

# 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 real-time 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 India. 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:

**Surrogate products:** Non-tobacco products with a similar visual brand identity as the company's tobacco products. "Surrogate marketing" is the marketing of surrogate products, which in India are most often pan masala or mouth fresheners.

**Brand-extended products:** Non-tobacco products that use the established brand name or trademark of a tobacco company, but do not have the same visual identity as the company's tobacco products. "Company brand extension" is the marketing of brand-extended products, which may include confectionaries, processed food products, household items, incense, etc.

**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

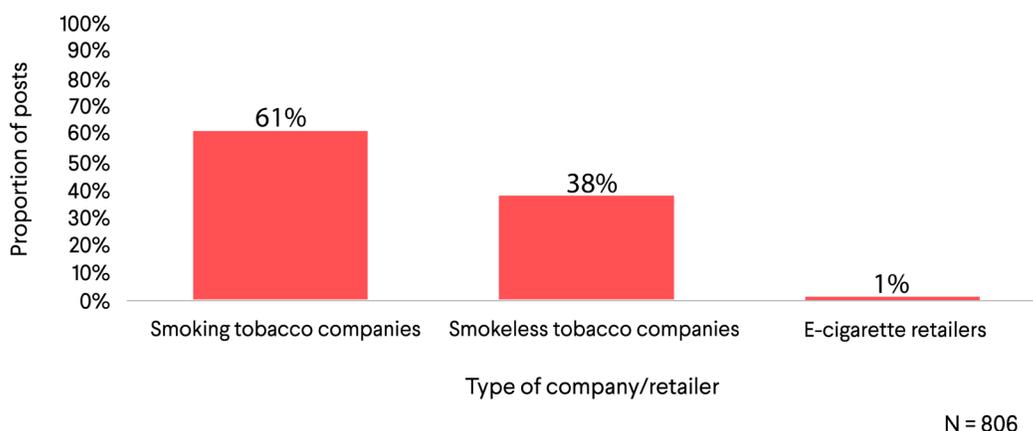
- Most tobacco marketing online was indirect or disguised. Out of a total of 806 instances of online marketing observed from August to September 2022, 98% was indirect marketing. Nearly two-thirds of this indirect marketing was by smoking tobacco companies (61%).
- Brand extension (86%) was the most commonly used indirect marketing tactic. Most of these observed marketing instances were for ITC Limited's brand-extended products, which included ultra-processed food, personal care and household cleaning items (59%).
- Surrogate marketing was observed in 10% of instances; products were exclusively pan masala and mouth freshener products.
- Direct marketing of tobacco products was observed in only 2% of instances—exclusively for bidis and e-cigarettes.
- A wider range of social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, News Sites, Twitter and YouTube, were used for indirect marketing of non-tobacco products. Facebook and Instagram were most often used for the direct marketing of tobacco products.
- Tobacco marketing tends to follow current cultural events. During this period, marketing using messaging pegged to religious events and imagery, such as greetings for the Onam and Janmashtami holidays, was commonly observed for tobacco products and surrogate and brand-extended products (25%).

