

TOBACCO INDUSTRY: Manipulating the Youth into a Lifelong Addiction



Tobacco companies hook the vulnerable youth into starting a lifelong addiction through flavors and targeted marketing. The tobacco industry publicizes its so-called contributions to society to mask long-term health and socio-economic harms while keeping children in tobacco farms, and lobbying against policies that protect children.



Global Center for
Good Governance
in Tobacco Control

The tobacco industry causes a net loss to the global economy, annually costing USD 1.4 trillion in economic losses[1] and killing 8 million people; with a disproportionate impact in developing nations as over 80% of the world's 1.3 billion smokers live in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).[2] Investment analysts estimate that the industry creates at least 5 times more societal costs than benefits.[3] Anti-fraud agencies have found evidence of tobacco companies' complicity in smuggling[4] and bribery[5], resulting in billions in lost revenue. Environmentalists have pointed out that cigarette butts are the most widely littered object in the oceans.[6] Human rights experts concluded that the tobacco industry must stop producing and marketing tobacco because it is "deeply harmful to human health" and irreconcilable with human rights.[7]

I. HOOKING THE YOUTH WITH FLAVORS

Tobacco companies develop a range of flavored products, from cigarettes to emerging and novel products like heated tobacco products (HTPs) and electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) such as e-cigarettes (see Box 1). ENDS are heavily marketed towards youth through the use of flavouring and promotional strategies.[52] Flavours such as fruit, candy, and mint, mask the harsh taste of tobacco and can make them more appealing to the youth (See Box 3).[8]

II. TARGETING THE YOUTH

The tobacco industry views the youth and young adults as its future loyal customers. Tobacco use starts during adolescence and about 90% of cigarette smokers first try smoking by age 18.[9] All evidence points to the fact that tobacco industry's marketing activities "recruit new users during their youth" (See Box 3).[10]

III. MARKETING TO THE YOUTH

The tobacco industry's marketing activities have led young people to initiate smoking and vaping, prevent users from quitting, and increase tobacco use.[11] These include playful product[12] and package design (See Box 5)[13], brand and corporate marketing (See Box 10),[14] point of sale[15, 16] and events marketing for a young crowd (See Box 8 and 14),[17] pricing strategies to keep products affordable to teens (See Box 12),[18] embedded marketing including product placement in movies targeted to kids,[19] digital marketing in platforms accessible by teens (See Box 9 and 11),[20] sports and culture sponsorships (See Box 13),[21] and so-called socially responsible activities that affect youth smoking behavior.[22] Tobacco advertising appeals to the youth because it reflects aspirations such as "independence, liberation, attractiveness, adventurousness, sophistication, glamour, athleticism, social acceptability and inclusion, sexual attractiveness, thinness, popularity, rebelliousness, and being 'cool' " (See Box 3).[23]

IV. CAUSING LIFELONG ADDICTION

The tobacco industry retains a key ingredient in their products, nicotine, which is more addictive than cocaine or heroin.[24] Nicotine tricks the nerve cells into sending a message to release more dopamine which is passed on to give a feeling of "high." The young brain creates more receptors to handle the anticipated nicotine, which leads teens to needing more nicotine to get the same high. Because the brain continues to develop until about age 25, the young brain can get addicted more easily than adults (See Box 2). In addition, nicotine addiction leads to an increased risk of addiction to other substances,[25] drugs,[55, 56] and alcohol.[57] ENDS products may serve as a gateway to conventional smoking among young people or the renormalization of smoking in society. [52]

V. CAUSING PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS AND COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT

Transnational tobacco companies have invested research in manipulating the effect of nicotine on the brain.[26] Nicotine affects parts of the brain responsible for learning and memory and, in the adolescent brain, the effect can become permanent.[27] Nicotine can also impair decision-making ability in the long term and worsen anxiety,[28] irritability,[29] impulsivity,[30] depression, and other mental health disorders.[58] Moreover, youth who smoke are at increased risk of developing mental disorders such as major depressive disorder, agoraphobia, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder,[31] while also worsening attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).[59]

