

The effect of branded versus standardized e-cigarette packaging and device designs: an experimental study of youth interest in vaping products

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Abstract

Objectives: Standardized ('plain') packaging is effective in reducing the appeal of cigarettes among young people. This study examined the impact of plain packaging and brand imagery on interest in trying e-cigarettes among youth.

Study design: Experimental design.

Methods: Two online experiments were conducted in February 2020 as part of the ITC Youth Tobacco & Vaping Survey, conducted with 13,624 16- to 19-year-olds in Canada, England, and the USA. In the between-group Experiment 1, participants were randomized to view a set of 3 e-cigarette brands, in either their original external packaging ('branded' condition) or standardized olive-green packaging ('standardized' condition), and asked to select the product they would be most interested in trying. The within-group Experiment 2 examined brand imagery directly on devices, including potential differences in appeal among subgroups. Each participant viewed 4 pod-style e-cigarette devices: one 'plain' and 3 in colourful 'skins'. Logistic regression models were conducted to test the effect of condition, adjusting for demographics, smoking and vaping status.

Results: In Experiment 1, participants in the 'standardized' packaging condition were significantly more likely to indicate 'I have no interest in trying any of these products' (72.3%) than those in the 'branded' condition (66.9%, AOR 1.45, 95% CI 1.33-1.59). Experiment 2 results indicated differences in e-cigarette appeal by sex in the selection of male- and female-oriented designs, and by cannabis use for a Rastafarian-themed design.

Conclusions: Brand imagery on e-cigarettes can target products to specific subgroups. Removal of imagery, in the form of standardized packaging, has the potential to reduce interest in trying e-cigarettes among young people.

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