

The marketing of e-cigarettes: a snapshot



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The marketing of e-cigarettes: a snapshot

Introductionⁱ

The electronic cigarette (e-cigarette) was launched as a new consumer product in the UK eight years ago.ⁱⁱ Sales now exceed half a million per year and analysts predict the e-cigarette industry, which is worth £150 million in the UK,ⁱⁱⁱ will continue to grow as usage among smokers has more than doubled in two years.^{iv} At present, they are not classed as tobacco products or medicines in the UK and are therefore only regulated under Trading Standards legislation. The situation may change if the health regulator, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), enforces tighter regulations – a decision on whether e-cigarettes require marketing authorisation to prove safety and efficacy is imminent.^v ¹

These rechargeable, battery-powered products, which commonly resemble real cigarettes, contain liquid nicotine cartridges and heating elements and turn nicotine and other chemicals into a vapour which is inhaled by users.^{vi} They are mostly used by smokers who are trying to quit,^{vii} although there is currently little evidence to prove that e-cigarettes are effective smoking cessation aids.^{viii} ^{ix} Despite this, e-cigarettes have been marketed as smoking cessation aids in the US.^x Users and advocates of the product suggest that they are a safer and ‘healthier’ alternative to smoking, while opponents attest that it is an unregulated product, which keeps smokers addicted to nicotine, is dangerous and a possible ‘gateway drug’ especially for the youth.^{xi}

Young people’s perceptions of the e-cigarette and how they respond to the marketing of the product, however, are presently untested. The results of baseline studies suggest

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that younger, non-minority smokers with higher incomes have a high awareness of the product.^{xii} Furthermore, evidence from the US indicates that its health regulator, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), is responsive to the possibility of the marketing of e-cigarettes having an impact on the way in which children and adolescents are 'deceptively lured' into smoking^{xiii} – although the regulator's efforts to restrict promotion of the product have been hindered by consumer advocate groups lobbying government.^{xiv}

Increased awareness of the e-cigarette among young people could be connected to the fact that they are heavily marketed through electronic and social media.^{xv} Consumers appear to be interactively responding in online communities; comparing and contrasting numerous e-cigarette brands.^{xvi}

Tobacco companies are increasingly taking ownership of the e-cigarette market through mergers and acquisitions of smokeless tobacco companies, and promoting the products through evocative advertising.^{xvii} It is therefore a public health priority to understand how e-cigarettes are being marketed and how young people are responding to this marketing. The tobacco industry has a well-established interest in young people entering the market – the latest report on youth smoking from the Surgeon General (2012), for instance, estimates that 88% of smokers start in childhood.^{xviii}

This document provides a brief description of the current marketing of e-cigarettes. It presents a collection of advertising images for various brands of the product; some examples of how they are being marketed in the media (television, print and social media) and trade press; and a summary of how e-cigarettes are being discussed from a marketing perspective by the tobacco industry.

Advertising regulations and examples of misleading claims

As a consumer product, the marketing of the e-cigarette is subject to regulations enforced by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), which takes action against misleading, harmful or offensive advertisements across all media.^{xix} The UK Code of Non-broadcast Advertising, Sales Promotion and Direct Marketing (CAP Code), which is enforced by the ASA, has advised on the way in which e-cigarettes may be marketed. As the products are not currently licensed as medicines, assertions that their use could help smokers cut down or quit smoking are not permitted. Marketers have also been instructed to avoid making 'claims that smoking e-cigarettes containing vaporised

nicotine is healthier than smoking tobacco, or risk free, unless they have robust clinical evidence to support their claims'.^{xx}

In 2012, the following claims on a CIGIREX advertisement were found to be misleading as the advertisers did not have evidence to illustrate that the product was harmless:^{xxi}

'[CIGIREX]...may help you stop smoking tobacco cigarettes in a very short period of time with none of the side effects' and is 'a carcinogen-free nicotine oral delivery system'

The company now promotes its product online (see image below)^{xxii} ² by focusing on 'benefits' of the e-cigarette in comparison to tobacco cigarettes, such as the ability to smoke 'in places where traditional smoking has been banned'.^{xxiii}



In 2012, the ASA also ruled that a comparable advertisement by a different e-cigarette brand was misleading as there was insufficient rigorous evidence to prove it was safe:^{xxiv}

'...you can enjoy them safely, anywhere you want'

² These images do not belong to ISM. Every effort has been made to provide the copyright for these images in the references. Permissions should be sought for replication.