VI. CAUSING OTHER ADVERSE HEALTH HARMS

The tobacco industry understands fully well the health harms caused by its products and in fact have been forced to reimburse governments for health costs.[32] Among the young, smoking causes faster heart rates,[33] shortness of breath, production of more phlegm,[34] early signs of heart diseases and stroke, limitations on performance and endurance, increased risk of lung cancers, reduced lung function, and shorter lives over time.[35]

VII. LOBBYING AGAINST TOBACCO CONTROL POLICIES THAT PROTECT YOUTH

The tobacco industry lobbies against evidence-based life-saving tobacco control measures[36] such as ban on flavoring (See Box 4), packaging restrictions (See Box 5),[37] ban on all forms of advertising,[38] nicotine regulation, and increase in price through tax measures.[39] Governments have committed to implement these measures which are embodied in the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC); however, the tobacco industry poses the single greatest barrier to these efforts.[40] It intends to gain a seat at the table, pre-empt or influence regulation, or secure incentives from the government by making contributions or offering partnerships to government offices or officials, offering weak draft legislation, seeking appointments for its officials or allies, bribing public officials, hiring former public officials, funding front groups and scientists to voice its interests and to cloud the debate.[41] Although the tobacco industry would purport to support legislation to restrict access to children, the interventions supported are typically ineffective ones.[42]

VIII. MASKING THE DAMAGE TO GAIN THE TRUST OF A YOUNG MARKET

The belief that tobacco companies are benefiting society gives it the credibility and legitimacy it needs to sell to a young market. Hence, it uses political and corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities to rehabilitate its image in the area of environment, human rights, science, agriculture, public health, disaster management, and development.[43] These activities also detract from the obligation to make the tobacco industry accountable[44] for all the harms caused, such as through policies and suits to recoup healthcare costs and other damages.[45]

IX. KEEPING CHILDREN IN TOBACCO FARMS

The tobacco industry casts an image of promoting sustainable tobacco farming while continuing to purchase leaves produced using child labor.[46] Child labor in tobacco thrusts children into a cycle of poverty by causing health harms and restricting access to education.[47] It is a well-known fact that the tobacco industry employs over 1.3 million children in tobacco farming and processing, who work in extremely hazardous conditions and suffer from diseases and poverty.[54] Instead of promoting a globally mandated shift towards alternative livelihood in accordance with the WHO FCTC, the tobacco industry seeks to justify tobacco growing and encourages tobacco dependence through contract farming.[48]

X. USING THE SAME TACTICS TO SELL NEW ADDICTIVE PRODUCTS

The largest tobacco transnationals are behind some of the most popular brands of novel and emerging nicotine products including e-cigarettes and HTPs;[49] and the backing of these transnationals have spurred global expansion.[50] Decades of tactics in marketing cigarettes to manipulate the youth are currently being repeated on new products in different countries (See Box 6 and 7).[51] The tobacco industry has invested heavily in social media marketing, which has a young audience. For example, BAT launched a USD 1 billion marketing campaign that focuses on social media, pop stars, concerts and sports and cultural events, that can potentially encourage young people to initiate tobacco use.[60]

Across the world, governments have recognized that there is a fundamental conflict of interest between tobacco control and public health.[i] In 2015, the international community of nations committed to attain the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs); and these goals include strengthening implementation of the WHO FCTC which obliges governments to protect public health policies from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry (WHO FCTC Article 5.3).[ii] Pursuant to this obligation, governments and public officials must limit interaction with the tobacco industry unless strictly necessary for regulation; avoid conflicts of interest; reject partnerships and contributions from the tobacco industry; require the tobacco industry to be accountable and transparent in its operations including requiring the submission of all forms of marketing, public relations, and lobbying information; denormalize and regulate so-called “socially responsible” activities of the tobacco industry; and not give in any preferential treatment, benefits, or incentives.[iii] These measures are intended to empower governments to resist industry influence and lobbying against policies that protect the youth from the tobacco industry’s manipulation.

i UN General Assembly (24 January 2012). Resolution adopted by the General Assembly – 66/2. Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/nmh/events/un_ncd_summit2011/political_declaration_en.pdf (accessed on 02 May 2020).

