





#SponsoredByBigTobacco
Tobacco & Nicotine
Marketing on Social Media



Executive Summary

Two of the world's largest publicly-traded tobacco companies — British American Tobacco (BAT) and Philip Morris International (Philip Morris) — are exploiting the popularity of social media to market addictive products to young people.

This report analyzes the social media marketing for three brands: Velo, a nicotine pouch sold by BAT; Vuse, an e-cigarette sold by BAT; and IQOS, a heated tobacco product sold by Philip Morris.

This report is based on data from several social listening tools including Keyhole, CrowdTangle and Klear. These tools were used to identify information about the audiences being reached by BAT and Philip Morris and to identify the influencers, brands and pages used to promote Vuse, Velo and IQOS on Instagram, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok and YouTube.

The analysis found that BAT and Philip Morris are using social media to market these three brands in more than 60 countries. Additionally, key findings include:



Content promoting Velo, Vuse and IQOS on social media has been viewed more than

3.4 billion times.





Approximately 40 percent of the audience are youth under the age of 25. This amounts to over

150 million youth reached,

including 16 million teens under the age of 18.

Tobacco companies claim they don't advertise to youth, but the results of this report demonstrate that this is untrue. To protect young people from the harms of nicotine and tobacco addiction, governments should urgently:

- **1.** Take action to comprehensively ban all forms of domestic and cross-border marketing of tobacco and nicotine products;
- 2. Cooperate with each other to more effectively enforce existing marketing restrictions and/or bans; and
- **3.** Place legal responsibility on social media companies to proactively identify and remove illegal tobacco and nicotine product marketing from their platforms.

Social media companies must also adopt and proactively enforce policies that comprehensively ban tobacco and nicotine promotion on their platforms.



mas info #igos #igos3 #phillipmon

Background

In recent years, governments have made significant progress in driving down tobacco use by adopting evidence-based public health policies such as smoke-free laws, increased tobacco taxes, picturebased health warning labels on product packaging and restrictions on the marketing strategies longused by tobacco companies to target youth.

Facing increased regulation and declining sales, tobacco companies have responded by turning to social media to evade the marketing regulations that have helped to successfully reduce smoking rates worldwide. Tobacco companies like BAT and Philip Morris are among the world's most sophisticated advertisers – and they have skillfully adapted their marketing playbook for use on social media, with a particular focus on influencer marketing.

For nearly 75 years, tobacco companies have understood the importance of influencer marketing. In 1949, Philip Morris outlined its marketing strategy for college students stating that they needed to:

'get 'em' young, train 'em right' " recognizing that college students "are widely copied by others. They set styles...[and] because they're young and if we sell them, we have customers for a long time. "

Now, the advent of social media enables tobacco companies to fully unleash the tactic of influencer marketing on vulnerable targets like youth.

An internal tobacco industry marketing document regarding "trend influencer marketing" (T.I.M) outlines that:



T.I.M. is strategic and subtle. It infiltrates the marketplace under the radar of the public's natural resistance to traditional marketing vehicles. Consumers in these settings should not feel that they are being marketed to – properly executed, the program will appear very natural and not at all contrived. The marketing company and process are invisible to the general public. What comes through is a genuine response to a product that is perceived as part of and integral to the setting and the scene. "



BAT (Greece)



recent studies finding that kids as young as 8 years old are using social media more than ever.¹ Public health authorities largely agree that exposure to tobacco product marketing causes youth to start and keep using tobacco. Yet, extensive evidence has documented that pervasive nicotine and tobacco marketing is exactly what awaits youth on social media.

The New York Times reported in 2018 that tobacco companies paid social media influencers to secretly promote cigarettes on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter in more than 40 countries.²

Reuters reported in 2019 that Philip Morris had paid young influencers to promote IQOS on social media in multiple countries.³ That same year, The Times (UK) reported that BAT paid Instagram influencers under the age of 25 to promote heated tobacco products on social media.⁴

Formal complaints have been filed in response to the social media marketing

BAT (Colombia)

tactics of tobacco companies in the United States⁵, Brazil⁶ and the United Kingdom.⁷ The complaints allege that tobacco companies are using social media to target and reach young people.

