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'Big Tobacco' using COVID-19 messaging and influencers to market products

May 15, 2020 by Arvind Hickman

An analysis of social media and influencer posts found evidence of tobacco companies using #StayAtHome hashtags, creative and giveaways - including branded masks - to market e-cigarettes, vapes and heated tobacco products.

News



Tobacco and e-cigarette companies have been accused of using the COVID-19 crisis to advertise e-cigarettes on social media and “undermine minimum age purchase restrictions” that protect minors.

The not-for-profit activist group [Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids](#) analysed the marketing tactics of big tobacco, e-cigarette and vaping companies in 28 countries, including the UK.

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used by governments and health authorities to market heated cigarette products, such as Glo and iQOS, and e-cigarettes, including Vype.

During the coronavirus pandemic, public health experts have warned that smokers and e-cigarette users are more likely to be vulnerable to COVID-19, and that smoking increases the risk for respiratory infections, weakens the immune system and can cause health conditions that increase risk of serious illness.

The social media and influencer activity ranges from incorporating ‘Stay at home’ messaging and imagery to special offers and discounts for purchases made during lockdown.

Some brands have used influencers to promote branded masks, and another has even posted a note thanking nurses on International Nurses Day. The not-for-profit also claimed that Philip Morris has waived ID validation checks in countries including the UK, a claim the tobacco giant has vehemently denied.

Posts advertising tobacco products were published after Facebook’s December 2019 announcement that its platforms would no longer allow influencers to promote tobacco products online.

In the UK, which has seen less aggressive tactics, BAT’s Glo Worldwide account posted about “partying at home” using the hashtag #netflixparty (see below). It also posted about [#workingfromhome](#) (with #discoverglo and #myglo).



 glo_worldwide • Following ...

 glo_worldwide Left brain says stay in. Right brain wants to go out. We're loving these new tools that let you party from home with no compromise. #BreakBinary #NetflixParty #Discoverglo #Myglo

22h

 mielersaus @maloyshort 

3h Reply

   

42 likes

22 HOURS AGO

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had promoted free delivery and “ordering in” during lockdown.

In other countries the marketing of e-cigarettes, vapes and heated tobacco products had a much clearer coronavirus theme.

In the US, e-cigarette makers and vape shops have engaged in pandemic-themed promotions such as free giveaways of protective masks with purchases and offering COVID-19 themed discounts (such as 'get 19 per cent off nicotine e-liquids by entering the code COVID-19').

In one promotion, vaping brand Moti America thanked nurses on International Nurses Day.

Happy
**INTERNATIONAL
NURSES DAY**
12TH MAY
#stay home #stay safe

21+
PROTECTION OF MINORS:
Intended for smokers or vapers over the age of 21 only.
WARNING: This product may contain nicotine. Nicotine
is an addictive chemical.

motiamerica • Follow

motiamerica Happy International Nurses Day !! 🙌👩🏻‍⚕️❤️
This year we will be saying an extra big thank you to all of our amazing Nurses. 🙌👩🏻‍⚕️ #thankyournurses #oursuperheroes You deserve to be honored everyday. 🙌👩🏻‍⚕️
Like this post to show your respect to them. 🌈

#MOTI #motipodsystem #motivape #motipod #vape #vapelife #vapeporn #vaper #vaping #ecig #MOTipiin #internationalnursesday #happyinternationalnursesday

2d

23 likes
2 DAYS AGO

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The study also found that British American Tobacco is promoting its heated cigarette Glo in several countries in special deals with discounts, contest prizes, branded face masks and hand sanitiser.

In Kazakhstan, BAT has provided Glo-branded masks to more than a dozen Instagram influencers who posted photos wearing the masks, with captions advertising free Glo masks with the purchase of a Glo device.

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glo_kz Hello! How do you quarantine? Are you sitting at home? Right 🙋 But if suddenly you are planning to go out, put on a mask! Can't find a mask anywhere? We will give it to you 😊 Until Thursday, March 26, you can get a mask for free in glo space on Nazarbayev 100G. Well, after that you can get the same mask by placing a purchase of the device on the website or in our outlet. Thank you for being with us! Take care of yourself and loved ones! * Attention, the information is intended only for adult consumers of nicotine-containing products.

#myglokz # quarantineglo #todaywillstayhome #stayhome #DinDinomi

196 likes
5 HOURS AGO

In Greece, Glo has run a 'Stay home' campaign on Instagram (*below*).



glo_greece • Following

glo_greece New CHALLENGE! 🏠 Can you stay indoors for as long as you can? Find creative and enjoyable ways to have a good time at home cozy!

Today I will ... STAY HOME! Can not wait? Get in Link in Bio to see what to do and win prizes that will make you discover the fun as #menoumespiti The winners will be announced with a direct message from the

@glo_greece

Participants must be 18+ and nicotine / tobacco consumers.

44 likes
2 DAYS AGO

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Bidi Vapor claimed on Instagram that “A Bidi Stick a day keeps the pulmonologist away.”

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bidivapor Vapors created by the Bidi™ Stick are cooler, which means your airways and throat are safe.

#BidiStick #BidiVapor #nicotine
#smoking #vape #vapepen

1d



25 likes
1 DAY AGO



Add a comment...

Post

In addition to social-media promotions, the report claimed Philip Morris has waived ID validation on delivery of IQOS in at least one country and referred to the COVID-19 crisis in at least 18 countries, including the UK, to promote special offers and home delivery of the product.

Philip Morris International told PRWeek claims it has waived ID validation were "deliberately misleading" and it had only encountered one case where a delivery service did not meet its obligations to check ID.

"We have not waived age verification on delivery anywhere," a spokesperson said. "We have instructed our markets to verify the age and identity of legal age users upon delivery, while complying with all government recommended COVID-19 safety measures.

"We are aware of a single case where these practices were not followed. We have carefully studied the facts and discovered a clear violation of our standards by the delivery service. We have already reiterated to the delivery service our age-verification requirements to avoid the possibility of Heatsticks being delivered to underage people.

In response to claims companies are exploiting 'Stay at Home' messaging, PMI added: "To ensure customers continue to observe government 'stay at home' guidance, we have informed adult users how they can purchase smoke-free products online, like many other retailers. This is particularly important to ensure that IQOS users do not go back to cigarettes."

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capitalising on a pandemic".

He added: "It's not just Big Tobacco – vape shops and e-cigarette-makers have stooped to new lows to target young people, mislead consumers and sell more e-cigarettes. As we continue to learn more about the harmful links between COVID-19 and tobacco use, these tactics should raise the alarm in every country around the world."

British American Tobacco has also been approached for comment.

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