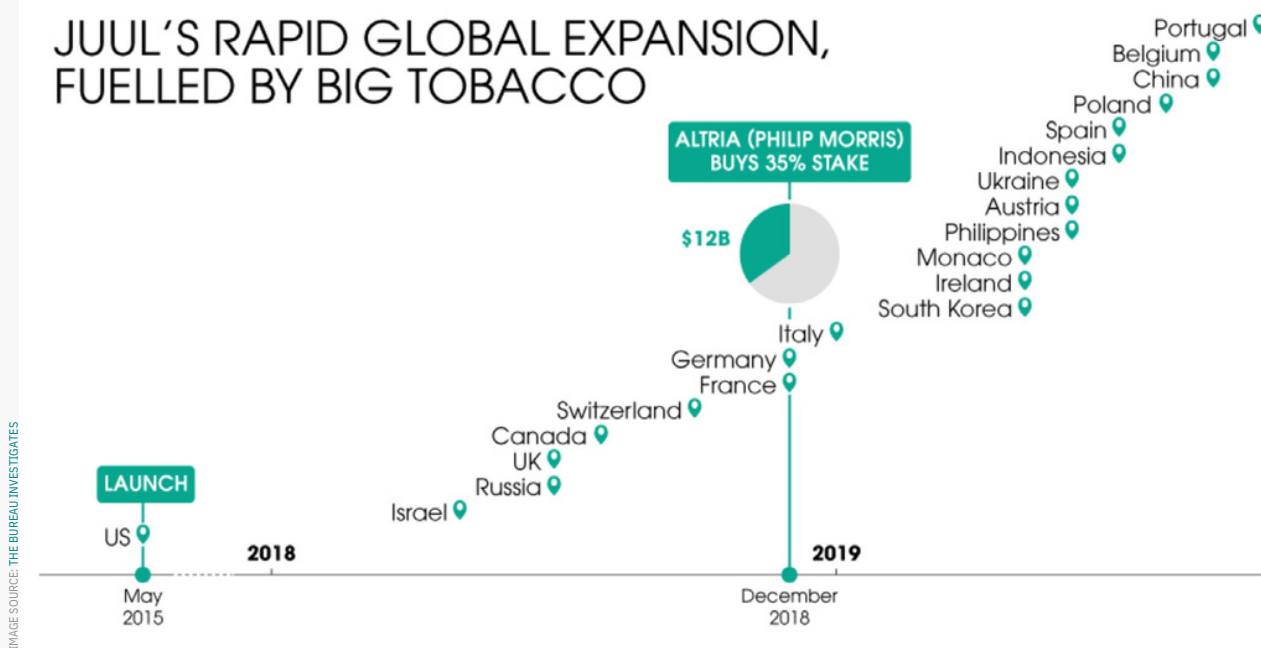
ii UNDP & WHO FCTC Secretariat (2017). The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control an Accelerator for Sustainable Development. Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org/publications/who-framework-convention-tobacco-control-accelerator-sustainable-development> (access on 02 May 2020).

iii WHO (2013). Guidelines for implementation of Article 5.3 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Retrieved from <https://fctc.who.int/publications/m/item/guidelines-for-implementation-of-article-5.3> (accessed on 18 April 2020).

BOX 1. TOBACCO TRANSNATIONALS BEHIND POPULAR BRANDS THAT HOOK KIDS

The same tobacco transnationals that have long been condemned for deceiving the public and luring kids into addiction are now behind the most popular brands of novel and emerging nicotine products including e-cigarettes and HTPs e.g. Philip Morris International (IQOS and Juul via Altria), British American Tobacco (Glo, ITC, Blu), Japan Tobacco International (Ploom). PMI or Philip Morris, through Altria, fuelled the global expansion of Juul, a brand which faced controversy for targeting kids in the US. As of June 2022, U.S. Food and Drug Administration has denied JUUL Labs Inc. authorization to market its products.[61]

JUUL'S RAPID GLOBAL EXPANSION, FUELLED BY BIG TOBACCO



BOX 2. TOBACCO INDUSTRY STRATEGY TO GAIN LIFETIME CUSTOMERS

Tobacco companies expanded their range of products from cigarettes to emerging and novel products like HTPs and e-cigarettes, but retains highly addictive nicotine, to hook consumers for a lifetime.