## Detailed Insights

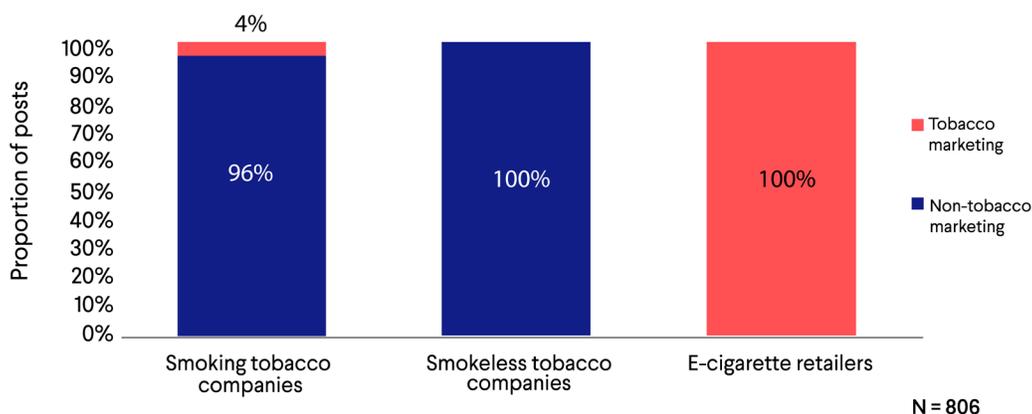
**How much marketing was observed?** A total of 806 tobacco marketing instances from 46 social media accounts and six news media sites were observed between Aug. 16 and Sept. 15, 2022. Nearly two-thirds of the observed marketing (61% or 493 posts) (Figure 1) was associated with tobacco companies that sell smoking products. Marketing associated with tobacco companies that sell smokeless products comprised 38% of the observed marketing (305 posts) (Figure 1). Marketing associated with e-cigarette retailers comprised 1% of the observed marketing (8 posts).

Most of the marketing associated with smoking tobacco companies was for non-tobacco brand-extended products (96%) (Figure 1a). Only 4% of observed marketing directly depicted tobacco products—specifically bidis. Marketing associated with smokeless tobacco companies was exclusively marketing for brand-extended and surrogate products (100%). There were some instances of direct marketing for e-cigarettes from third-party retailers (1%) (Figure 1a).

**Figure 1**  
**Volume of Marketing**

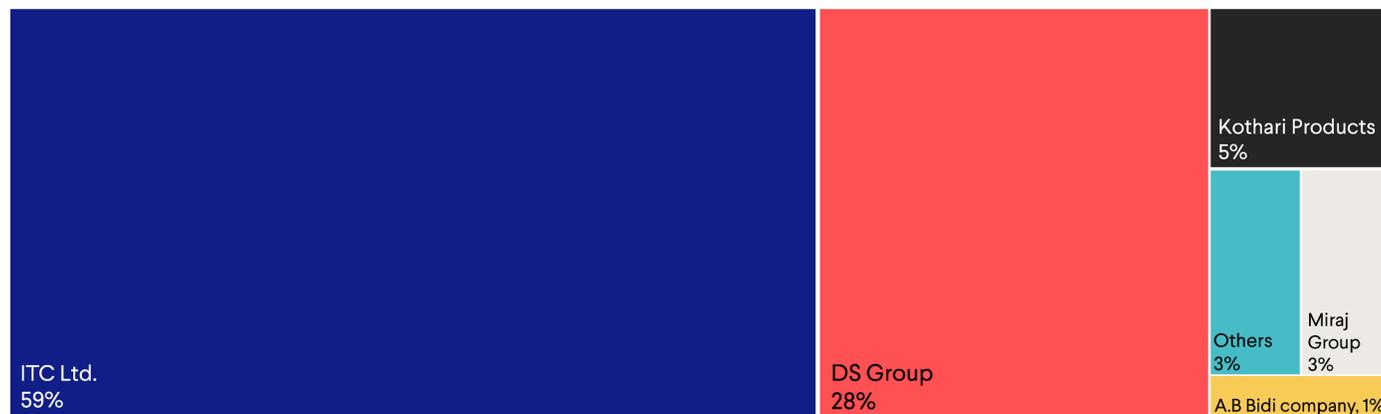


**Figure 1a**  
**Volume of Marketing by Marketing Type**



**Who were the key players?** The majority of observed posts were for ITC Ltd.'s brand-extended products (59%), followed by marketing for DS Group's brand-extended and surrogate products, which were primarily pan masala brands (28%). A.B. Bidi Company's bidi products were also marketed directly on online platforms, with clear pictures of the product and product packaging (1%).