In the United States, studies have found that social media marketing played a critical role in fueling the popularity of Juul e-cigarettes among young people and helped cause a youth e-cigarette epidemic.

In December 2019, Instagram announced that it would ban influencers from promoting e-cigarettes and other tobacco products on its platform. The policy has been **ignored by tobacco companies and is not enforced by Instagram**, despite repeated calls for the company to end its complicity in tobacco industry advertising.⁸

As evidenced in this report, tobacco companies continue to aggressively use Instagram and other social media platforms as a tool to market e-cigarettes, heated tobacco products and nicotine pouches to young people.



vuse.jamaica 1w Mint so fresh you can't hide your smile.

18+ Only. This product contains nicotine and is addictive.

Big Tobacco's Global Reach

British American

Summary of brand marketing on social media platforms from January 2018 to October 2023.

> People reached: 252.1 Million

≫ VELO Nicotine pouch

Impressions:

2.1 Billion

Percent of **Audience Under 25:**

39%

Countries Targeted:

32

Number of Teens (Under 18) Reached:

10.08 Million



British American

Tobacco

Countries Targeted:

44

Number of Teens (Under 18) Reached:

4.3 Million



Philip Morris International

People reached: 86.2 Million

Impressions:

1 Billion

People reached:

Audience Under 25:

Percent of

42%

47.6 Million

Impressions:

335 Million

IQOS **Heated Tobacco** Device



Percent of **Audience Under 25:**

41%

Countries Targeted:

36 **Number of Teens**

1.9 Million

(Under 18) Reached:



A Surround Sound Effect - Marketing Tactics

Tobacco companies are deploying a suite of tactics to reach young people and create an immersive, "surround sound" marketing effect on social media.

These tactics leverage the reach of multinational brands, influencers, trending topics and creators to increase the visibility, popularity and brand recognition of tobacco and nicotine brands on social media.

Tobacco companies claim that they only market products to adults who are current tobacco and nicotine users. Yet, the tactics outlined here demonstrate how tobacco companies are using an array of tactics to ensure that tobacco and nicotine marketing on social media not only reaches the widest possible audience, but is also appealing to youth and those who have never used tobacco or nicotine products.



TACTIC ONE: Direct Product Marketing



BAT and Philip Morris use at least 56 social media accounts in at least 45 countries to directly promote addictive products on social media. These accounts, owned and managed by two of the world's largest tobacco companies, serve as the epicenter of tobacco industry marketing on social media.



Tobacco companies use accounts like @IQOS_it (IQOS Italy, 67k followers), @Velo_Pakistan (50k followers), and @Vuse.Indonesia (62k followers) to post content promoting their addictive products. Influencers paid by tobacco companies tag these accounts to expand the reach of marketing content and trending hashtags are used to draw a wide network of social media users to these brand pages. For example, BAT uses hashtags like #LoveTheUnexpected, #CricketFever and #StayInTheMoment to tap into trending conversations on social media, ensuring that non-tobacco and nicotine users will see marketing content for addictive products.

These accounts also serve as hubs for the online sale of tobacco and nicotine products. Through links promoted by these accounts, social media users can directly purchase tobacco or nicotine products without leaving platforms like Instagram or Facebook.

velo.pakistan volume You don't have to wait for the elevator doors to open when #YouveGotVELO simply twist, tuck and tingle



BAT (Pakistan)

BAT (Guatemala)

TACTIC TWO: Influencers



refalhady/BAT



chistina_ich/Philip Morris



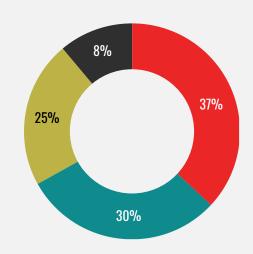
ayesha.m.omar/BAT

BAT and Philip Morris have amassed a network of influencers around the world who market addictive products to their followers via public social media accounts.

Tobacco companies engage a mix of influencers to achieve reach, give an impression of authenticity and to access niche audience segments. This includes using influencers with diverse interests and backgrounds, as well as influencers with a range of followers. From micro influencers with at least one thousand followers to mega influencers, including well-known celebrities with millions of followers.