Philip Morris: Marlboro and IQOS



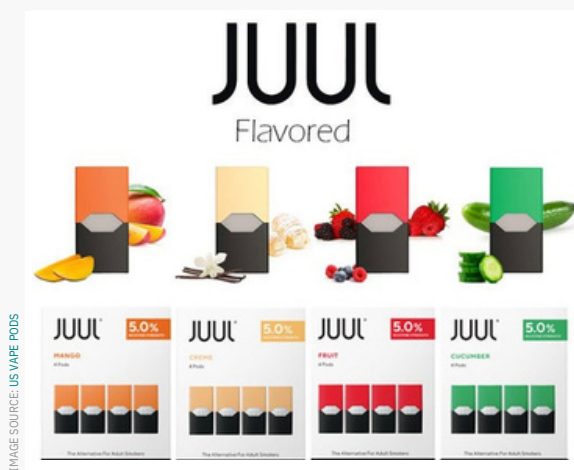
BAT: Lucky Strike and Vype

BOX 3. TOBACCO INDUSTRY STRATEGY TO GAIN NEW CUSTOMERS

Cigarette and E-cigarette products of major tobacco transnationals come in flavors that attract the youth.



Marlboro, PMI’s cigarette brand, comes in a variety of appealing flavors.



Juul, Altria’s (Philip Morris) e-cigarette product, comes in various flavors: mango, crème brûlée, fruit medley, cucumber, etc.



Blu, Imperial Brand’s e-cigarette product, comes in various flavors: vanilla, menthol, blueberry, etc.

BOX 4. TOBACCO INDUSTRY'S DOUBLE STANDARD ON FLAVORED PRODUCTS

Banning flavors in tobacco products protects the youth from initiation. Protecting the rights of children includes promoting their right to health. The tobacco industry claims that it cares for kids but applies a double standard: It does not sell flavored products in some countries but continues to do so in others.



Juul: mint, virginia tobacco, crème brulee, mango, etc. Used to be available in the US but is currently banned because flavors attracted a generation of teen vapers.



IMAGE SOURCE: TOKOPEDIA



IMAGE SOURCE: REDDIT

Marlboro: Watermelon and Mint. Currently banned in the EU and US but is currently available in Brazil, Indonesia, Japan and online.

BOX 5. TOBACCO INDUSTRY'S DOUBLE STANDARD ON PACKAGING

Tobacco companies are prohibited from making tobacco packages attractive. Many countries have adopted graphic warnings covering over 60% of the packages or require plain or standardized packaging. This is not the case for countries where tobacco industry lobbying is the strongest.



IMAGE SOURCE: ASIAN TRIBUNE

○ Implemented or about to implement plain packaging



IMAGE SOURCE: GLOBAL TOBACCO CONTROL

Attractive packaging (Philippines)

IMAGE SOURCE: CANCER INSTITUTE NSW

BOX 6. TOBACCO INDUSTRY MARKETING: TOBACCO VS. NEW PRODUCTS

Civil society reports show that in 2017, PMI announced that it has changed its ways, and even funded Foundation for a Smoke-Free World (FSFW) and launched an UNsmoke campaign to promote IQOS. However, to promote its new product, PMI adopted a marketing style that is similar to that of Marlboro.

