

# 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 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](https://term.vitalstrategies.org/) 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 and services:** Non-tobacco products and services 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.

**Non-tobacco products:** Surrogate products and brand-extended products and services.

**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 film advertisers promote tobacco online. Numerous movie posters that featured famed actors smoking, including Ranbir Kapoor and Kartik Aaryan, were shared by Miraj Group's Miraj Cinema accounts. These posters associated smoking with "having swag" and bravery. See our spotlight on the issue of tobacco marketing in entertainment media (P. 2).
- In addition, news coverage for heated tobacco products this period focused on Philip Morris International's CEO Jacek Olczak speaking during the Economic Times Global Summit held in February 2023. The articles publicized the points he made at the event about heated tobacco products serving as a smoking cessation tool (there is no evidence to support this). See page 5.
- We also note the continued use of children by the bidi industry. Many of the bidi packages that were promoted via social media with clear package images had children's faces. See pages 6.

## Spotlight issue: Tobacco use in entertainment media

With the comprehensive tobacco law, the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA, 2003), the Indian government prohibited the advertisement and display of tobacco products in multiple ways, including through a ground-breaking policy that restricts tobacco depictions in films and on television. This policy, which came into effect in 2012, is often referred to as the “film rules.”\* As part of the policy, promotional materials for movies such as movie posters cannot depict tobacco use.

During this period, TERM observed several movie posters that depicted famed movie stars using tobacco. These were shared via the account of Miraj Cinemas, which is a chain of cinemas owned by Miraj Group a tobacco company that later diversified into other industries including entertainment. This highlights that there are still a significant amount of movie posters that depict famous stars using tobacco, and that social media is providing a platform for these posters to have even wider reach with easily editable messaging.



A poster for the film “Shehzada” featuring the actor-movie producer Kartik Aaryan smoking.

Source: @mirajCinemas Twitter



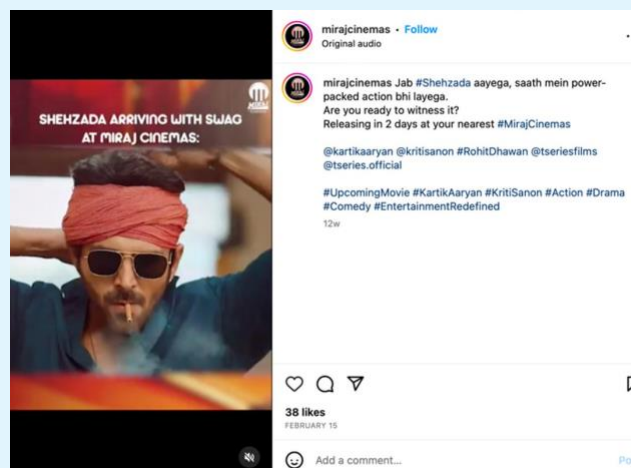
A poster for the film “Waltair Veerayya” featuring the actor Chiranjeevi smoking.

Source: @mirajCinemas Twitter



A poster for the film “Animal” featuring the actor Ranbir Kapoor smoking.