Influencer posts promote tobacco and nicotine products as part of a "cool" and "desirable" lifestyle and make tobacco and nicotine use seem normal—and even popular—on the social media feeds of young people around the world.

The table to the right shows the common niche markets that BAT and Philip Morris are targeting: creative, lifestyle, fashion and sports influencers. The largest group of influencers marketing for these brands is made up of "creatives" or musicians, artists, DJs and actors who are well-known for their art or craft. The second most common category is fashion influencers whose work or interest is centered around the beauty or fashion industry.



Influencer Niche*

Creative (musicians, artists, DJs, actors)

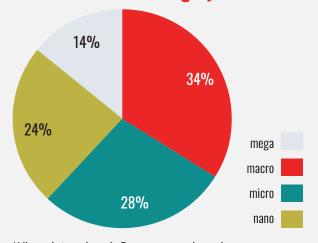
Fashion (clothing design, modelling, beauty, fashion writers)

Lifestyle (fitness, adventure, travel)

Sports (athletes, sports teams, brands)

*Manually categorized based on influencers with applicable "Top Skill" defined by Klear.

Influencer Reach Category*



*Klear determines influence score based on an algorithm that predicts the amount of real views an influencer post will receive.

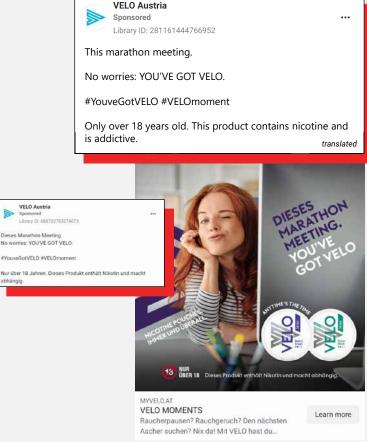
Mega influencers help brands get broad impressions and visibility, while macro and micro influencers reach into specific vertical or niche audiences. Marketing on these levels also supports repetition, which enhances a positive association with the brands.

The chart on the left defines the varied following of the influencers used by BAT and Philip Morris on social media. It demonstrates that tobacco companies are marketing through influencers at different levels of reach to infiltrate various spaces across social media. The largest group participating in brand campaigns are macro influencers, followed by micro influencers. This data was generated based on a Klear algorithm that categorizes influencers into four categories*: mega, macro, micro, and nano.

TACTIC THREE: Paid Ads

BAT and Philip Morris use the Ads Manager feature on Facebook and Instagram to run paid advertisements for tobacco and nicotine products. Ads often lead social media users directly to a page where they can purchase BAT and Philip Morris' tobacco and nicotine products online.

Advertisements for tobacco and nicotine products are not permitted under the current advertising policies on Facebook and Instagram, yet tobacco companies ignore these rules and social media platforms do not effectively enforce their policies. The result is that tobacco companies use paid advertisements to target social media users and Facebook and Instagram make money from such advertisements.



BAT (Austria)

TACTIC FOUR: Sports Brand Collaborations

To tap into the global popularity of sports, tobacco companies leverage the online reach of sports brands to promote nicotine and tobacco products. This includes high-profile race car drivers promoting nicotine pouches, sports content branded with tobacco products and content series featuring athletes and fans.

BAT has longstanding partnerships with the

McLaren Formula 1 Racing Team to promote tobacco and nicotine brands online. These collaborations allow tobacco companies to promote their products to audiences well beyond their own followers.

The hashtags #DrivenBvChange and #LoveTheUnexpected are currently driving significant marketing on social media. They include a variety of tactics, including posts with athletes and fans, artist collaborations and promotions and contests.





velo.global OWIN your name on the #McLaren

showing their fans the love by bringing you the ultimate superfan opportunity - the chance to be one of 60 names creating the word LOVE on the MCL60 at Zandvoort, Plus, one lucky winner will win a trip to the Netherlands for an exclusive VELO x McLaren Formula 1 Team

Experience for them and a friend.