In January 2013, the ASA deemed claims on Nicolite's website to be misleading as the company stated that its e-cigarettes were harmless and there was insufficient evidence to prove this. The following statement was thus banned from appearing in this form:^{xxv}

'Although the vapour inhaled and exhaled when using Nicolite resembles smoke, it's simply a completely harmless vapour. The vapour has no odour and does not linger the way tobacco smoke does. So there's no danger of passive smoking posed to those around 'vapers,' as e-cig users are called. It's the tobacco that's harmful, not the nicotine, which is mildly addictive but poses no health hazard ...'



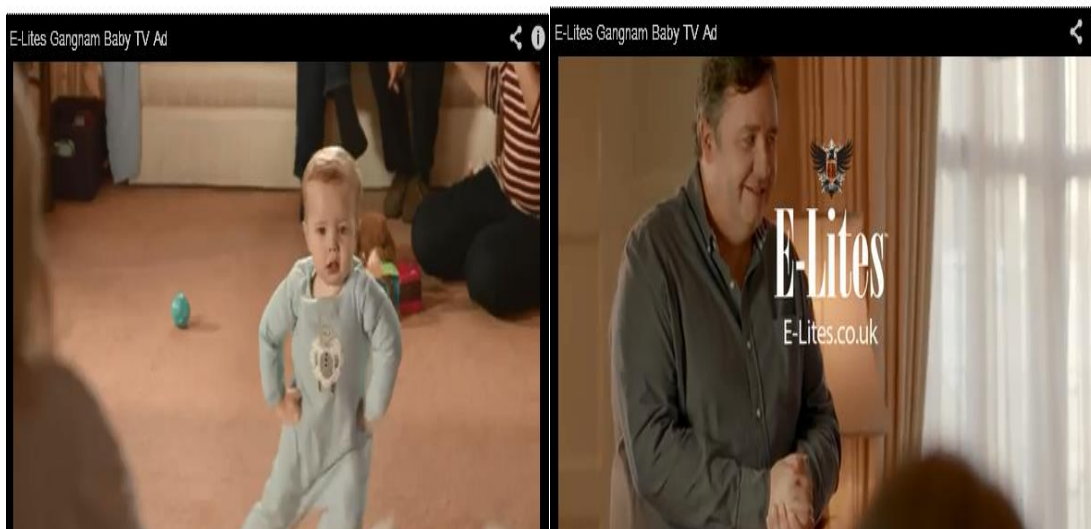
An e-cigarette advert linked to Nicolite's website ©^{xxvi}

Advertising on television

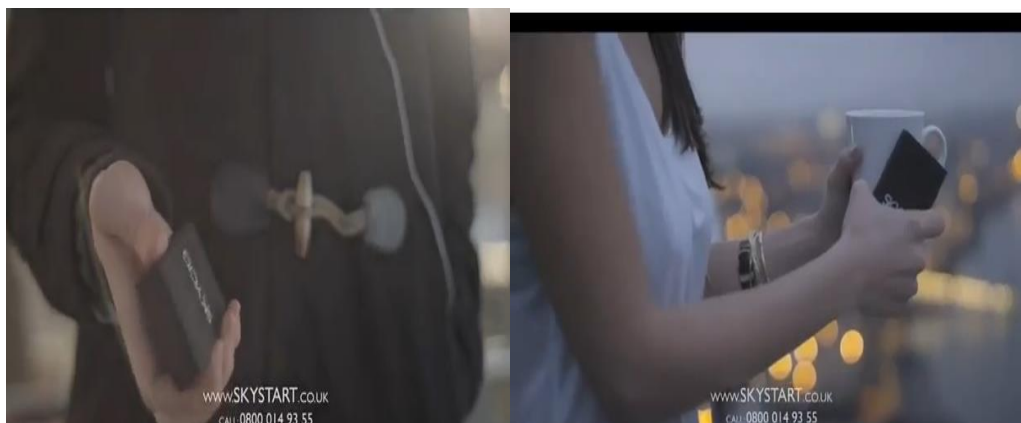
Several television advertisements for brands of e-cigarettes have recently been approved by Clearcast, which complies with the UK Code of Broadcast Advertising (BCAP) enforced by the ASA. It bans advertisements promoting smoking or the use of tobacco products and its rules state that:^{xxvii}

'... if a non-tobacco product shares a name, emblem or any other feature with a tobacco product (which would catch electronic cigarettes), then it can only advertise if it makes no reference to smoking, does not promote smoking and does not include a design, colour, imagery, logo style etc that might be associated in the audiences' mind with a tobacco product.'

