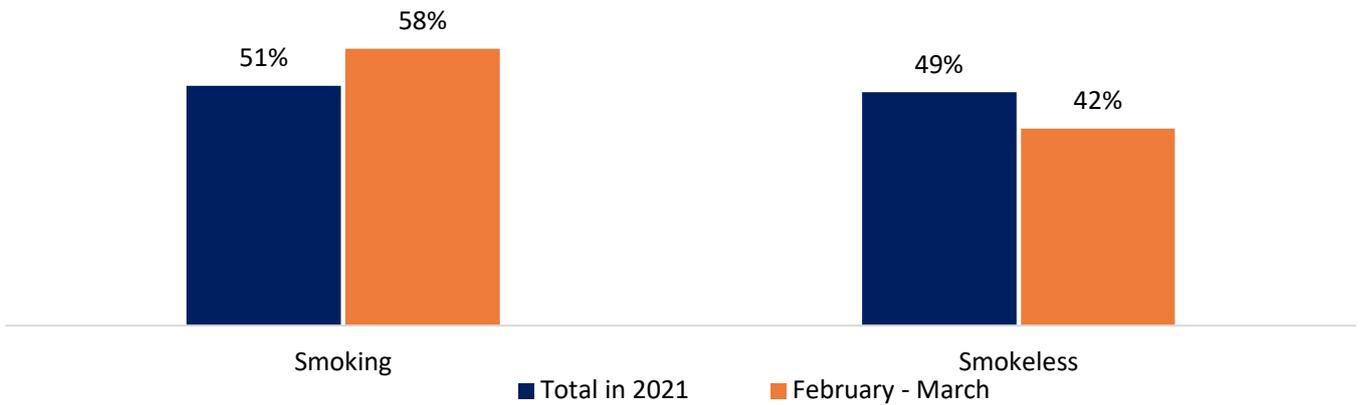
Year to Date (December 16, 2020 to March 15, 2021) (n = 2476)

February 16, 2021 to March 15, 2021 (n = 770)

² Recreation: Messages that involve making people's leisure time more interesting or enjoyable. Examples include: cooking, family time, playing outdoors, movies etc.

³ Community celebration: Messages that involve activities that people do in their place of worship or with groups. Examples: Religious festivals, community events, sporting events, birthdays etc.

Figure 2. Type of Product Marketed



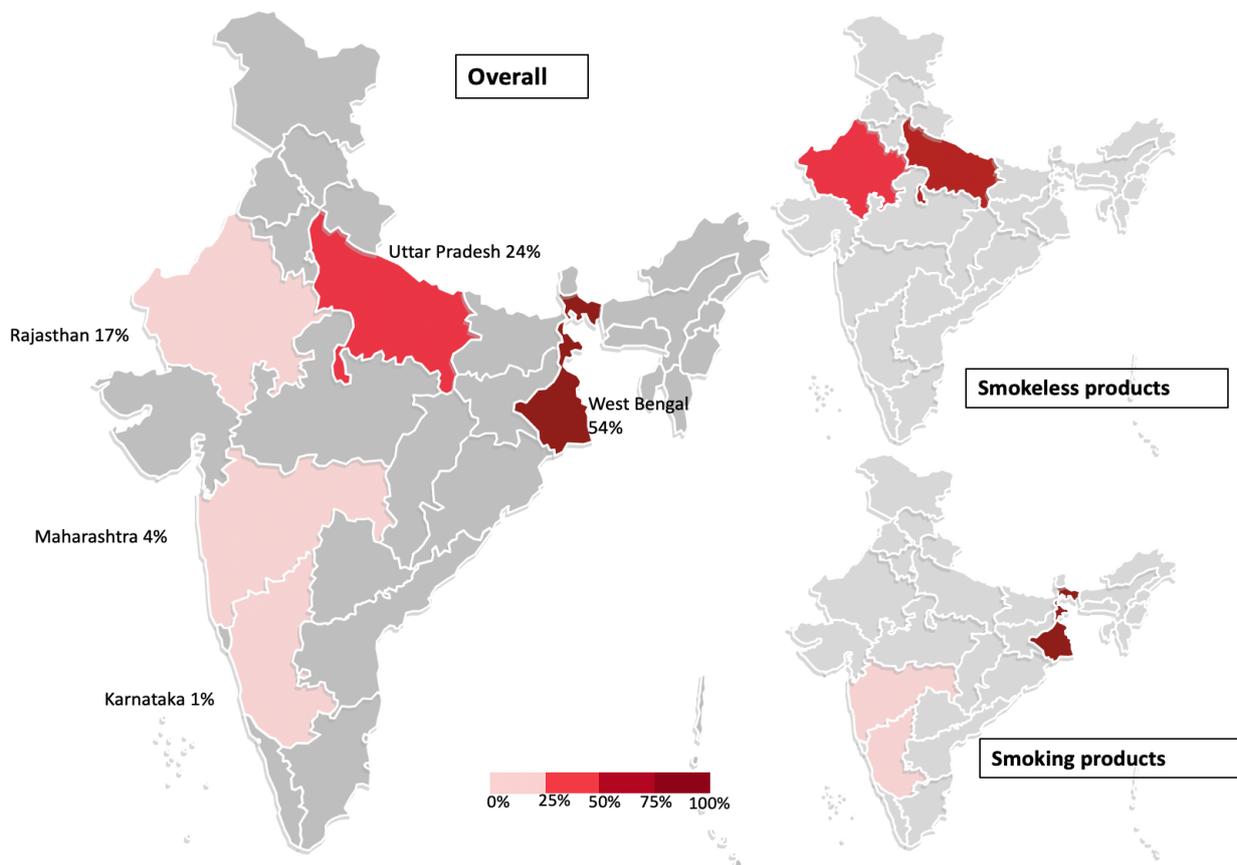
Year to Date (December 16, 2020 to March 15, 2021) (n = 2476)