Source: @mirajCinemas Twitter



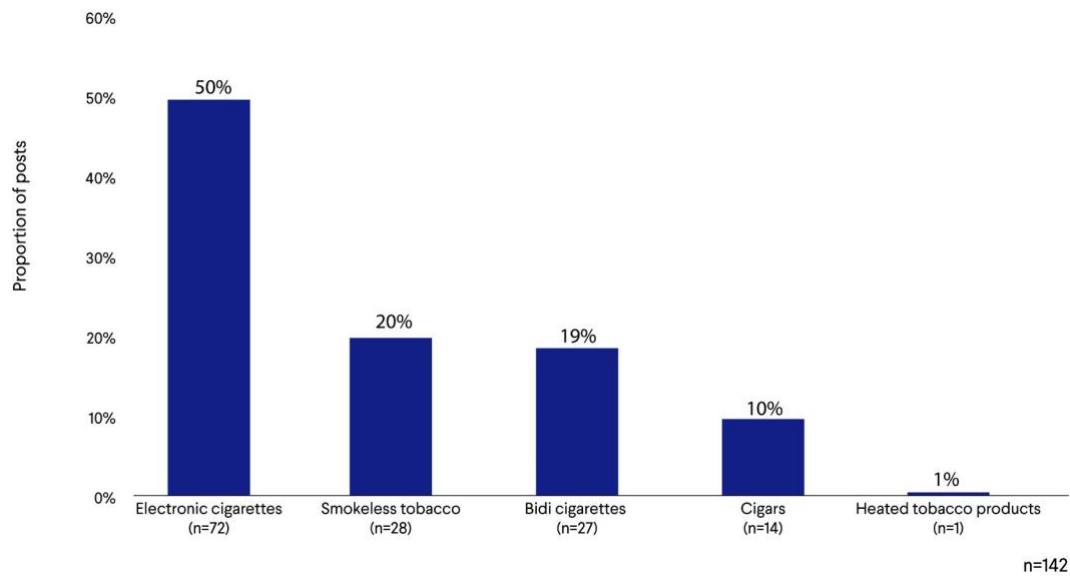
This gif featuring the actor-producer Kartik Aaryan, associates smoking while riding a motorcycle with having “swag.”

Source: @mirajCinemas Instagram

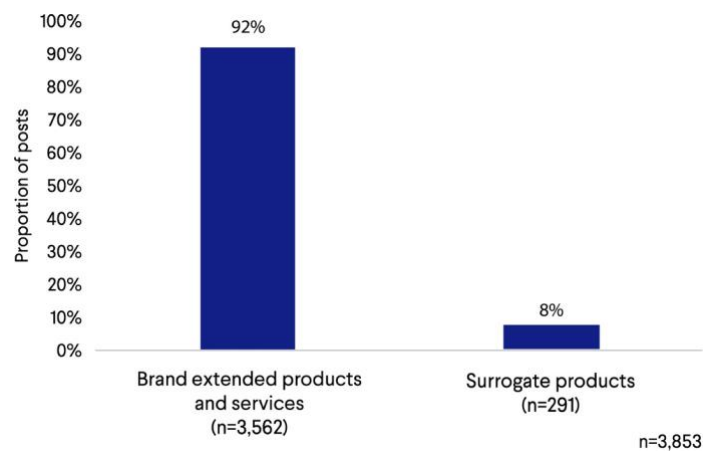
## Detailed Insights

**How much marketing was observed?** Most observed marketing was indirect marketing for non-tobacco products (n=3,853, Figure 1a), primarily for brand-extended products and services (92%). There were 142 instances of direct tobacco marketing (Figure 1). The majority of these were for electronic cigarettes (50%), followed by smokeless tobacco products (20%), bidi cigarettes (19%), cigars (10%), and finally, heated tobacco products (1%).

