

# Study finds e-cigarette manufacturers use targeted marketing to lure in young adults

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Research led by Minji Kim, assistant professor of health promotion, education, and behavior, has found that marketing strategies used by e-cigarette manufacturers increase the likelihood of uptake among

otherwise low-risk young adults. These widespread but under-researched strategies use psychographic targeting to appeal to new users based on lifestyles, attitudes and values. Kim published the results in *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*.

"Young adults who currently don't use [tobacco](#) and [nicotine](#) products are susceptible to these advertisements, which may result in the initiation of [e-cigarette use](#) for individuals who were otherwise less likely to use these products," Kim says. "To address this increased risk, stricter marketing regulations for emerging tobacco and nicotine products are needed to reduce marketing exposure."

Previous research has shown that young adulthood (ages 18–29) is a critical time for both initiation and cessation of tobacco/nicotine use. Steady increases in e-cigarette uptake for this age group correspond with their exposure to e-cigarette marketing. Further, e-cigarette use among young adults also predicts smoking initiation.

These trends warrant further research into the impact of e-cigarette marketing on [young people](#) to better inform regulations and interventions, according to the authors. They designed the present study to understand the effects of psychographic targeting using peer crowds that reflect shared values, interests, lifestyles, fashion and social tendencies.

The researchers analyzed responses from an experiment with 2,100 young adults. The participants were divided into three primary groups based on their peer crowd affiliation: Mainstream, Young Professional, Hip Hop/Hipster/Partier. They randomly selected half from each subgroup to view existing print and online e-cigarette advertisements that reflected their lifestyles, and then answered questions about their effects. The other half viewed advertisements that featured lifestyles that did not match their own, and then answered the same questions.

## Mitigating marketing

When considering all participants at the same time, their analysis did not reveal that peer crowd matching led them to like the e-cigarette advertisements more; however, the researchers did find that responses differed based on their tobacco and nicotine use status.

For example, advertisements featuring members of a respondent's peer crowd led to increases in character liking and ad evaluation only among those who currently do not use tobacco and nicotine products. This finding suggests that people who are at low risk for tobacco use—in other words, current non-users—are more likely to respond favorably to advertisements depicting their peer crowd and increasing their susceptibility to begin using e-cigarettes.

"Marketing regulations, such as an advertising ban on channels that can reach non-users, could minimize low-risk [young adults](#)' exposure to [e-cigarette](#) advertising," Kim says. "Future studies should examine how communication campaigns and regulations can counteract these targeted tobacco and nicotine marketing effects."

**More information:** Minji Kim et al, Young Adult Responses to Peer Crowd-Based Targeting in E-cigarette Advertisements: An Experimental Study, *Nicotine and Tobacco Research* (2023). [DOI: 10.1093/ntr/ntac292](https://doi.org/10.1093/ntr/ntac292)

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