MARLBORO — **PRODUCTS** — **IQOS**



IMAGE SOURCE: FOODLAND

Marlboro Silver, Philip Morris



IMAGE SOURCE: VOK

Marlboro Menthol, Philip Morris



IMAGE SOURCE: LIGHTERS GUAORE

IQOS 3.0 MULTI, Philip Morris



IMAGE SOURCE: VAPE GURU

IQOS HEETS, Philip Morris



IMAGE SOURCE: WHY QUIT

Marlboro, Philip Morris (2011)

2011-2015

2016-2017



PMI announced its “transformation” and established FSFW (2017)



IMAGE SOURCE: STANFORD UNIVERSITY

IQOS Party, Southern/Eastern Europe (2017)



IMAGE SOURCE: GEO

IQOS, Philip Morris (2017)

2018-2019



IMAGE SOURCE: @MMK_DESIGNSTUDIO

Marlboro Penthouse at DWPX - Marlboro landmark, Indonesia (2018)



IMAGE SOURCE: NYTIMES

Chesterfield, Philip Morris (2018)



IMAGE SOURCE: @ALINAEREMIA

IQOS, Philip Morris (2019)

UNSMOKE

PMI launched UNsmoke campaign (2019)

BOX 7. TOBACCO INDUSTRY MARKETING: SAME TACTICS, NEW PRODUCTS

Evidence shows how tobacco companies have targeted young women with its cigarette advertisements from the 1970s to 1990s. E-cigarette advertisements now look much like the cigarette advertisement of the past.



Virginia Slim, 1990, PMI (USA, British Virgin Islands, Brazil, Germany)



Blu, 2017, Imperial Brand (USA, UK, France and Italy)

BOX 8. EVENTS MARKETING BY TOBACCO COMPANIES FOR THE YOUTH

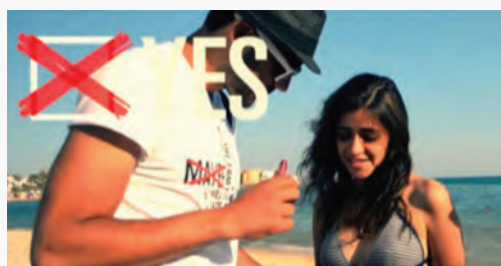
Philip Morris hosts and sponsors events, parties, concerts, and festivals with tobacco products paraphernalia that attract young users. Parties include alcohol, attractive women hosts, DJs, and live music suggesting trendiness and youthfulness. Organizers also entice attendees to post their experiences on social media.



Be Marlboro Concert (Marlboro Beat), Paleo Festival, Switzerland (2018)



Be Marlboro Beach Events, Atlantic Coast of Latin America (2012)



Be Marlboro Beach Events, Tunisia (2014)



IQOS Party, Southern/Eastern Europe (2017)



Marlboro Penthouse at DWPX - Marlboro landmark, Indonesia (2018)

BOX 9. DIGITAL MARKETING BY TOBACCO COMPANIES FOR THE YOUTH

The tobacco industry uses influencers to promote cigarettes and HTPs as lifestyle products. Digital media, including social media platforms where these are posted, can easily be accessed by the young.

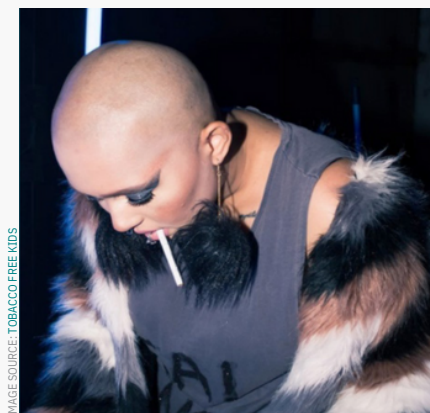
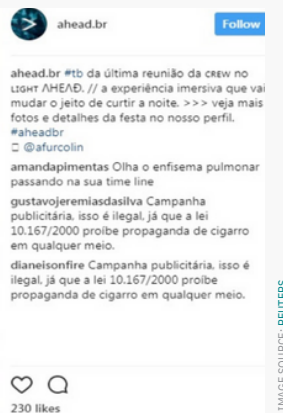


IMAGE SOURCE: TOBACCO FREE KIDS



BAT's #AheadBR campaign- promoting brands Dunhill, Lucky Strike and Kent



IMAGE SOURCE: REUTERS

IQOS, Philip Morris (2019)

BOX 10. BRAND MARKETING BY TOBACCO COMPANIES FOR THE YOUTH

Philip Morris launched Be Marlboro in 2011 to associate Marlboro with “freedom,” “independence,” and “confidence,” among others. This was sharply criticized by public health groups for attracting youths. A few years after, in 2018, after announcing that it has transformed, PMI promoted its IQOS brand with the same brand marketing approach.