**Figure 1**  
**Volume of Marketing for Tobacco Products**

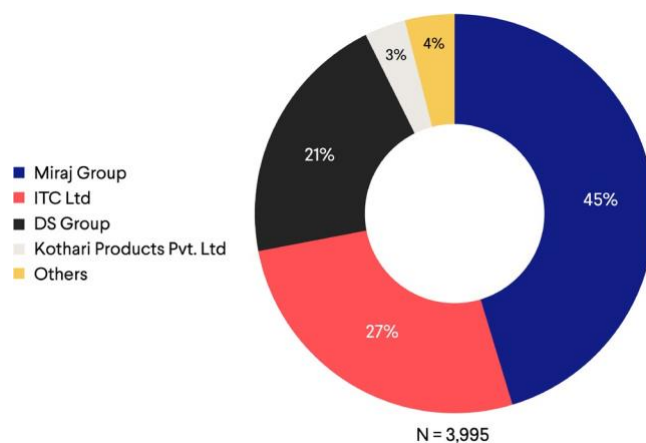


**Figure 1a**  
**Volume of Marketing for Non-Tobacco Products**



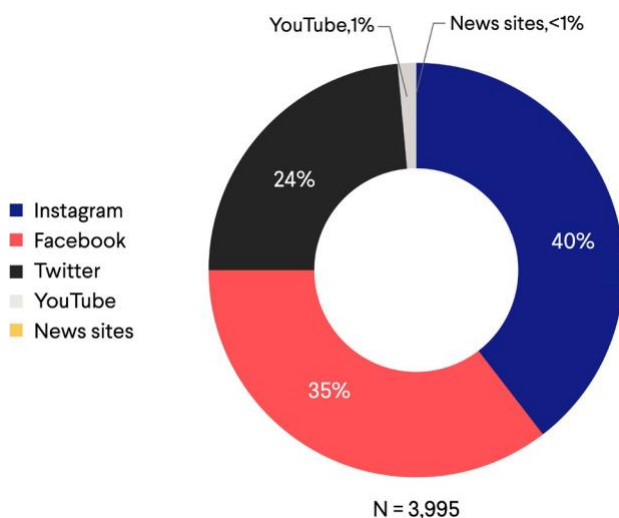
**Who were the key players?** The majority of observed marketing instances were for Miraj Group's brand-extended products and services (45%, Figure 2), which was largely for the cinema chain Miraj Cinemas during this period. This was followed by marketing for ITC Ltd.'s brand-extended products and services (27%), which were largely food products, and DS Group's brand-extended and surrogate products (21%).

**Figure 2**  
**Companies Associated with Marketing**



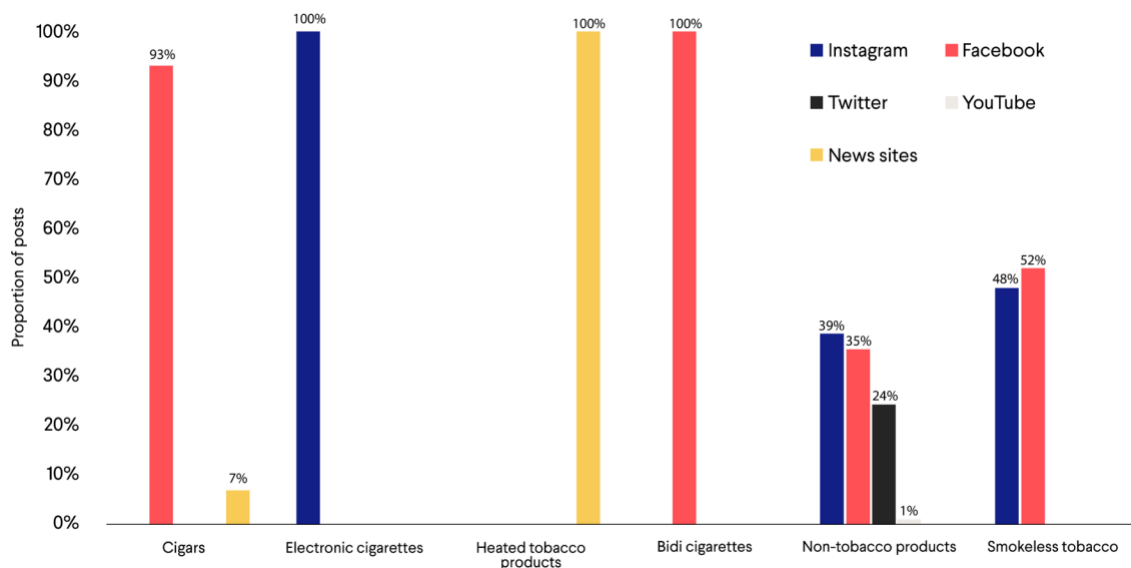
**Where were products marketed?**<sup>1</sup> Most marketing was observed on Instagram (40%, Figure 3), followed by Facebook (35%). Instagram was the predominant platform used to market electronic cigarettes (100%, Figure 3a) and non-tobacco products (39%). Facebook was the predominant platform used for cigar marketing (93%, Figure 3a), bidi cigarette marketing (100%) and for non-tobacco products (35%). Marketing on Twitter (24%, Figure 3) was exclusively observed for non-tobacco products (24%, Figure 3a). All marketing for heated tobacco products was observed on news sites (100%, see example). Smokeless tobacco marketing was observed almost evenly on Facebook (52%, Figure 3a) and Instagram (48%).