February 16, 2020 to March 15, 2020 (n = 770)

Tobacco Marketing by State

- The majority of tobacco marketing observed this month originated in West Bengal (54%), followed by Uttar Pradesh (24%), Rajasthan (17%), Maharashtra (4%) and Karnataka (1%).
- Marketing of smoking tobacco products most often originated in West Bengal (92%) followed by Maharashtra (6%) and Karnataka (2%). Smokeless tobacco products were most often marketed in Uttar Pradesh (58%) and Rajasthan (42%).

Map 1: Origin of Tobacco Marketing by State

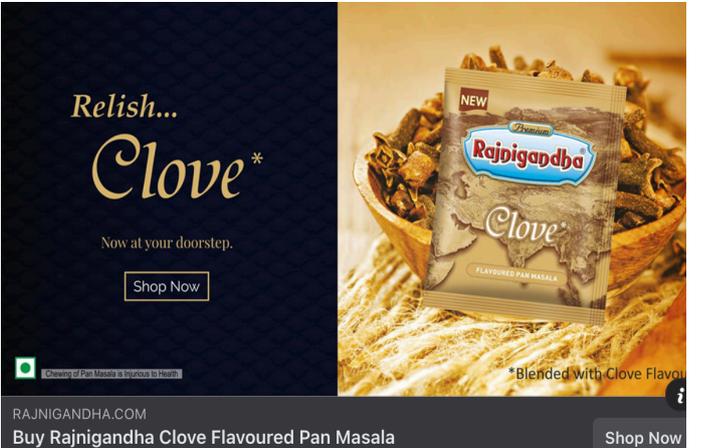


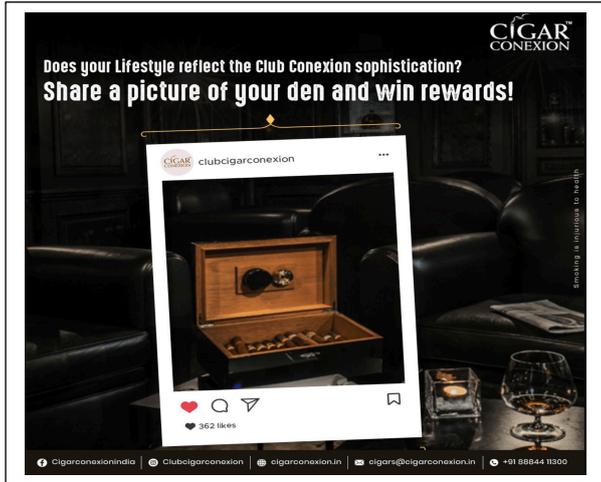
February 16th to March 15th, 2021 (n = 770)

Marketing Violations Recorded Feb. 16 to Mar. 15, 2021

Most, if not all, of the tobacco marketing observed this month was in violation of current regulations, as noted below.

