

Proliferation of JUUL-related content on Instagram likely to appeal to the young

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There has been a proliferation of JUUL-related content on the photo and video sharing social media service, Instagram, that is likely to appeal to young people, reveals research published online in the journal *Tobacco*

Control.

The posts feature product promotion, nicotine and addiction content, and references to youth culture, the analysis shows.

In the US, digital marketing of e-cigarettes on [social media](#) is unregulated, leaving the way clear for the vaping industry to aggressively market products like JUUL to [young people](#), who are the heaviest users of social media platforms, say the researchers.

JUUL is a high tech vaping device that resembles a computer flash drive. It comprises a [rechargeable battery](#) and detachable pods—nicotine cartridges that come in various flavours.

Amid growing concerns about the increasing popularity of JUUL and other e-cigarette products and their potential to addict a new generation to nicotine, the researchers set out to analyse the amount and characteristics of JUUL-related posts on Instagram.

In all, they retrieved 14,838 relevant posts from 5201 individual users between 1 March and 15 May 2018, including all posts on the official JUUL account before it was deleted in November 2018.

Using a combination of machine learning methods, keyword algorithms, and human coding, primary posts were classified as featuring content related to product promotion; nicotine and addiction; youth culture, including memes, celebrities and music; and lifestyle, including social activities or identities.

A third of the posts (34%) contained overt promotional content that highlighted ways to obtain products at reduced cost, such as freebies and incentivised friend-tagging.

Around one in 10 (11%) of the posts contained information related to nicotine and addiction. These featured memes and hashtags about the positive effects of nicotine and compared nicotine's addictive nature to chocolate cravings or binge-watching Netflix.

Over half the posts (55%) featured youth culture or lifestyle-related (57%) content.

Youth-related [content](#) or lifestyle appeals were obvious within promotional posts and nicotine- and addiction-related posts.

"These findings bear a striking resemblance to the tactics used by the traditional tobacco industry to promote smoking as a socially acceptable behaviour and normalise the 'positive aspects of smoking and [nicotine](#)'," they write.

JUUL recently closed its official Instagram account, but voluntary action alone might not be enough, say the researchers, given the burgeoning category of JUUL-like e-cigarettes coming to market.

"Strong regulatory action is needed to restrict promotional efforts for e-cigarette products, particularly within social media platforms where youth participation is high," they conclude.

More information: Characterising JUUL-related posts on Instagram, *Tobacco Control* (2019). [DOI: 10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2018-052824](https://doi.org/10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2018-052824)

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