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



<sup>1</sup> 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.

**Figure 3a**  
**Digital Platforms Used for Marketing by Product Type**



### Example of news article

#### Synopsis

"India is no stranger to harm reduction. It has led the world in embracing policies that reduce harm, has earned the reputation as a world leader in tobacco control. Nevertheless, there are still more than a hundred million people here who smoke," he said at the Economic Times Global Summit in Delhi on Saturday.



ETGBS 2023| Sustainable economy for greater good: Jacek Olczak, CEO, Philip Morris International

India can help drive positive change for the rest of the world and, as chair of the G20, be a prime example for emerging economies to control tobacco consumption, said Jacek Olczak, CEO of Philip Morris International.

"India is no stranger to harm reduction. It has led the world in embracing policies that reduce harm, has earned

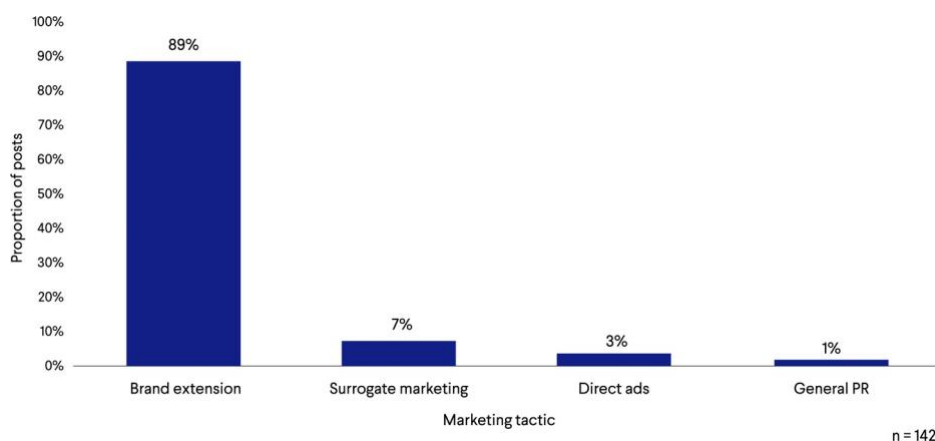
*Philip Morris International's CEO was invited to speak during the Economic Times Global Summit held in February 2023, during which he pushed the cessation narrative for heated tobacco products.*

*Source: The Economic Times website*



**What marketing tactics were used?**<sup>2</sup> The use of indirect marketing tactics was the most prominent form observed online. Most was for brand-extended products and services (89%, Figure 4), which during this period was heavily promotions for movies from Miraj Cinemas. This was followed by surrogate marketing of pan masala products (7%), and direct ads for bidi cigarettes and electronic cigarettes (3%). Finally, 1% of observed marketing was general PR for the companies.

**Figure 4**  
**Marketing Tactics Used for All Products**



### Examples of direct ads for bidis



*This post celebrating National Tourism Day associates bidis with India's culture and landmark destinations.*

Source: A.B. Bidi Company Facebook



*This post associates bidis with patriotism, using bidi packaging with a child's face.*

Source: A.B. Bidi Company Facebook



*This post uses bidi packaging with a child's face to suggest that smoking bidis is a great idea.*