Table 1: Type of Marketing Activities Leading to Violations

Marketing Tactics	Summary
<p>Direct Marketing</p>	<p>There were 37 instances of direct advertising recorded during this period. Cigars were directly marketed on social media; primarily via Facebook. Ads depicted the qualities of a well-made cigar and offered aspirational messaging around cigar smoking. Many posts provided details on where to order products.</p>
	
<p>Indirect Marketing (Surrogate marketing and Events, promotions, and sponsorships)</p>	<p>There were 726 instances of indirect advertising observed. Messaging highlighted tobacco features including flavors, appetite and packaging. Event, promotion and sponsorship activities were timed with religious festivals including Holi. During those periods there was increased surrogate advertising of tobacco products. Indirect advertising of surrogate tobacco products occurred across online platforms including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.</p>
	



Corporate Social Responsibility Activities

There were two observed instances of corporate social responsibility activities conducted by the tobacco company, ITC Limited. Messaging was primarily focused on social initiatives and corporate governance.

CSR Initiatives in West Bengal

ITC's CSR intervention in Agriculture in WB

ITC has been expanding its footprint in the agricultural sector in WB. Leveraging the knowledge and experience of its globally acknowledged e-Choupal programme, the Company has been working with the farmers of the state to promote contemporary and relevant agriculture practices in over 500 villages, leading to a reduction in input costs, improved yields and enhanced incomes. Over 70,000 farmers have benefitted from ITC interventions in the state, so far.

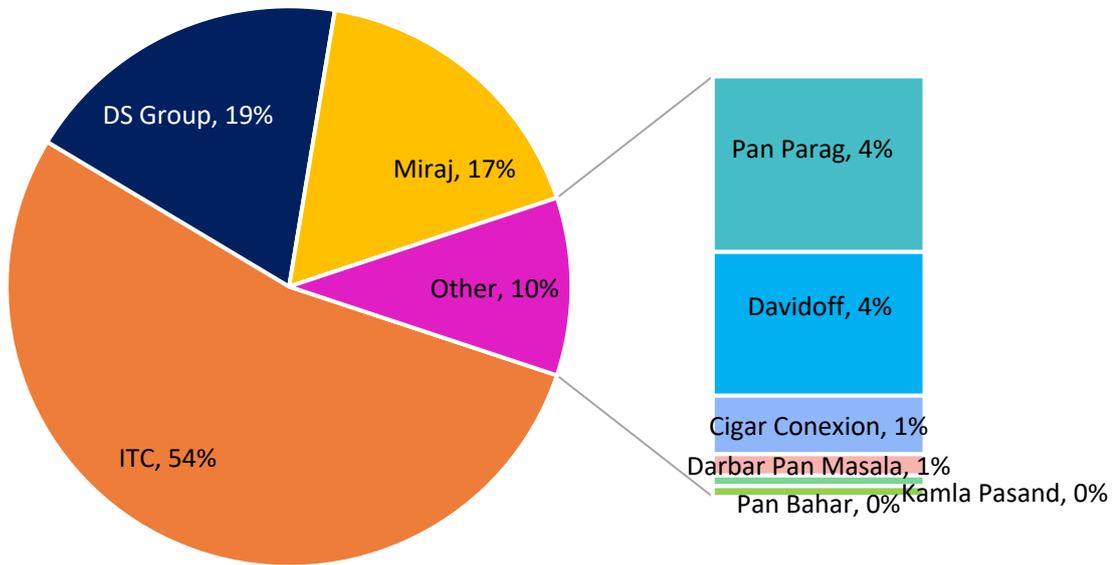
In addition, the Company has spearheaded a wheat development programme that covers around 8,500 acres, focusing on providing region-specific improved varieties and agronomical practices to increase yield. ITC has implemented targeted interventions in rice, fresh fruits and vegetables. The Company also engages with aqua farmers, supporting a prawn value chain that is anchored by our brand ITC MasterChef Super Safe Prawns, which is exported to the US, Japan and Vietnam. ITC's subsidiary, Technico's early generation high-quality seed is used by over 1,35,000 farmers in 12 districts, increasing yield, quality and reducing costs.