BAT (Australia)

TACTIC FIVE:

Music and Festival **Collaborations**

Tobacco companies capitalize on the online popularity of musicians and festivals and use music events as opportunities to promote their addictive products on social media.

Around the world, BAT uses the Tomorrowland music festival series as an online promotion vehicle for Vuse and Velo. Tomorrowland is one of the most popular music festivals in the world: More than 600,000 people attended Tomorrowland festivals in 2022 and there are nearly five million posts on Instagram alone using the hashtag #tomorrowland.

BAT engages influencers and musicians to promote its products online in the lead-up to and during these popular music festivals. Collaborations with music festivals allow BAT to exponentially expand its online reach to hundreds of thousands of people who attend and follow music festivals like Tomorrowland – many who might otherwise have no engagement with tobacco or nicotine brands.

In Pakistan, BAT has partnered with Spotify to promote Velo on the music streaming platform. Using hashtags like #PopDontStop and #SpotifyxVSS, Velo content is promoted to followers on Spotify, Instagram and Facebook as well as through paid advertisements running on these platforms. As part of the collaboration, well-known musicians release singles through the "Velo Sound Station" verified artist playlist on Spotify, which is also promoted on social media.

eg.iqos It is finally Thursday so we can throw it back to our first City Experience in Egypt! A day full of delicious food, good music and the perfect company!

Stay tuned for our next City Experience.

#IQOSEgypt #IQOSCityExperience

This product is not risk-free and provides nicotine, which is addictive. Only for use by adult smokers. Tax Registration number (450-225-747)

#IQOSCityExperience

#VELOWeirdlyWonderful #tomorrowland Philip Morris (Egypt)

BAT (Switzerland)

iessmelu 2 14w Tomorrowland felt unreal 🧚 here are some amazing moments of this epic experience with the VELO family

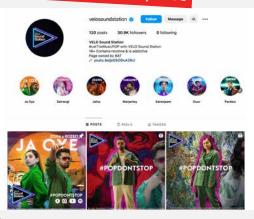
Paid partnership with @velo.switzerland

#VELOWeirdlyWonderful



BAT (Pakistan)

#VELOSoundStation #Spotifyx



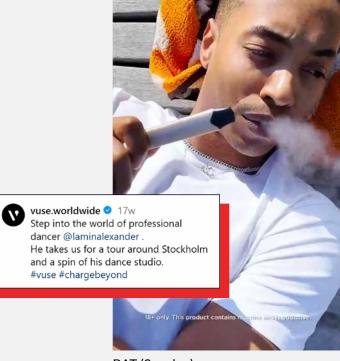
TACTIC SIX:

Arts and Culture Creators

Tobacco companies use online collaborations with arts and culture creators to associate their products with trendy and cool lifestyle content on social media. This includes partnerships with chefs, street artists and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

As part of this strategy, Philip Morris partners with leading media and fashion brands to promote IQOS on social media as a trendy, fashion forward product.

Collaborators include Conde Nast Traveller, Elle, Designist, Vice, Harpers Bazaar and Esquire. In Romania, Philip Morris sponsored Romanian Design Week 2023, as well as a summer "Jazz in the Park" series to promote IQOS. Philip Morris also worked with several high-profile brands like Vice Media and Designist to promote the events on social media.



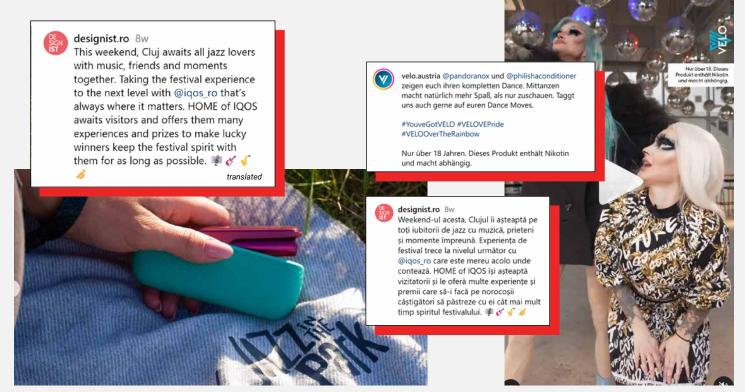
BAT (Sweden)



velo.austria It's tingling in your legs: @pandoranox and @philishaconditioner show you their dance moves that can't be missing at any drag show. Don't just watch - participate!