Source: A.B. Bidi Company Facebook



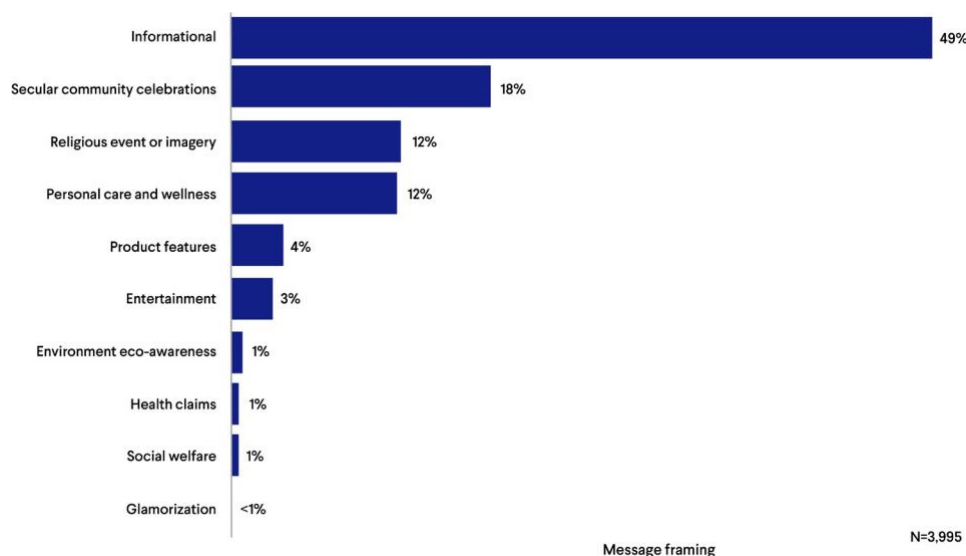
*Direct marketing of bidi packaging that features a child's face.*

Source: Masud Beedi 604

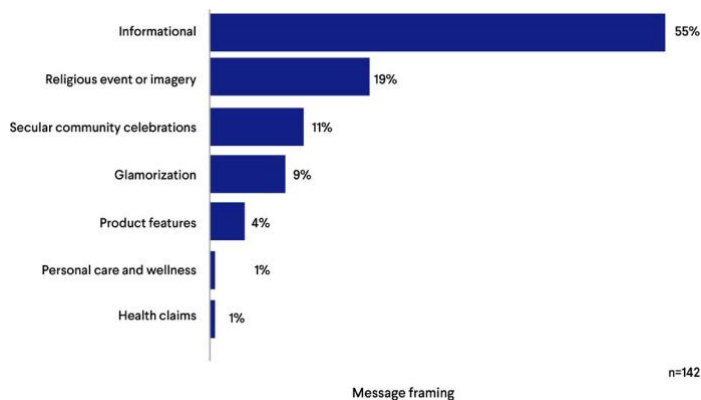
<sup>2</sup> See Appendix Table 1 for definitions of message tactics.

**What messaging was used?**<sup>3</sup> Overall, marketing messages for all products was mostly informational (49%, Figure 5), offering information on non-tobacco products and services. For this period, there was a significant amount of marketing offering information about movies from Miraj Group's Miraj Cinemas.\*\* Message framing for the direct marketing of tobacco products was also predominantly informational (55%, Figure 5a), such as electronic cigarette retailers providing instructions to send screenshots of electronic cigarettes or inquiries to the WhatsApp number of the retailer. Religious events and imagery was the second-most common message framing for tobacco products (19%, Figure 5a), including for holidays like Christmas and Navratri. This framing was used more for tobacco products than non-tobacco products (19% vs. 12%, Figure 5a, 5b). Secular community celebrations like International Women's Day and Army Day, were also used often to promote tobacco products (11%). However, this framing was used less for tobacco products than for non-tobacco products (11% vs. 19%, Figure 5a, 5b). Glamorization was also frequently observed for cigar products (9%, Figure 5a).