Marketing by Tobacco Companies

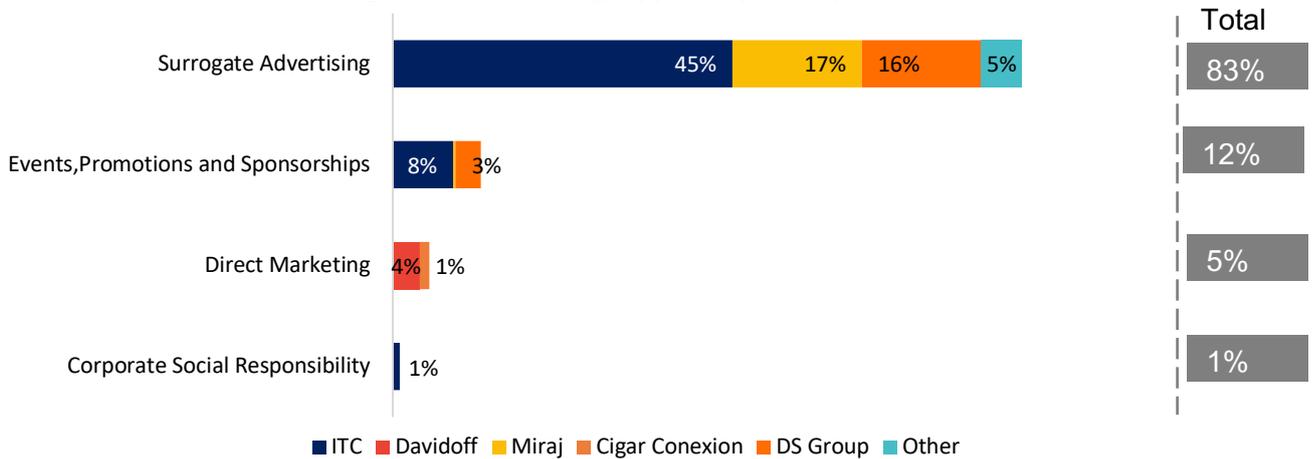
- The majority of marketing observed this month was sponsored by ITC Limited (54%). Other chief sponsors of tobacco marketing were: Dharampal Satyapal Group (19%), Miraj (17%), Davidoff (4%) and Pan Parag (4%).
- Most of the surrogate advertising observed this month was sponsored by ITC Limited (45%), while 17% was sponsored by Miraj.

Figure 3a. Marketing by Tobacco Companies



February 16, 2021 to March 15, 2021 (n = 770)

Fig 3b. Marketing Types by Companies

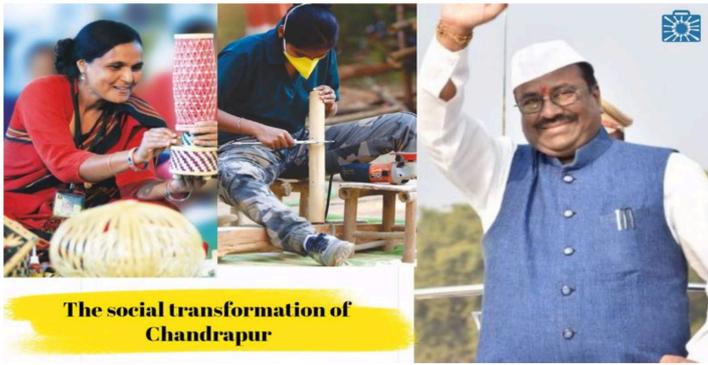


February 16, 2021 to March 15, 2021 (n = 770)

Public Engagement Activities

The public engagements, including corporate social responsibility activities, observed this month are presented below.