#YouveGotVELO #VELOVEPride #VELOOverTheRainbow

Just over 18 years old. This product contains nicotine and is addictive. transle



Philip Morris (Romania)

BAT (Austria)

TACTIC SEVEN: Discounts, Contests and Giveaways

Tobacco companies market tobacco and nicotine products on social media through the use of product discounts, contests and giveaways.

BAT uses "promo codes" to encourage sales of products like Velo. For example, Instagram followers gain access to special codes for 15 percent off Velo products. The company also promotes contests and giveaways on social media — for example, followers can enter to win a free iPhone by engaging with BAT's social media content.

In the hands of tobacco companies, these discounts, contests and giveaways serve to promote highly addictive and harmful products and create attractive incentives for young people to experiment with tobacco and nicotine products.

velo.xwitzerland ● Erhöhe den Vibe mit VELO an deiner Seite ♥

Gevinne Tickets für 1 von 5 Sommerfestivals!
Um telizunehmen, besuche VELO.com/ch und lies die AGBs in der Bio, um zu sehen, was alles enthalten ist.

Nur für 18+. Für erwachsene Konsumenten mit Wohnsitz in der Schweiz.

Ameliore la vibe avec VELO å tes côtés ♥ Gagne des billets pour 1 des 5 festivals d'été!
Pour participer, rendez-vous sur VELO.com/ch et lis les conditions geherales en bio pour voir tout ce qui est inclus.

velo.switzerland 🥏 Raise the vibe with VELO by your side 🖤

Only for 18+. For adult consumers residing in Switzerland.

Pour participer, rendez-vous sur VELO.com/ch et lis les conditions générales en bio pour voir tout ce qui est inclus.

To enter visit VELO.com/ch and read the T&Cs in bio to see what

Improve the vibe with VELO by your side Win tickets to 1 of 5

18+ uniquement. Pour les consommateurs adultes résidant en

Win tickets to 1 of 5 summer festivals!

all is included.

maaairakhan Want to switch up your nicotine game with VELO? The tingles are worth it! Own the sensation with my exclusive VELO PROMO CODE MAIRAKHAN15 for 15% off VELO products! Have a very VELO-FUL day! #YouveGotVELO #NowYouTingle @velo.pakistan



BAT (Pakistan)



18+ uniquement. Pour les consommateurs adultes résidant en

#VELO #YouveGotVELO

velo.pakistan Who knew winning an iPhone could be as easy as enjoying VELO? You read it right – all you have to do is buy two cans of VELO and enter the lucky draw. Visit pk.velo.com Terms & conditions apply*

BAT (Switzerland)

#iPhone #Giveaway #VELO #WeirdlyWonderful



BAT (Pakistan)

Policy Recommendations



This report shows that tobacco companies are aggressively using social media to reach a global audience of all ages in order to addict a new generation to their tobacco and nicotine products.

Social media was designed to connect users around the world. Yet, without the right policy safeguards and enforcement practices in place, social media is an ideal venue for tobacco companies to target children and young people.

To create a safer internet and protect young people, the online marketing of tobacco and nicotine products should be prohibited, even where the sale of these products is permitted.



Governments must implement domestic and cross-border marketing bans on all tobacco and nicotine products, and enforce existing ones. This includes collaborating with other governments to identify and remove illegal marketing entering their territories.

Governments must strengthen legal measures to comprehensively ban all forms of domestic and cross-border marketing of these products. This would include ensuring that a legal responsibility is placed on social media companies to proactively identify and remove prohibited tobacco and nicotine product marketing from their platforms.

Social media companies must adopt and proactively enforce policies that comprehensively ban tobacco and nicotine advertising on their platforms. This includes marketing through paid influencer campaigns, paid advertisements, and accounts or pages run by tobacco companies, tobacco or nicotine brands, and/or affiliates. Nicotine products that are approved as cessation products should be exempted from these policies.