**Figure 2**  
**Tobacco Companies and E-cigarette Brands Associated with Marketing**

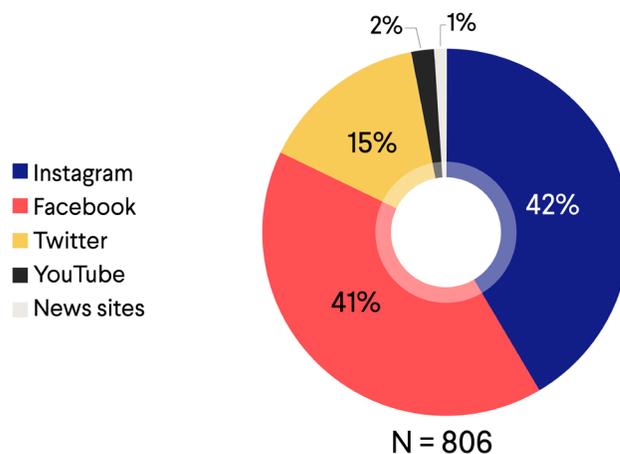


Note: Other products (in order of number of posts per company/brand) include Ashok & Co. Pan Bahar, Thalappa Ganesh Beedis, VAPORESSO, Dilbagh, Sun Beedi, and Juul.

N = 806

**Where were products marketed?** More than 80% of marketing was observed on Meta platforms, divided almost equally between Instagram (42%) and Facebook (41%). There was marketing on Twitter (15%) and YouTube (2%) for brand-extended products. News articles (1%) captured ITC Ltd.'s launch of a short film celebrating India on Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, the country's 75th independence anniversary, and DS Group's launch of an NFT on its 93rd Founders' Day; the company was founded in 1929.

**Figure 3**  
**Digital Platforms Used for Marketing**



**Example of a news article**

### ITC launches short film to celebrate the spirit of India@75

*The film has been designed around ITC's philosophy #NationFirst – #SabSaathBadhein*

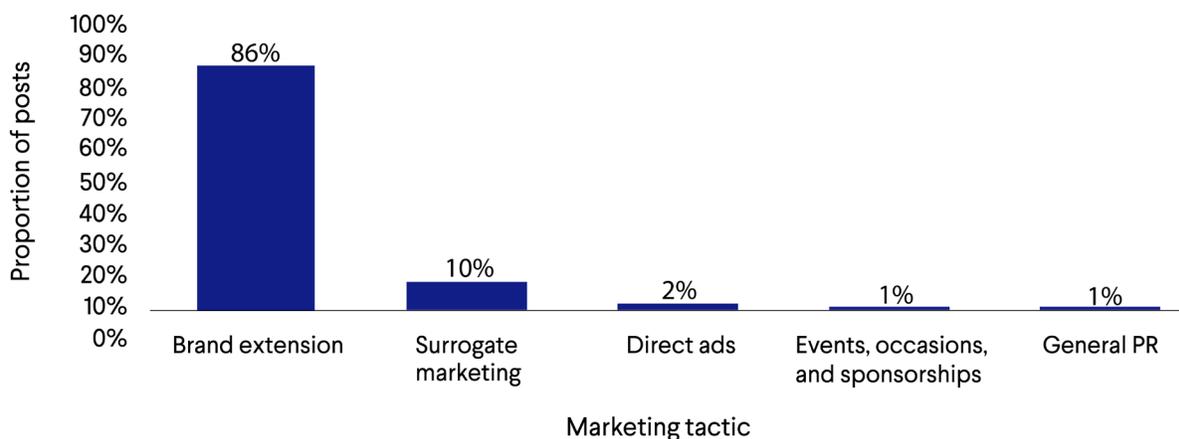
by exchange4media Staff  
Published: Aug 18, 2022 11:04 AM | 1 MIN READ

*ITC Ltd. released a short film to celebrate India on Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav, which marks 75 years of the country's independence. The article claims that the film was designed around ITC's philosophy, which is #NationFirst (#SabSaathBadhein).*

*Source: Exchange4media*

**What marketing tactics were used?**<sup>1</sup> The use of indirect marketing tactics was the most prominent form observed online. Most observed marketing was for brand-extended products such as spices, incense, processed food items, household cleaning and personal care products (86%); followed by surrogate marketing (10%), which was exclusively for mouth fresheners and pan masala products. Direct marketing promoting bidis and e-cigarettes comprised 2% of observed marketing. Posts using events, occasions and sponsorships, such as greetings during secular and religious holidays, to promote products or the brand, comprised 1% of observed marketing. General posts promoting the company or brand comprised 1% of marketing.