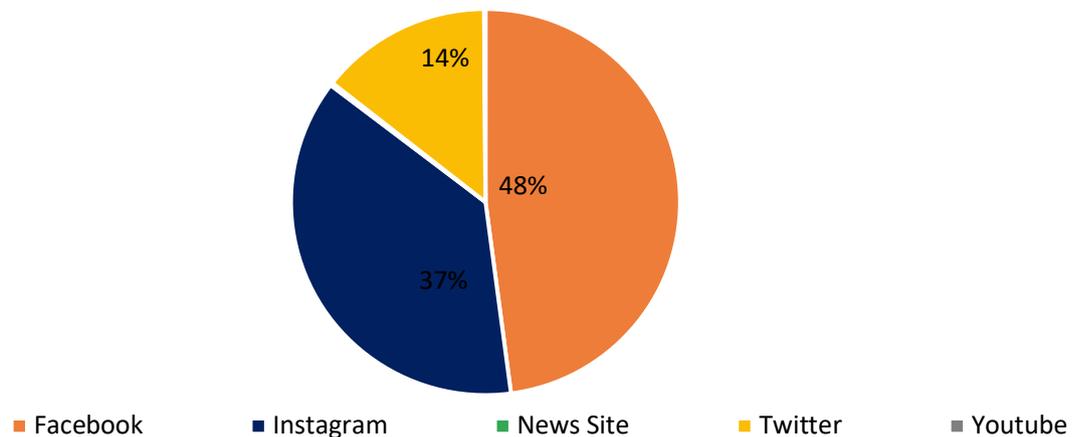
Table 2. Examples of observed public engagement activities by the tobacco industry.

Example
<p>Top CSR initiatives for rural livelihood By The CSR Journal - February 22, 2021</p> <p>SHARE  Facebook  Twitter </p>  <p><i>ITC Limited runs social forestry and agro-forestry programmes that are not only generating rural livelihood but also healing the environment</i></p> <h3>ITC Social Forestry</h3> <p>This CSR programme by ITC Limited focuses on creating commercially viable land-use options for smallholder farmers through tree-based farming. In addition, it contributes towards the 3Fs – food, fodder and fuelwood. Together with the Farm Forestry programme, this CSR initiative by ITC has greened nearly 7.33 lakh acres till date, and generated about 135 million person days of employment for rural households. The Agro-Forestry initiative is integral to the Social Forestry programme. In Tripura state, this initiative is also creating bamboo wood source, which is most suitable for making incense sticks.</p>
<p>AGRICULTURE & RURAL DEVELOPMENT EDITOR'S PICK</p> <p>Special Report: Transforming Chandrapur By Rahuldeo Sharma - February 23, 2021</p> <p>SHARE  Facebook  Twitter </p>  <p>The social transformation of Chandrapur</p> <p><i>Sudhir Mungantiwar (right) is changing the face of Chandrapur district</i></p>
<h3>Incense Sticks Industry</h3> <p>Religious devotees across India take the name of Pombhurna with reverence. The reason is that this tehsil in Chandrapur is where the agarbattis for most pilgrimage sites and holy temples come from. With the help of corporate social responsibility and ITC Limited, Mungantiwar has spearheaded an agarbatti making industry in Pombhurna. Women working in these incense making factories are examples of PM Modi's 'Vocal for Local' dream. The agarbatti units have not only given them skills but also new hope. They have changed the lives of 300 incense makers. In Chandrapur alone, there are 7 incense making projects.</p>