As an advert can only be approved if there is no reference to smoking, e-cigarette marketers rely on sheer creativity when promoting their products.^{xxviii} For example, the E-Lites television advert which launched on a national, mainstream British channel in January 2013, was described as ‘light-hearted’ and ‘anti-smoking at its core’.^{xxix} It starred British actor Mark Benton, who stepped outside for a cigarette and consequently missed his baby’s first steps and surprising ‘Gangnam style dance’. It posed the question ‘What are you missing?’ (see images below).^{xxx} E-Lites reportedly waited more than a year to get approval for it to be screened.^{xxxi}



A television advert for another e-cigarette brand, SkyCig, which has been aired on satellite channels in the UK, portrays ‘young people hanging out, sending the message that life is all about sharing moments’^{xxxii} – see images below.^{xxxiii}



The first e-cigarette television advertisement was screened in the US in December 2012 for the brand Njoy Kings with the slogan 'Cigarettes, you've met your match' and the song 'Feels Like the First Time'.^{xxxiv} Its opponent, Blu eCigs, uses the theme 'Rise from the ashes' in its television commercial and features Hollywood actor Stephen Dorff, who claims to have smoked for 20 years before trying Blu. He appeals to smokers to be adults about the choices they are making: to smoke e-cigarettes without feeling guilty, whenever and wherever they want, and to 'take their freedom back' - see images below.^{xxxv}



Regulating adverts for e-cigarettes on YouTube and viral channels are not within Clearcast's remit.^{xxxvi}

Promoting e-cigarettes on television programmes and through celebrity endorsements

Characters on television programmes in the UK such as *Eastenders*^{xxxvii} and *Lewis*^{xxxviii} are also using e-cigarettes, and the products are being promoted through features in shows such as the *Alan Titchmarsh Show*^{xxxix} and endorsed by celebrity experts such as Dr Hilary Jones as part of the British Heart Foundation's No Smoking Day.^{xl} E-cigarettes are mostly referred to in the context of quitting in these programmes, despite the fact that they are not regulated as smoking cessation aids.

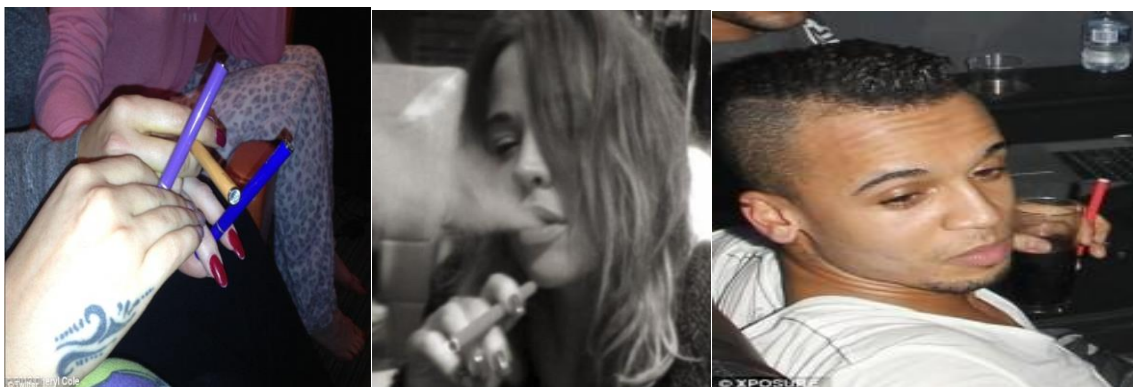
Similarly in the US, Hollywood celebrities have demonstrated how they use e-cigarettes to help them quit on television talk shows: whilst being interviewed on the *David Letterman Show*, for example, Katherine Heigl 'smoked' a Smokestik live on-air claiming she was addicted to the product, but it 'wasn't bad for you', and encouraged Letterman to have a 'puff' – see images below.^{xli}