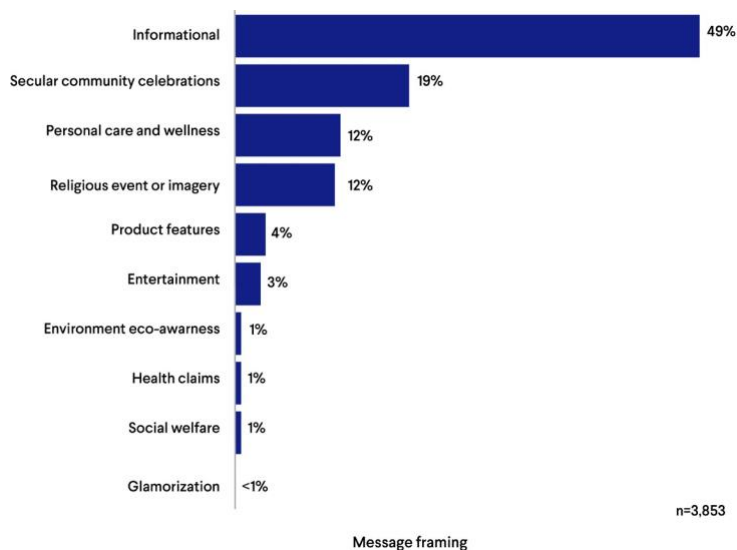
**Figure 5**  
**Message Framing Used for All Products**



**Figure 5a**  
**Message Framing Used for Tobacco Products**



**Figure 5b**  
**Message Framing Used for Non-Tobacco Products**



<sup>3</sup> See Appendix Table 1 for definitions of message framing.

\*\* This marketing was coded as informational and not entertainment because information is being offered about movies; entertaining posts are coded as those that promote the product as being entertaining and fun or present the content in an entertaining way (memes, cartoons).

## Message framing examples

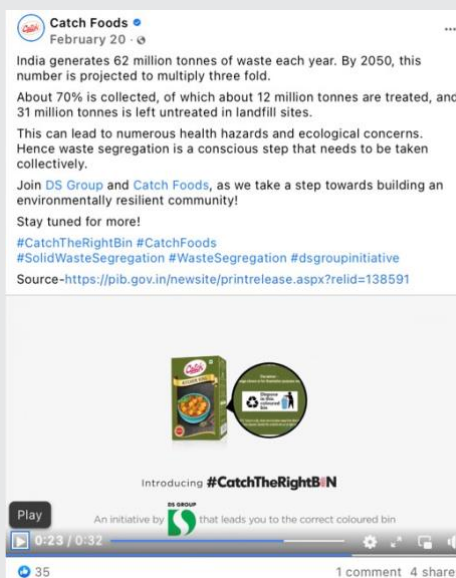
### Social welfare



This post for DS Group's surrogate brand of "mouth fresheners" Rajnigandha Silver Pearls shares its support for gender equality and salutes women working in the area of women's empowerment while associating them with the brand by calling them "pearls."

Source: Rajnigandha Silver Pearls

### Environment eco awareness



DS Group promoted a new environmental initiative for its Catch Foods brand of products that identifies the appropriate recycling bin to use to discard of product packaging.

Source: Catch Foods YouTube and Facebook

### Secular community celebrations



Marketing congratulating the national women's cricket team on a victory during the 2023 ICC Women's T20 World Cup was observed for several brand-extended products. Harmanpreet Kaur, captain of India's women's cricket team, serves as a brand ambassador for ITC Ltd.'s B Natural juice.

Source: B Natural Fruit Beverages Twitter

### Religious event or imagery



This post wishes viewers a Happy Cheti Chand, using an image of the deity Jhulelal surrounded by bidi packaging.

Source: A.B. Bidi Company Facebook



## 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.
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.

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.
Informational	Posts that present the product as healthier than other products or as being less harmful than conventional tobacco products.
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.

## Other TERM reports: India

### Recent situation reports:

- August-September 2022 — [English](#)

### Issue briefs:

- Tobacco Marketing and Football: A Losing Game —The 2022 FIFA World Cup and Tobacco Marketing on Social Media in Indonesia, India, and Mexico  
[English](#) | [Hindi](#)
- 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](#)

### About the Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement

Vital Strategies' Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement (TERM) is a digital media monitoring system that tracks tobacco marketing online on social media platforms and news sites. TERM is currently operating in India, Indonesia and Mexico.

### About Vital Strategies

Vital Strategies is a global health organization that believes every person should be protected by equitable and effective public health systems. We partner with governments, communities and organizations to reimagine public health, and the result is millions of people living longer, healthier lives. Our goal is to build a future where better health is supported across all facets of our lives, in our families, communities, in our environment and our governments.

## Join the movement



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