

How media stories in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) discussed the FDA's authorization of the marketing of IQOS as a modified risk tobacco product with "reduced exposure" information

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Background

- In July, 2020, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorized the marketing of IQOS Tobacco Heating System as a modified risk tobacco product (MRTP) with "reduced exposure" information.
- IQOS is the first tobacco product to receive "exposure modification" orders.
- We examined how the FDA's authorization was discussed in news media in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

Methods

- News articles published in LMICs from Jul. 7, 2020 to Jan. 7, 2021 were obtained via a systematic search of Tobacco Watcher.
- Articles were coded by two coders to assess presence of the term "MRTP" as well as reduced risk and reduced exposure language.
- Coders assessed presence of quotes from the tobacco industry and/or public health or medical professionals.
- Article location was determined then coded by WHO region.

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One quarter of articles misrepresented the FDA's authorization to market IQOS as an MRTP by including reduced risk language. Most articles included tobacco industry quotes but not quotes from public health or medical professionals.

Article content	% (# of articles)	Example
"MRTP" or "modified risk tobacco product"	72% (n=36)	"Last week, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorized the sale of Philip Morris' IQOS heated tobacco system as a modified risk tobacco product (MRTP) ." (Argentina, 07/16/20)
Reduced Exposure Only	50% (n=25)	"[Philip] Morris is seeking for the import provision in the decree to be reconsidered now that the FDA has announced that IQOS is a modified exposure product. " (Mexico, 08/12/20)
Reduced Risk	26% (n=13)	
<i>Reduced Risk Only</i>	8% (n=4)	"PMI Chief Executive Officer Andre Calantzopoulos claims that IQOS received a marketing license from the US Food and Drugs Administration this week as a safer alternative to cigarettes. " (Indonesia, 7/14/20)
<i>Reduced Exposure AND Reduced Risk</i>	18% (n=9)	Article title: " <i>US FDA Authorizes Marketing of Heated Tobacco Products: Less Harmful</i> " Quotation: "The decision was based on a set of scientific facts: first, that these products are completely different from traditional smoking, since they rely on the technology of heating the tobacco and not on burning it; and second, they reduce the chemicals that are harmful to human health that result from traditional cigarettes, according to a statement issued by the company." (Egypt, 07/12/20)

www.globaltobaccocontrol.org | www.tobaccowatcher.org

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Results

- We identified 50 unique articles published in 20 LMICs.

WHO Region (# of countries)	Articles % (n)
African (5)	28% (n=14)
Eastern Mediterranean (2)	6% (n=3)
European (1)	2% (n=1)
Americas (6)	26% (n=13)
South-East Asia (2)	8% (n=4)
Western Pacific (4)	30% (n=15)

- 26% of articles (n=13) included reduced risk language.
- 18% of articles (n=9) included reduced risk AND reduced exposure language.
- 60% of articles (n=30) included only tobacco industry quotes.
- 14% of articles (n=7) included only quotes from public health or medical professionals.
- 4% of articles (n=2) included quotes from both perspectives.
- 46% of articles (n=23) were in a Business, Finance, or Economy section; only 12% (n=6) were in a Health section.

Recommendations

- Additional studies in LMICs and the US could assess how reduced exposure information impacts risk perceptions of IQOS.
- Future research could also assess the extent to which the FDA's authorization is being used to shape tobacco control laws and IQOS marketing in LMICs.