Tobacco Marketing Activity by Channel

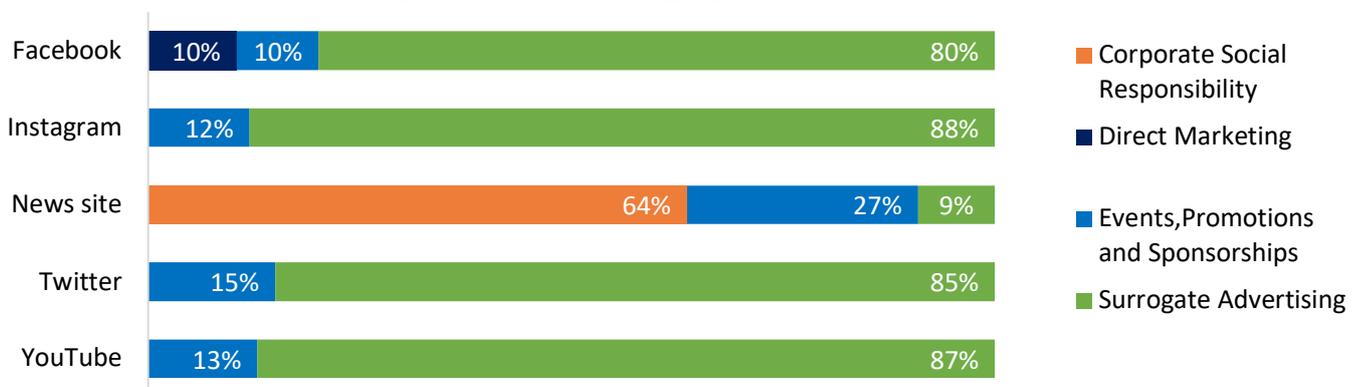
- Almost all observed tobacco marketing (direct and indirect) during this period was conducted on social media channels, including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (99%). Surrogate marketing of tobacco products was conducted through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. The news media provided the primary channels for reports on tobacco industry-sponsored corporate social responsibility initiatives.
- Smoking tobacco products were marketed through Facebook (50%), Instagram (33%) and Twitter (8%). Smokeless tobacco products were marketed through Facebook (40%), Instagram (39%), and Twitter (21%).

Figure 5a. Total Marketing by Platform



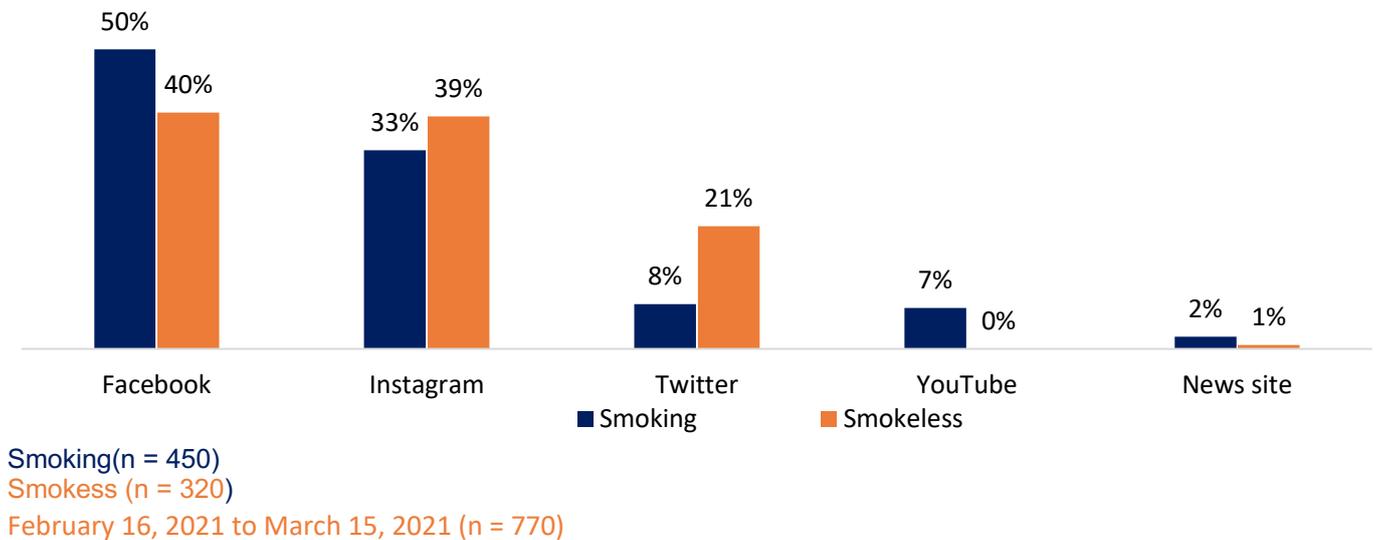
February 16, 2021 to March 15, 2021 (n = 770)

Figure 5b. Marketing Types by Platform



February 16, 2021 to March 15, 2021 (n = 770)

Figure 5c. Marketing Types by Product



Frequently Used Messages

A "word cloud" is a visual representation of the most frequently used terms across online platforms. The larger the word in the visual, the more commonly it was used in tobacco marketing messages. This month reveals that words related to **community celebrations** appear the most in marketing messages.