Jonny Depp's character 'smokes' an e-cigarette in the feature film *The Tourist*.^{xlii} Other Hollywood celebrities including Leonardo DiCaprio, Dennis Quaid and Kevin Connolly have also been pictured in the press 'smoking' e-cigarettes, and company websites feature pictures of A-list celebrities who use their products^{xliii} (see image below).^{xliv}

The e-cigarette company, SkyCig, sponsors Tom Ingram, a 19 year old British Touring Car professional racing driver;^{xlv} and several British personalities, such as Girls Aloud and Aston from JLS, have featured in the print media smoking disposable e-cigarettes called shisha pens – see images below.^{xlvi xlvi}





In the British tabloids, smoking shisa pens has been described as ‘one of the trendiest new activities among the hip fashionable young crowd in the UK’ – ‘a hot new alternative for smokers who still want to indulge in the trendy pastime while staying healthy and still looking cool’.^{xlviii} Vapelux Ltd, the company producing the product which comes in ‘fresh bright colours’, has ‘a signature diamond tip’ and is available in various flavours such as apple, grape, strawberry, peach and blueberry, promotes it as ‘the finest and ultimate smoking experience without any of the harmful toxins’ and the ‘healthier alternative to smoking’.^{xlix} The disposable e-cigarette does not contain nicotine, but replicates the act of smoking.^l^{li}

Advertising e-cigarettes online and through social media

Vapelux has reproduced the pictures of celebrities smoking e-shishas in the media on its own website (<http://www.vapelux.fr/>). Consumers are encouraged to download the Instagram app to follow ‘theofficialeshish’, where photographs of celebrities using the disposable e-cigarettes appear on the online gallery.^{lii} Along with most other e-cigarette companies, Vapelux uses various social networking platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest. It also displays YouTube videos of people using the product.^{liii} See image below^{liv} for rival e-cigarette company, iSmok’s, Facebook page.



Elsewhere, the E-Lites website displays updates from Facebook, Twitter, Google + and its Blog, which make reference to special offers; its television advert (featuring its 'weapon, the Gangnam Style baby'); British Heath Foundation's No Smoking Day; and celebrities endorsing the product – see images below.^{lv} The company also encourages its Facebook friends to take photographs of themselves when using the e-cigarette at weekends and provides prize incentives for the best pictures. A savings calculator (complete with celebrity endorsements) is used to illustrate how cost effective the product is when compared to tobacco cigarettes.^{lvi}

TWITTER

ELitesUK: On Facebook we're asking people to send us some photos of them using E-Lites for #NoSmokingDay on Weds! Come join in! <http://t.co/jTw9v3leRB>
READ MORE >

ELitesUK: Noel Gallagher said Muse drummer's e-cig "lit up green when he had a drag". There's only one company that make green-tipped e-cigarettes...!
READ MORE >

ELitesUK: @fl_ash We can't wait either! It's going to be an exciting season and we'll be tweeting photos throughout! :D
READ MORE >



SAVINGS CALCULATOR

Compare your usual cost of smoking to E-Lites.*
See how much you could save.

Cigarettes per day 10 15 20 25 30 35 40+

Cost per pack \$5.00 \$6.00 \$7.00 \$8.00 \$9.00

Current cost of smoking
£240.00

E-Lites cost*
£60.00

Saving per month
£180.00



E-Lites Electronic Cigarettes · 5,782 like this

Friday at 6:43am · 🌐



Hope you're all set for a fun weekend! If you're out with friends, don't forget we're after photos of you with your E-Lites, so send in some wonderful photos from the weekend for us to feature next week!



E-Lites Electronic Cigarettes · 5,782 like this

March 5 at 6:16am · 🌐



No Smoking Day is on March 13th, and we're running a photo competition in the lead-up to it! We're looking for photos of our E-Lites users who will be using our products on No Smoking Day. The winner will receive an E-Pro 4 Kit worth £64.99, and will be announced on the 13th. Get creative with your photos, but make sure you and your E-Lite are in shot and the best photos will make it to our Facebook page next week! You've got until Friday to get your photos in! Just post them to our page! Have fun!

e-Cigarette review websites such as Tech-Cigarette.com have also been created 'to ensure that Electronic Cigarette lovers from across the globe are provided with the latest and the most comprehensive information pertaining to the top electronic cigarette brands that are available in the international market'. The website hosts a blog, which has features including 'The Changes Your Body Undergoes When You Quit Tobacco Cigarettes and Start Puffing Electronic Cigarettes' - see images below.^{lvii}