IMAGE SOURCE: WHY OUT

Marlboro, Philip Morris (2011)



IMAGE SOURCE: GEO

IQOS, Philip Morris (2017)

BOX 11. YOUTH ACCESS TO TOBACCO PRODUCTS ONLINE

Cigarettes and e-cigarettes are made available for ordering online. Young consumers in different jurisdictions are able to override the age restrictions on websites.

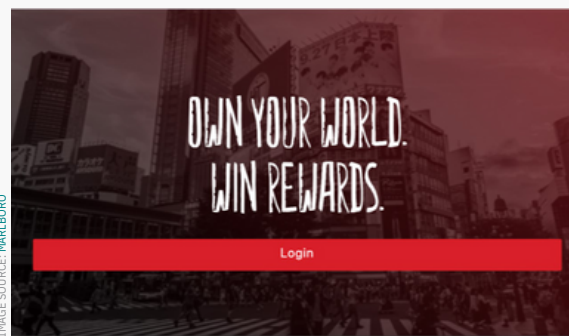


IMAGE SOURCE: MARLBORO

Marlboro

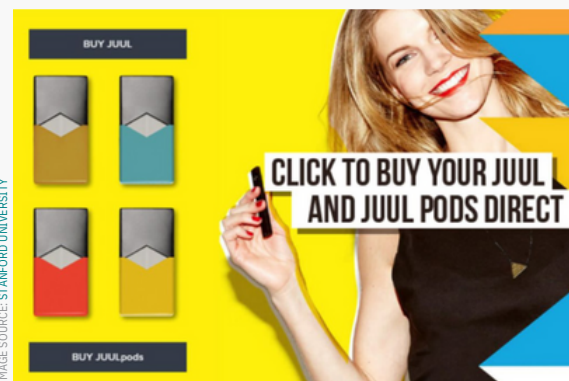
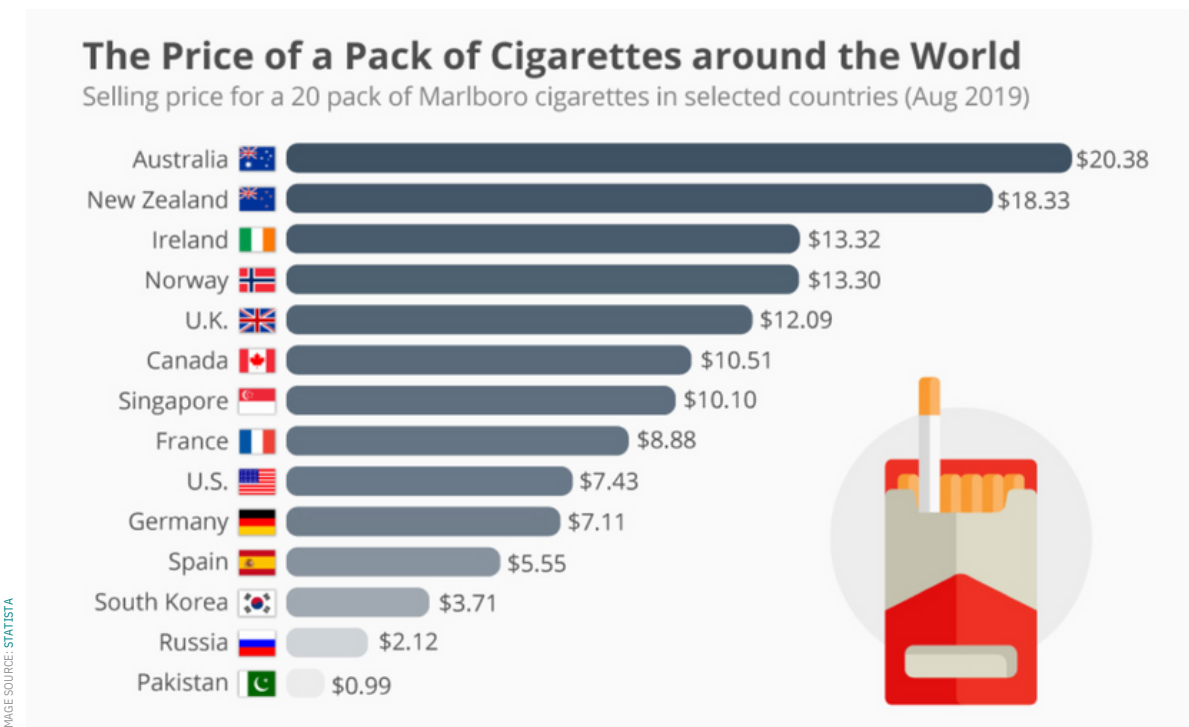


