

Nicotine-Related Content in ENDS advertisements: 2018-2020

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Background

There is no standard way to communicate to consumers how much nicotine is present in ENDS.

Some ENDS users, including youth, are unsure of how much nicotine is present in their e-liquid or ENDS cartridges..

Effective communication of nicotine strength in product advertisements (ads) could increase public knowledge of ENDS nicotine content.

This study assesses the presence of nicotine-related content in ENDS ads (2018-2020).

Methods

We acquired English-language ENDS ads that appeared in consumer and business-to-business (B2B) outlets between 01/01/2018 and 12/31/2020 from Numerator. Media outlets included TV, radio, newspapers, magazines (consumer and B2B), online platforms, and direct-to-consumer emails.

We coded for the presence of any nicotine-related content (excluding the required nicotine warning statement). Nicotine-related content includes words such as ‘nicotine’, ‘nic’, ‘salts’, and presentation of content communicating nicotine strength, as well as nicotine descriptors. Nicotine-related content was coded for manufacturer/retailer and for media outlet.

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Most ENDS ads do not include nicotine-related content (excluding the required nicotine warning statement) or details about how much nicotine is present. When nicotine strength is reported, it is most often communicated in mg or mg/mL.

No mention of nicotine content

Ad in B2B magazine



Ad in consumer magazine



Nicotine mentioned

Ad in B2B magazine – nicotine mg



Ad in consumer magazine – nicotine %



Results

The sample included N=2966 unique ads.

The proportion of ads in the entire sample with nicotine-related content differed by manufacturers/retailer:

- Logic, 55% (n=227),
- South Beach Smoke, 48% (n=93),
- Blu, 46% (n=106),
- Vuse, 26% (n=99),
- JUUL, 14% (n=100),
- Vapor4Life, 13% (n=43).

And by media outlet:

- Magazines (B2B): 60% (n=63)
- Direct to consumer emails: 40%, (n=511)
- Magazines (consumer): 30% (n=41)
- Online: 25% (n=227)
- Radio: 19% (n=90)
- TV: 17% (n=4)

Overall, 32% of ads (n=942) included nicotine-related content.

Of the ads that contained nicotine-related content, 38% (n=354) included a mention of nicotine in the main ad copy.

Among ads that contained nicotine-related content, mentions of “salts” (or similar) anywhere in the ad were present in 13% of ads (n=121).

Ads that included content about nicotine strength communicated this using mg or mg/mL, %, or symbols such as bars or dots. Among ads that contained nicotine-related content, 47% reported nicotine strength in mg or mg/ml (n=444) compared to strength being reported in “%”, (28%, n=260).

Nicotine descriptors included ‘high’, ‘mild’, ‘smooth’, ‘strong’, and variations on ‘satisfying’.

Discussion

Nicotine was featured in about one third of ads with substantial variation in presentation by manufacturer/retailer and by media outlet.

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