Top 10 E Cig Brands 2013	
<div>1</div> V2 Cigs <div>Visit Site</div> <div>View Reviews</div>	<div>7</div> The Smoke Tip <div>Visit Site</div> <div>View Reviews</div>
<div>2</div> Green Smoke <div>Visit Site</div> <div>View Reviews</div>	<div>8</div> Premium E-Cigarette <div>Visit Site</div> <div>View Reviews</div>
<div>3</div> South Beach Smoke <div>Visit Site</div> <div>View Reviews</div>	<div>9</div> Electronic Cigarettes Inc <div>Visit Site</div> <div>View Reviews</div>
<div>4</div> Ever Smoke <div>Visit Site</div> <div>View Reviews</div>	<div>10</div> Chase Cigs <div>Visit Site</div> <div>View Reviews</div>
<div>5</div> Vapor Couture <div>Visit Site</div> <div>View Reviews</div>	
<div>6</div> White Cloud <div>Visit Site</div> <div>View Reviews</div>	

The social network platform, Vapers Place, has been created for e-cigarette users to join groups and post on forums, and allows members to integrate their Twitter or YouTube accounts to allow content to appear on the homepage activity stream. Vapers Place also hosts *The VP Live Network*, where live radio and filmed shows are broadcast from the website in real time – see image below.^{lviii}



Some e-cigarette companies have developed internet-based marketing strategies, such as ‘affiliate marketing schemes’. These allow users to become profiting distributors in a matter of minutes thereby turning consumers into sellers.^{lix} Others are using ‘deal-of-the-day websites’ such as Groupon to promote their products at discounted rates – see image below.^{lx} One brand, which uses the design of a famous US tattoo artist and elaborate colours, sells e-cigarettes packaged in a collectable tattoo designed box with bespoke messages – see image below.^{lxi} VIP offers loyalty cards to devoted consumers.

E-Cigarette Kit With Mains, US Charger, Plus Refills from £19 Delivery (Up to 59% Off)

More Info!

**Amount:
from £19.95**

Discount 59%	You save £28.40
-----------------	--------------------





[© loyalty card photos, Paul Simpson; © VIP <http://www.vipelectroniccigarette.co.uk/>]

e-Cigarette brands generally have their own websites, which allow consumers to purchase products directly from them online. They feature pictures of the products, usually in the hands of attractive young men and women: see images on South Beach Smoke's website^{lxii} and comparable images on Ever Smoke's website.^{lxiii} Vapor Coutour advertises its products (with flavours including 'Sexy Bombshell'; 'Rodeo Drive'; 'Fresh Mint' and 'Passion Fruit') with 'gorgeous', 'must-have' accessories;^{lxiv} and VIP advertises limited editions (such as cinnamon flavour) and other promotions alongside glamorous models in classic black-and-white photographs.^{lxv}

While most of the websites promoting and selling e-cigarettes state that products are not available to those under the age of 18, there is no clear mechanism to authenticate age. The need to monitor the marketing of these products to minors is highlighted by the fact that some brands are using images, which may appeal to children. Totally Wicked, for example, which describes itself as 'much more than just a supplier of electronic cigarettes and e-liquid' but 'a community' and 'smoking evolution', promotes its products through witty cartoons and interactive social media platforms. Its website features an interview with a character called 'Mr Wicked' and the company has established a partnership with a local rugby club – see images below.^{lxvi}



Blu e-Cigs has taken social networking to a new level by creating 'smart packs', which alerts users when they come into fifty feet of other users - both packs start vibrating and flashing a blue light. The packs can be set to transmit Facebook and Twitter profiles in the event that users do not wish to approach others in real life settings, but would rather make virtual friends.^{lxvii}