**Figure 4**  
**Marketing Tactics Used**

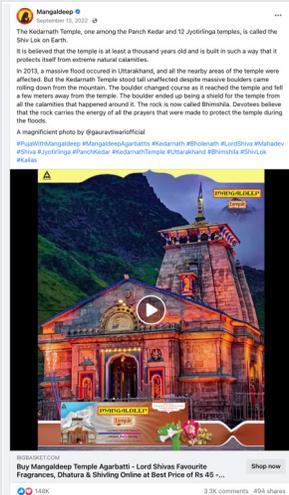


N = 806

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix Table 1 for the definitions of marketing tactics categories.

## Examples of marketing tactics

### Brand extension



*An account for ITC Ltd.'s incense brand, Mangaldeep, posted about the Kedarnath Temple. The post garnered nearly 152,000 engagements, including 148,000 likes.*

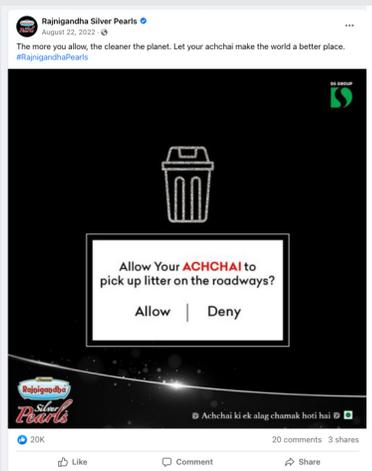
*Source: Mangaldeep Facebook*



*Twin influencers promote DS Group's catch foods, garnering 33,408 likes.*

*Source: catch foods Instagram*

### Surrogate marketing



*This post for DS Group's Rajnigandha mouth fresheners, encourages doing good deeds (achchai) in everyday life.*