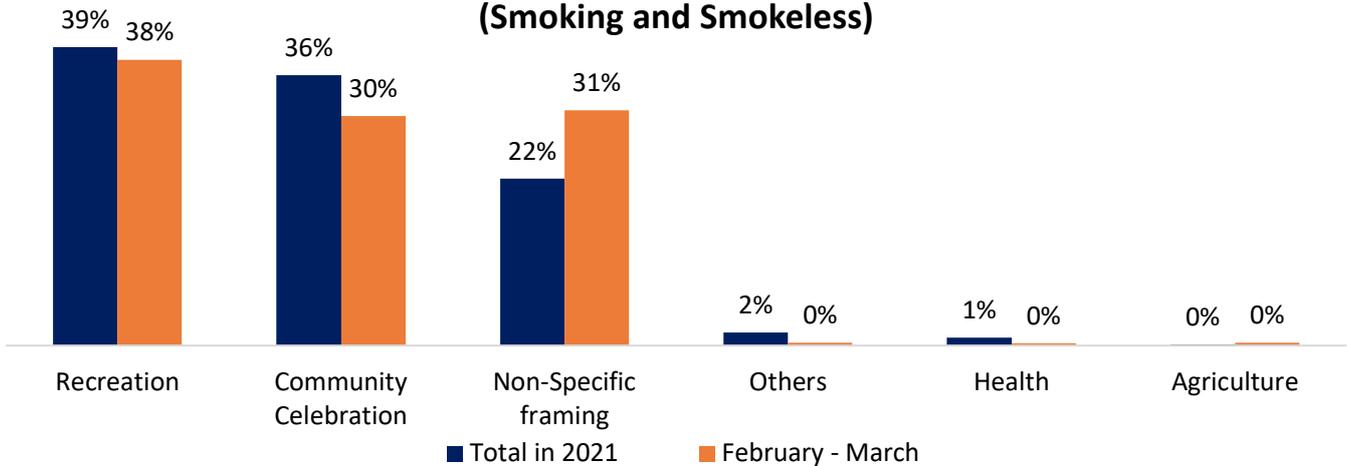


February 16 to March 15, 2021 (n=770)

Framing of Marketing Messages

- Many tobacco marketing messages were framed with a celebratory tone linked to recreation (38%). Messages were also connected to festivals and special days (30%) and non-specific framing (31%).
- Both smoking tobacco products and smokeless tobacco products were marketed using messages about recreation and community celebration. For smoking products, 60% of messages focused on recreation and 45% on community celebration. For Smokeless tobacco products, 41% focused on recreation and 30% on recreation.

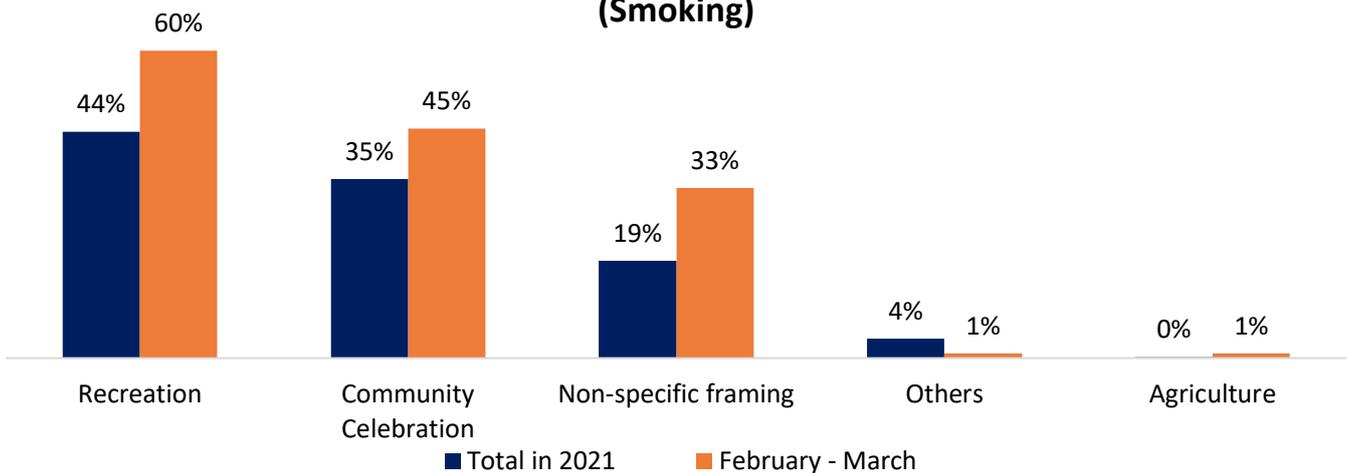
Figure 6a. Total Marketing by Types of Message Framing and Product (Smoking and Smokeless)