Sparkling Crystal Tips
RECHARGE BATTERIES

You'll Fall in Love...
SLIM, ELEGANT E-CIGS
PICK YOUR COLOR

View the Lookbook

VAPOR COUTURE
Made for Women

VAPOR COUTURE'S
STARTER KITS
SHOP NOW

FOLLOW US ON
Facebook Twitter Pinterest

What is VAPOR COUTURE?
Gorgeous Accessories
SHOP NOW

YOU'LL FALL IN LOVE WITH
VAPOR COUTURE

Bomb Shell
Vapor COUTURE

Rodeo Drive
Vapor COUTURE

Fresh Mint
Vapor COUTURE

Passion Fruit
Vapor COUTURE

Cinnamon Cartomizers
Limited Edition Specialist Flavours

Now £5.39
~~£8.99~~
Order Now

5 CARTOMIZERS
VIP
200
Cigarettes Approx

LIMITED EDITION

Advertising in the trade press

The trade press has also featured multiple page spreads advertising e-cigarettes: June 2012, November 2012 and January 2013 editions of *Convenience Store*, for example, ran features called 'spotlight on electronic cigarettes' with full and half-page sized advertisements for various brands.^{lxviii lxix lxx}

The Grocer has featured a reader offer to win 'a fully stocked counter-top E-Lites display'; a job advertisement for NICOCIG Field Account Managers; and a feature on e-cigarettes, which included an Intellicig display on a till counter for point of sale promotion.^{lxxi lxxii lxxiii}



E-Lites
ELECTRONIC CIGARETTES
SMOKING. REINVENTED

TRY IT TODAY!
£4.99

20 'CIGARETTES'
COST £2 USING E-TIPS

500 Disposable £2.49 40 Disposable £2.49 USB Charger £3.49

offer 2
Win yourself a fully stocked counter-top E-Lites display

E-Lites, the UK's leading electronic cigarette brand, is giving away a counter-top display unit (rsp: £169.77) to five readers of *The Grocer*.

The E-Lites patented design offers a unique smoking experience that recreates the sensation of traditional cigarettes without the negative effects of smell, smoke, legal restrictions or impact on passive smokers.

The display elegantly showcases the E-Lites range. For more information on E-Lites visit www.e-lites.co.uk



An industry perspective of e-cigarettes

The development and growth of the e-cigarette market has received a lot of interest in tobacco industry journals. In *Tobacco Journal International* (TJI), there have been 73 mentions of the product from February 2001 until March 2013 (when this document was drafted). Analysts predict that in 2050, a third of the tobacco market excluding cigarettes will be comprised of tobacco-less nicotine delivery devices, almost certainly dominated by cigarette mimicking products.^{lxxiv} It is also noted that the e-cigarette

market will be controlled by the major tobacco companies as only they have the marketing force to create a real competitor to other tobacco product sectors.^{lxxv}

The tobacco industry recognises that non-tobacco products are perceived as ‘reduced harm’ products and do not need to convey the same warnings as tobacco products. E-cigarettes can therefore be marketed more freely.^{lxxvi}

The Euromonitor International 2050 forecast envisages a market where non-combustible, non-tobacco cigarettes (NNCs), including e-cigarettes, account for approaching 5 per cent by value of the total market, more than any single OTP category (cigars, smoking and smokeless tobacco). These NNCs could also well enjoy a “reduced harm” regulatory status and not have to carry the same warnings as tobacco products.

The industry is also aware that the licensing of e-cigarettes as medicines is a lengthy and expensive regulatory process and that the pharmaceutical industry would be best placed to corner this market. As a result, analysts predicted four years ago that the tobacco industry would call for e-cigarettes to be established as consumer products and market them as extensions of their brands. They recognised that the tobacco industry has the marketing skills and financial ability to make the product a success:^{lxxvii lxxviii}

The products envisaged to dominate the nicotine delivery sector of the market are cigarette mimicking devices. Some will be the evolved version of the e-cigarette but it is envisaged that, by 2050, a range of new products will have entered this sector which look like cigarettes, are not electronic and are marketed by the major tobacco companies because it is probable that only the major tobacco companies have the marketing strength to create a product sector to rival the other OTP sectors.

Will pharma get its way and have e-cigarettes subjected to drug legislation and buy time? For the makers of e-cigarettes, this would mean spending millions of dollars on clinical research, plus having to wait several years before gaining regulatory approval. In effect, it would wipe out the legal e-cigarette market immediately until pharma (or anyone else) had their own versions of the e-cigarette in place as a “new drug delivery system”, should they desire to follow this path. Or will tobacco enter the fray and stake its claim that an e-cigarette is a consumer product for adult pleasure and that only they really understand smokers and are therefore predestined to take on a leading role, i.e. with flavoured nicotine to match the “real thing”? Will we be seeing e-cigarettes with that Marlboro, Lucky Strike, Newport or Camel taste? Can tobacco afford to miss this opportunity? It is a fair assumption that many smokers would smoke cigarettes and e-cigarettes in parallel, depending on circumstances, so there is some sense to this argument. Either way, tobacco and/or pharma could make a success of the e-cigarette (if the product is right). They both have the professional marketing savvy and the financial clout to do so.