*Source: Rajnigandha Silver Pearls Facebook*

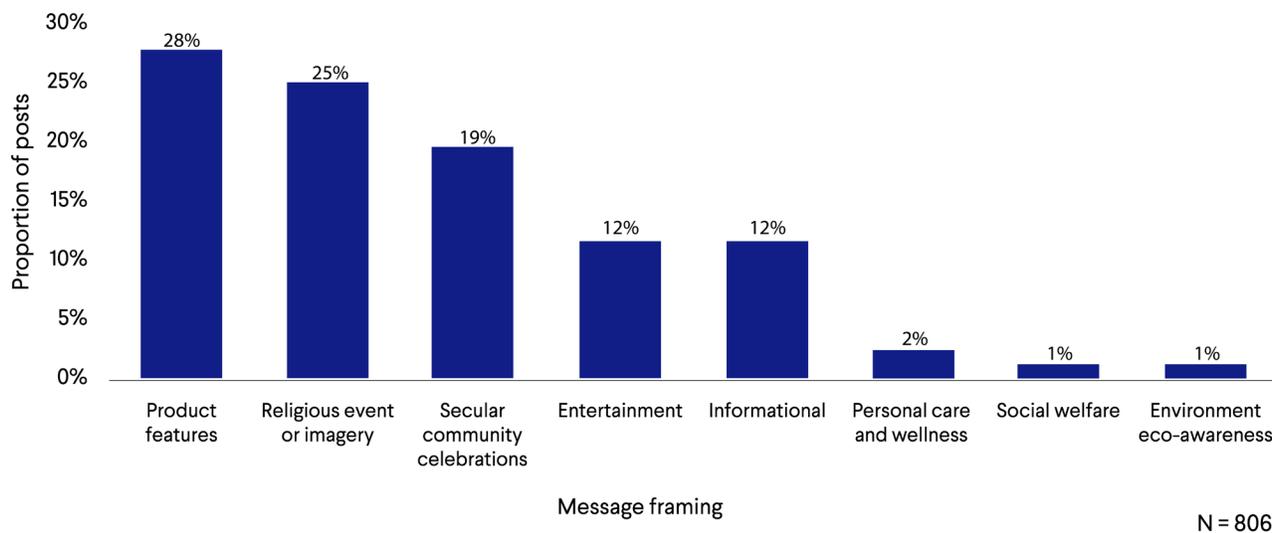


*This post promotes Kothari Products Ltd.'s Pan Parag pan masala as refreshing.*

*Source: Pan Parag Facebook*

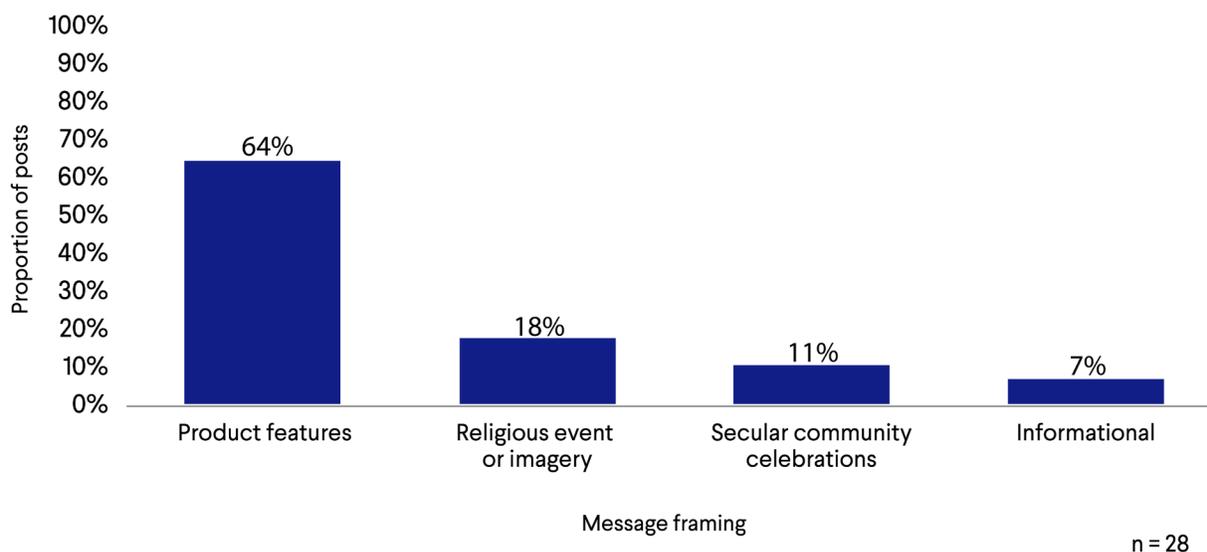
**What messaging was used?**<sup>2</sup> Overall, marketing messages for all products highlighted product features (28%), followed by religious events such as Onam and images of religious sites, such as the Sri Anuvavi Anjaneyar Temple dedicated to Hanuman (25%). Messaging that used secular community celebrations to promote products was also observed, including Teachers' Day, National Sports Day and Gender Equality Day (19%).

**Figure 5**  
**Message Framing Used in Marketing (All Product Types)**



Messages used to promote bidis highlighted product features such as fresh flavors, while e-cigarette posts highlighted features such as number of puffs (64%). Posts leveraging religious events and imagery were also used, especially by bidi companies during Ganesh Chaturthi and Janmashtami (18%).

