

TikTok's policies on vaping are frequently violated, putting teens at risk, study finds

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New Curtin University research has found TikTok's policies on the promotion of vaping are frequently violated, putting the social media platform's predominantly young users at potential risk of e-cigarette

exposure and use.

Lead researcher Professor Jonine Jancey, from the Curtin School of Population Health said the findings highlighted the dangers of relying on [social media platforms](#) to develop and enforce their own policies around content. The paper is published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

"Our study explored how e-cigarettes are promoted on TikTok, to assess the effectiveness of the platform's own 'drugs, controlled substances, alcohol and tobacco policy,'" Professor Jancey said.

"The sheer amount of potentially harmful content being fed to [young people](#) on TikTok shows [self-regulation](#) is failing.

"Of the 264 videos related to e-cigarettes that we studied and which had a total of 2.5 million views, 97.7% portrayed them positively, and these posts received 98.7% of the total views and 98.2% of the total likes. These used humor, music, shared vaping tricks and referred to a 'vaping community,' supporting the normalization of these products.

"Sixty-nine of the posts (26.1%) we reviewed violated TikTok's content policy by promoting these products for purchase. This included videos containing details on how and where to purchase e-cigarette products, links to online retailers and other social media accounts for purchasing products and offers such as 'buy three, get one free' and giveaways."

Professor Jancey said federal regulations should be tightened to ensure penalties are enforced for both [content creators](#) and social media platforms that breach policies or government advertising laws.

"It seems there are no major consequences for those who do not follow TikTok guidelines and violate content policy. Social media platforms can

decide the consequences for breaches of their policies, but they have a clear financial incentive not to punish people who breach their policies," Professor Jancey said.

"Government regulations that captures e-cigarette advertising, promotion and sponsorship, including on social media must be enforced. These should include requiring [social media](#) platforms to report on how they are ensuring these regulations are upheld."

Co-author and Professor of Internet Studies Tama Leaver from Curtin's School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry said because the videos are typically made by young people for young people, they are particularly powerful.

"This is essentially a form of peer-to-peer promotion where young people see their friends or celebrities portraying vaping in a positive way," Professor Leaver said.

"In addition, some vaping content is posted by influencers who may actually be paid by the [e-cigarette](#) industry to promote their products, although this is not disclosed and young people watching these videos may not even know they are being advertised to."

More information: Jonine Jancey et al, Promotion of E-Cigarettes on TikTok and Regulatory Considerations, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph20105761](#)

Provided by Curtin University

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