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Over 125 Organizations Call on Social Media Companies to End All Tobacco Advertising, Including by Paid Influencers

May 22, 2019

WASHINGTON, DC – The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids is joining more than 125 public health and other organizations from 48 countries in calling on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat to immediately end the promotion of cigarettes, e-cigarettes and all other tobacco products on their platforms, including prohibiting the use of social media influencers.



[A letter sent to the CEOs of these companies](#) describes how tobacco manufacturers, including Philip Morris International, British American Tobacco, Imperial Brands and Japan Tobacco International, have conducted social media marketing campaigns that have been viewed billions of times worldwide. These campaigns reach millions of young people and undermine efforts to reduce tobacco use and save lives.

The letter urges the social media companies to strictly enforce their existing policies prohibiting paid advertising for tobacco products on their platforms, to extend these policies to prohibit the use of paid influencers to promote tobacco products, and to ensure the policies include all tobacco products and e-cigarettes.

“While Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat have advertising policies rightly prohibiting the promotion of tobacco products, the fact that these policies are not consistently applied to influencer content creates a loophole that is currently allowing rampant marketing of cigarettes, e-cigarettes and heated cigarettes like IQOS to young users on social media,” the letter states.

Without swift action by the social media companies, “Philip Morris International and other tobacco companies will continue to use your platforms to addict the next generation of tobacco users around the world,” the letter states.

Recent media reports and studies have documented the widespread use of social media to market tobacco products:

- As reported by [The New York Times](#) in August 2018, tobacco companies have paid social media influencers to promote cigarettes on platforms including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter as part of a marketing strategy [documented in more than 40 countries](#). The influencers are usually young, attractive and have large social media followings. These social media campaigns have been viewed more than 25 billion times worldwide, according to social media analytics.
- As reported by [Reuters](#) on May 10, Philip Morris International is using young influencers in multiple countries to market its IQOS heated cigarette – a product the company claims is marketed only to adult smokers. In an attempt to preempt negative media coverage of this marketing tactic, Philip Morris told Reuters it was suspending “product-related digital influencer actions.” However, Philip Morris did not say it would permanently end such efforts, and the letter to the social media companies notes that “past experience has shown we cannot rely on self-regulation by the tobacco industry to control their actions.” [View examples of IQOS marketing on social media.](#)
- Formal complaints have been filed against British American Tobacco (BAT) in [Brazil](#) and the [United Kingdom](#) over its marketing on social media. In Brazil, complaints have been filed with government authorities over the company’s social media campaigns for cigarettes brands including Lucky Strike. In the U.K., the Advertising Standards Authority is investigating BAT’s use of social media platforms to promote

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- In the United States, studies have found that social media marketing played a critical role in fueling the popularity of Juul e-cigarettes among young people and helped cause a youth e-cigarette “epidemic.” A [study by Stanford University researchers](#) concluded that Juul’s launch advertising, much of it on social media, was “patently youth oriented.” [View Juul marketing images.](#)

“Tobacco companies use social media to promote their products because they know Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat are the gateway to young people all over the world,” said Matthew L. Myers, president of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. “In fact, the tobacco industry’s entire business model depends on addicting the next generation of tobacco users to its products. Social media companies must take action now to protect young people from the tobacco industry’s predatory marketing practices.”

In addition to the letter to social media companies, six U.S. public health and medical organizations recently sent a [letter](#) urging the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to immediately revoke its authorization for Philip Morris to market IQOS in the U.S. if the company uses youth-oriented marketing tactics, including on social media, as it has in other countries.

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Related Materials

- [Letter to social media companies](#)
- [Examples of cigarette marketing on social media](#)
- [Examples of IQOS marketing on social media](#)
- [Reuters: "Citing Reuters report, health groups push tech firms to police tobacco marketing" \(May 22, 2019\)](#)

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