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New smoke signals: Is Big Tobacco using influencers to illegally punt new products

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Could companies' wooing of social media influencers be just a clever ploy to get around the country's tobacco advertising ban?

Joan van Dyk- June 20, 2019

Tobacco companies are banned from advertising their products, but when they reach out to social media influencers they could blur the lines between what is legal and what's not.

In April 2019, Philip Morris South Africa sent MetroFm talk show host Pearl Modiadie to Italy for the opening of Milan Design Week – all expenses paid, according to Philip Morris's marketing director Rishaad Hajee.

The annual exhibition draws hundreds of designers to the city to display their latest innovations in furniture, lighting, and installation art. Among the new designs featured at the fair this year was Philip Morris International's heat-not-burn tobacco product, IQOS, short for "I Quit Ordinary Smoking".

The company on its website describes IQOS as a smoke-free product that electronically heats tobacco just enough so that it will give off a "nicotine-containing vapour" instead of the pungent smoke emitted from traditional cigarettes.

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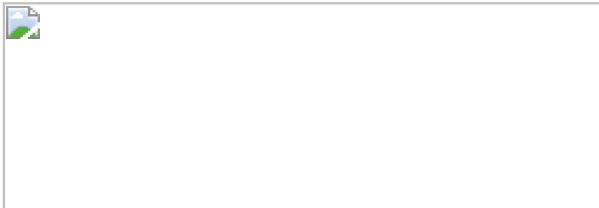
industry researchers monitored patients' blood pressure, lung function and cholesterol, for instance, but not any cancer-related risks. IQOS users were not better off than the traditional smokers with regards to blood pressure, lung function and cholesterol at the end of the trial, the study published in the journal *Tobacco Control* found.

Hajee says this research is “misleading” because it ignores a decade’s worth of positive evidence conducted by various health agencies and regulators.

This story first appeared on Bhekisisa.org and can be accessed [here](#).

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