

# Research finds e-cigarette content on Instagram violates policies, is marketed to teens

May 6 2024

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New research presented May 4 at the American Psychiatric Association's

[Annual Meeting](#) indicates that methods of advertising e-cigarettes on digital platforms are violating federal government and Instagram policies.

The primary violations include omitting age-restricted content tags on Instagram and neglecting to address the addictive potential of e-cigarettes and other vaping products. Previous studies have found that exposure to e-cigarettes on social media is correlated with increased use.

The term "e-cigarette" refers to vaping products, synthetic nicotine products, and other electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS). In a new study, Jessica Tran and colleagues reviewed ENDS-based content on Instagram for level of engagement among adolescent users, accuracy of the ENDS information presented, and adherence to federal and Instagram regulation policies.

The researchers examined ENDS-related Instagram posts in December 2023, using a simulated 14-year-old female's profile to search hashtags such as #vapelife, #vapecommunity, and #ecig. The team reviewed 51 posts from these hashtags to assess the presence of health-related warnings and common themes.

The majority (34) of the 51 posts portrayed e-cigarette use in a positive light, whereas 12 took a negative tone towards ENDS. The most common marketing strategies used included appeals to aesthetics and lifestyle. Two-thirds of posts did not contain warnings regarding age restriction or the addictive potential of nicotine, in violation of FDA regulations.

In a breach of Instagram branded content policies, 23 of the 51 posts were created by vape shops or ambassadors, who serve as sales

representatives for vape brands. Only 14 of the 51 posts aimed to educate consumers, with 30 of the posts created for promotional purposes.

"Youth exposure to content about e-cigarettes and other ENDS must be curtailed by effective age restrictions and diligent enforcement of regulatory policies," said Tran. "Even more importantly, ENDS-related content must evolve to educate consumers about the potential health effects of [e-cigarette](#) usage."

Provided by American Psychiatric Association

Citation: Research finds e-cigarette content on Instagram violates policies, is marketed to teens (2024, May 6) retrieved 18 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-05-cigarette-content-instagram-violates-policies.html>

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