IMAGE SOURCE: STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Juul

BOX 12. YOUTH ACCESS TO TOBACCO PRODUCTS THROUGH INDUSTRY PRICING STRATEGIES

Tobacco companies price their products low so that school-aged kids can afford to buy tobacco products with their lunch money.



Even in places where cigarettes are already cheap, tobacco companies adopt a pricing strategy of selling by sticks or in “kiddie packs.”



“Kiddie Pack” of 10 cigarettes, Philippines

BOX 13. SPORTS SPONSORSHIP BY TOBACCO COMPANIES TO ATTRACT YOUTH

According to WHO, around **48 countries** have adopted TAPS ban and 103 countries have a partial TAPS ban. [52] TAPS ban typically includes sports advertising in mass media such as television, radio, magazines, newspapers, and billboards, while also banning some forms of indirect advertising and promotion. Some countries specifically ban sponsoring of cultural or sporting activities, events, as well as promotion of corporate social responsibility. But the tobacco industry manages to undermine these bans through the global exposure of tobacco's **Formula One** and **Championship Auto Racing Teams (CART)** sponsorship. Typically watched by adolescents and young adults, these sporting events provide tobacco companies plenty of screen time to showcase their branding, attracting youth.[53]



BAT's Velo nicotine pouches



BAT's Vuse e-cigarettes

BOX 14. 2019 CONRAD CHALLENGE SPONSORED BY PMI FUNDED FOUNDATION FOR A SMOKE-FREE WORLD

CONRAD challenge is an annual competition for school-going children to present their innovative ideas on a wide range of topics, including aerospace, cyber technology, health, education and the environment. In 2019, the competition titled "Smoke Free World Challenge" was sponsored by PMI funded Foundation for a Smoke Free World (FSFW), where their branding and name were prominently displayed. In addition, some representatives of the Foundation were jury members who had the opportunity to interact closely with the participants. "Some of the schoolchildren The BMJ talked to were appreciative of FSFW. "The employees of the foundation were very helpful. They gave us their business cards and mobile numbers and told us to stay in touch, maybe for internships in the future," said a student who took part as a finalist in this category. "They didn't tell us about any links to the tobacco industry," the student said."[62]



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The Danish Institute for Human Rights (4 May 2017). Human Rights assessment in Philip Morris International. Retrieved from <https://www.humanrights.dk/news/human-rights-assessment-philip-morris-international> (accessed on 25 May 2020). - "According to the UNGPs companies should avoid causing or contributing to adverse impacts on human rights. Where such impacts occur, companies should immediately cease the actions that cause or contribute to the impacts. Tobacco is deeply harmful to human health, and there can be no doubt that the production and marketing of tobacco is irreconcilable with the human right to health. For the tobacco industry, the UNGPs therefore require the cessation of the production and marketing of tobacco."
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