At the Tenth Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP10) to the WHO FCTC, Parties should adopt the draft decision and proposed Specific Guidelines to Address Cross-Border Tobacco Advertising, Promotion and Sponsorship and the Depiction of Tobacco in the Entertainment Media.



Methodology

Toronto-based marketing agency Grassriots and the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids collected data on social media advertising of emerging tobacco and nicotine product brands. Three brands were selected based on their pervasiveness on social media, and to represent the three main categories of emerging products: heated tobacco products (IQOS); e-cigarettes (Vuse); and nicotine pouches (Velo).

Data privacy policies implemented by Meta and other social media platforms after 2019 significantly restricted data access on social listening platforms. In response, a hybrid research methodology of manual research directly in the social media platforms in combination with automated research through the social listening tools was used.

This research took place on social listening tools Keyhole, Klear and Crowdtangle, in addition to direct data collection from the social media platforms Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, TikTok and SnapChat. The majority of active and direct brand marketing was observed on Instagram.

In order to identify brand accounts and to analyze the volume of marketing taking place, four approaches were taken:

- Identifying all brand-controlled Instagram accounts.
- **2.** Identifying commonly used brand marketing hashtags through a review of the branded pages and monitors on the Keyhole platform.
- 3. Creating a list of influencer accounts from the top 200-250 posts for each brand using the top 5-10 marketing hashtags.
- 4. Conducting searches in the Klear platform to identify influencers associated with each brand.

Generating Klear reports

Campaign keywords were used in Klear to pull all posts with brand mentions from January 2018 to October 2023 and calculate the reach and impressions of these posts. Screenshots of the full list can be found in the appendix.

A note about young people on social media

Instagram is one of the most popular social media channels. The platform has two billion users worldwide, and the number of users continues to rise. The largest group of users on Instagram are aged 18-25.

However, the age of users on social media is self-reported, meaning users provide their own age and this information is not independently verified. This means it is difficult to get a complete picture of those exposed to content on the platform, especially under the age of 18.¹²

A note about the photos contained in this report

The photos contained in this report are screenshots of publicly available social media content posted by influencers and brands online. The publicly available URLs are provided in the Appendix.



Appendix

Social Listening Platform Background

About Keyhole

Keyhole is a social media analytics platform that measures real-time and historical social media data. Keyhole can be configured to pull data based on Instagram hashtags and profiles so they can be aggregated and monitored in the platform. The platform has analyzed over 6 Billion posts. Hashtag monitors and profiles were configured in Keyhole to perform preliminary research and help identify trends and influencers to review further.

Changes to social media data API access by companies like Meta in 2019 have limited the ability to pull and aggregate historical post and influencer data based on hashtag queries significantly. A more manual approach to review marketing behavior and identify profiles posting about tobacco company brands was needed to populate Klear campaigns for analysis

About Klear

Klear is an influencer marketing software that analyzes social media influencer profiles to determine their True Reach, Engagement Score, and Influence. The Klear platform uses machine learning to predict the amount of actual views and engagements an influencer gets per post, and scores them on an engagement-reach matrix to determine their influence. Influencer posts can be monitored by creating campaigns in Klear that are based on a combination of keywords, brand hashtags and account handles.

Link to Original Screenshots from Social Media Accounts

- pg 1 @kativarnava
- pg 1 @evelina_nikoliza
- pg 1 @mclaren
- pg 3 @martee0304
- pg 3 @sotirisbougas
- pg 4 @vuse.colombia
- pg 4 @vuse.jamaica
- pg 9 @iqos_it
- pg 9 @vuse.guatemala
- pg 9 @velo.pakistan
- pg 10 @refalhady post removed
- pg 10 @christina_ich
- pg 10 @ayesha.m.omar
- pg 11 @velo.austria
- pg 11 @velo.global
- pg 11 @vuse.worldwide
- pg 12 @eg.iqos
- pg 12 @jessmelu
- pg 12 @bilalsaeed_music
- pg 12 @velosoundstation
- pg 13 @vuse.worldwide
- pg 13 @velo.austria
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Endnotes

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