The March 2013 edition of the journal includes a lengthy feature on e-cigarettes and poses the question: ‘An idea [e-cigarettes] whose time has come?’ suggesting that regulation could ‘short circuit the e-party’.^{lxxix}

Tobacco companies are increasingly taking ownership of the e-cigarette market through mergers and acquisitions of smokeless tobacco companies or establishing company divisions for these cigarette alternatives.^{lxxx} British American Tobacco (BAT) established Nicoventures in 2011 and has plans to launch its nicotine inhaler by the end of 2014.^{lxxxi} ^{lxxxii} It also acquired CN Creative in December 2012 ‘as a natural extension of BAT’s approach to tobacco harm reduction that has been evolving over a number of years’.^{lxxxiii} In 2012, Kind Consumer, a healthcare company developing innovative inhalation technologies for the consumer and medical markets, was backed by BAT and sought a multi-million pound investment from private sponsors to research and develop cigarette substitutes for launch around 2015.^{lxxxiv}

The tobacco company, Lorillard, paid £90 million for the e-cigarette company Blu in 2012; RJ Reynolds has created its own e-cigarette brand;^{lxxxv} Imperial Tobacco has also invested in an e-cigarette company; Japan Tobacco International has agreed to commercialise nicotine ‘vaporisers’; and there are reports that Philip Morris intends to launch ‘a healthier version of its cigarettes under the Marlboro brand in 2016’.^{lxxxvi}

Research implications

Several brands of e-cigarettes are being widely marketed online as safer, 'healthier' and cheaper alternatives to smoking. It is common for e-cigarette companies to advertise that their products can be used anywhere – even in places where smoking is banned – and encourage consumers to regain their freedom.

The products come in various flavours, colours and innovative packaging; have been endorsed by celebrity doctors and actors and linked to charities (such as the British Heart Foundation); have featured in various television programmes and films in the UK and US; and been pictured in the hands of celebrities.

Even though e-cigarettes are not licensed as smoking cessation aids in the UK, many are being promoted for this purpose – sometimes on e-cigarette companies' websites based in the US, which are not regulated by the ASA. The UK advertising regulator has banned some claims on e-cigarette websites suggesting that the products are harmless as there is insufficient, robust evidence to prove this at present, and is monitoring television advertising of e-cigarettes, which cannot make reference to the act of smoking. The fact that they cannot mention smoking, however, does not mean that e-cigarette companies do not manage to communicate it. One task of any research is to check whether the current advertising regulations are effective.

Numerous e-cigarette companies promote their products on websites with images of young, attractive men and women and use social networking sites and other online marketing tools (such as internet-affiliate schemes). It is thus necessary for tobacco control advocates to observe how e-cigarettes are being marketed in the press; trade press; tobacco journals; through social media; television and other traditional and electronic communication channels and sources.

The tobacco industry is increasingly taking a stake in the business of e-cigarettes. As tobacco companies' main objective is profit-maximisation, they clearly see this as a commercial opportunity to normalise the concept of nicotine ingestion and ensure they control all the recreational and possibly pharmaceutical gateways to it. Furthermore, the current trend of e-cigarettes being positioned as a competitor to conventional cigarettes will vanish as tobacco companies enter and conceivably monopolise the market.

Its conspicuous youth dimension in marketing is alarming and raises several important questions including whether the tobacco industry is normalising smoking amongst a new generation, and how it is possible to reduce harm amongst a demographic that has yet to start smoking. Future research therefore needs to investigate how young people are responding to this marketing, specifically examining whether the publicity and marketing appeals to young, non-smokers and draws them to the idea of nicotine usage. It is also necessary to understand how young, non-smokers are perceiving e-cigarette use and users, and how this perception relates to their feelings about smoking and smokers.

For young smokers, we need to find out if this marketing encourages or discourages tobacco use; if it justifies their need for nicotine; reduces their ambivalence about smoking; or undermines tobacco control messaging.

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