Total in 2021(December 16, 2020 to March 15, 2021) (n = 2476)

February 16, 2021 to March 15, 2021 (n = 770)

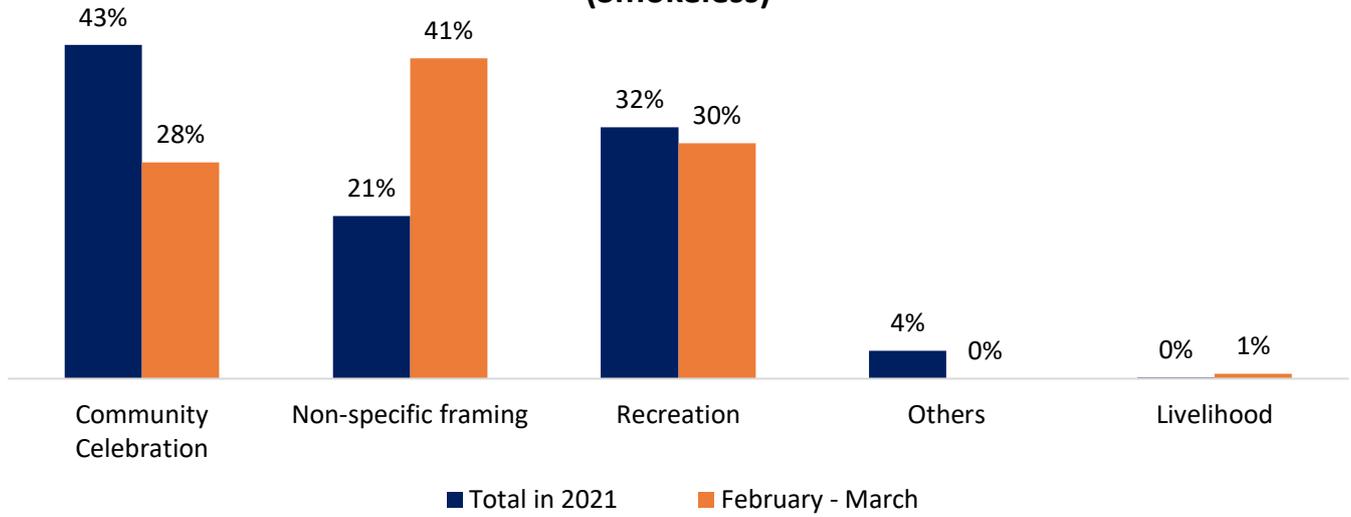
Figure 6b. Marketing by Types of Message Framing and Product (Smoking)



Total in 2021(December 16, 2020 to March 15, 2021) (n = 1254)

February 16, 2021 to March 15, 2021 (n = 450)

Figure 6c. Marketing by Types of Message Framing and Product (Smokeless)



Total in 2021(December 16, 2020 to March 15, 2021) (n = 1222)

February 16, 2021 to March 15, 2021 (n = 320)

*Non-specific framing refers to marketing that does not fall under a specific category.

Methods: This report summarizes information gathered through specific 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. Information was also gathered from social and digital platforms, including but not limited to Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and forums. The information was then machine coded and systematically human-checked to determine 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>

ⁱhttps://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

ⁱⁱ 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>

ⁱⁱⁱ 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>