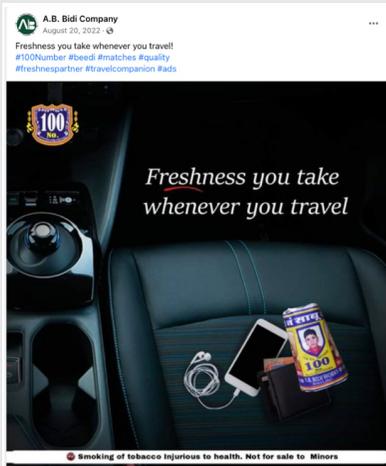
**Figure 5a**  
**Message Framing Used in Marketing (Tobacco Products)**



<sup>2</sup> See Appendix Table 1 for the definitions of message framing categories.

## Examples of message framing for tobacco products

### Product features



*This post promotes this bidi product as being fresh and essential for daily use, just like an iPhone and wallet.*

*Source: A.B. Bidi Company Facebook*



*This post features images of bidis and the product packaging in an attractive design.*

*Source: SUN BEEDI Facebook*



*This post uses youth-oriented imagery such as a skateboard and cartoon background to suggest taking bidis to a picnic.*

*Source: A.B. Bidi Company Facebook*



*This third-party retailer promotes Yuoto e-cigarettes with clear images of the colorful products and by highlighting the number of puffs.*

*Source: vape\_yuoto\_india Instagram*

### Religious event or imagery



*This bidi company offers greetings for Ganesh Chaturthi.*

*Source: A.B. Bidi Company Facebook*



*This bidi company offers greetings for Janmashtami; images of Krishna and greetings for Janmashtami were commonly used to market bidis during this observation period.*

*Source: Dinesh Bidi Instagram*

## 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 an artificial intelligence-driven monitoring tool from publicly available posts on social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, and from online media articles collected via LexisNexis. Instances of tobacco marketing 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. 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 Hindi. Data restrictions and privacy laws followed by social media platforms may lead to undercounting of marketing activity. [Read our full methodology here.](#)

## Disclaimer

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

| <i>Marketing tactic</i>         | <b>Type of marketing strategy used, which captures the intention of the marketing (to sell products, create brand endearment/loyalty, etc.)</b>   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Brand extension                 | A separate brand of non-tobacco items that are produced by tobacco companies/conglomerates. The products may use the trademark logo or the name of the parent tobacco company. These products do not show any features that indicate association with any tobacco products. |
| 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).   |
| Surrogate marketing             | Non-tobacco products or services that have the same brand name, emblem, trademark, logo or trade insignia or any other distinctive feature (including distinctive color combinations) as a tobacco product or company so that they can be easily associated.                |

| <i>Message framing</i>         | <b>Underlying theme around which the whole message of the post is built.</b>  |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 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.   |
| Informational                  | Posts that instruct viewers how to use a product. This category also includes posts that provide background information on the company.   |
| Personal care and wellness     | Posts that associate products with relaxation or stress management. This category also includes posts that frame products as being used for social bonding, including forming community around use of the product with like-minded peers.   |
| 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. |
| Religious event or imagery     | Posts that feature religious imagery, or celebrate religious festivals and events.  |
| 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. |

|             |         |                             |                         |   |   |
|-------------|---------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---|---|
| Mom's Magic | YouTube | Smokeless tobacco companies | Product brand / company | 2 | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/@sunfeastmomsmagic">https://www.youtube.com/@sunfeastmomsmagic</a>       |
| Mangaldeep  | YouTube | Smokeless tobacco companies | Product brand / company | 1 | <a href="https://www.youtube.com/@MangaldeepAgarbattis">https://www.youtube.com/@MangaldeepAgarbattis</a> |

\*Account has been deactivated or deleted

### Other TERM reports: India

- Protecting Youth From Online E-Cigarette Marketing: Findings From a New Study in India, Indonesia and Mexico - [English](#)
- Findings from a TERM Content Analysis of E-Cigarette Marketing on Social Media: India - [English](#)
- Hidden in Plain Sight: Surrogate Marketing of Tobacco Products on Social Media in India - [English](#)
- Selling Death on Social Media: How bidis are reaching consumers online - [English](#)

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TERM website: [www.termcommunity.org](http://www.termcommunity.org)