

'Teenagers will certainly be curious'

Perceptions of intended audience & influence of tobacco marketing among Chinese high school students

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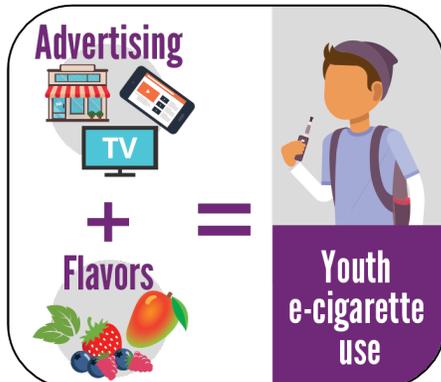
DISCLOSURES & FUNDING STATEMENT

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COIs: The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

RELEVANT BACKGROUND



Marketing → youth tobacco use

Similar patterns found in China

China's advertising restrictions

2015: banned cigarette ads in public places, online & in mass media

2022: (May) extended restrictions to e-cigarettes

Exposure to marketing remains

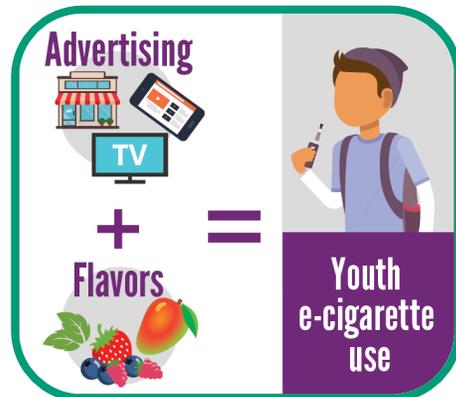
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Exposure to tobacco ads in retail stores **46%**

Exposure to tobacco ads online **23%**

Liu, S., et al. 2020 *China CDC Weekly*, 2(22), 385–393.

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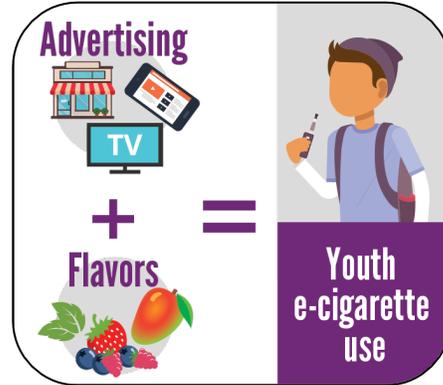
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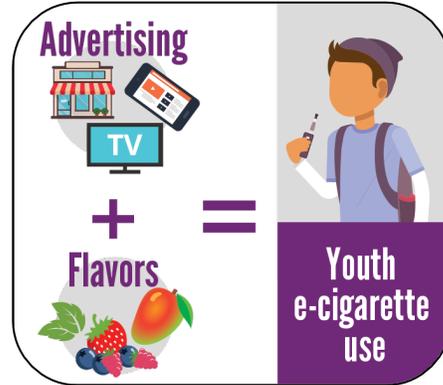
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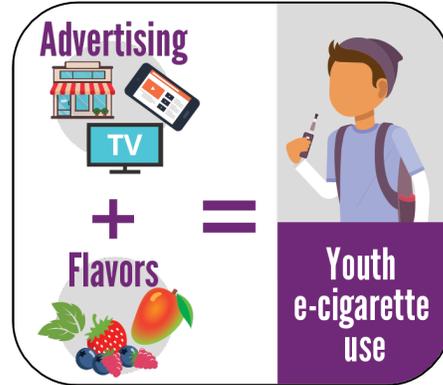
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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1.** To what extent do Chinese high school students perceive that they are the **target** of tobacco marketing?
- 2.** How do Chinese high school students describe the **influence** of tobacco marketing on youth tobacco use?

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

- Data collected Dec 2021-Jan 2022
- Recruitment in 10 cities in areas with highest retailer density
- 20 focus groups w Grade 10 youth, stratified equally by gender (n=119)
- Trained facilitators led 90-minute group discussion online, in Chinese



METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

- Discussion questions included the following:
 - Intended target audience and impact of marketing (defined as ads + displays)
 - Prompted response to photos to discuss who is affected by marketing in images



E-cigarette store inside shopping mall (Beijing)



Cigarette display inside convenience store (Beijing)



Cigarette display on view at stationary store (Shanghai)



Outdoor roadside stall selling tobacco (Kaifeng)



Cigarette ads on view at tobacco retailer (Guangzhou)

- We conducted thematic analysis of transcripts translated to English

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Cigarette display inside
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Cigarette display on view at a stationary store in Shanghai



METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Outdoor roadside stall selling tobacco in Kaifeng



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Cigarette ads on view at tobacco retailer in Guangzhou



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KEY FINDINGS

All groups discussed how e-cigarette ads & displays were largely intended for young people and focused on stylish ads & flavors



Participant 3: Now it's probably more about the **gorgeous packaging of the e-cigarette**. And some e-cigarette cases are more **attractive to young people who are in pursuit of the fashionable feel**.

Beijing, girls focus group

Participant 5: All of them, including the **pictures**, the **colors** of the vaping devices, the **flavors** of the pod, are very appealing to young people.

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All groups discussed how cigarette marketing seemed targeted to adults, except for flavored capsule cigarettes

Participant 6: I just think about it carefully. E-cigarette is for those young people. As Participant 1 says, the ads are young, trendy and stylish, so they are liked by young people. Cigarette is for those smokers aged 35 years old. They have low acceptance of fashion, so they smoke the normal cigarette.

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Participant 5: Cigarettes that have flavor capsule, they may appeal to teenagers.
Baiyin, girls focus group



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KEY FINDINGS

While some acknowledged that e-cigarettes could help adults who smoke, most groups identified them as part of youth culture.

Participant 2: I think e-cigarette attracts more teenagers and maybe some middle-aged people. For example, my family members use e-cigarette when they want to quit smoking. I see more teenagers smoking e-cigarette because e-cigarette is a relatively new thing. We teenagers think it's new and we want to get into contact with this stuff.

Baiyin, girls focus group

KEY FINDINGS

Most groups felt that exposure to public and online e-cigarette ads & displays directly increased youth interest in trying an e-cigarette



Participant 1: I think it will have an influence.

Teenagers often go to malls, and gradually after hearing and seeing these things often, they may be interested in these tobacco products.

Baiyin, girls focus group

Participant 3: For example, on Weibo, if [a blogger] post some e-cigarette ads, I may think that, since people I like so much are vaping I should also buy it to try.

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IMPLICATIONS



- Enhanced enforcement of current advertising restrictions in **public places**
- Enhanced enforcement of current advertising restrictions **online**
- Restrict visible, public tobacco displays
- Maintain **March 2022 ban** on flavored e-cigarettes, expand to cigarettes

LIMITATIONS

- 1** Recruitment approach limited to Grade 10 students

- 2** Only 10 cities across China represented in study

- 3** Marketing definition limited to only tobacco ads & displays

- 4** Data were collected in Chinese, analyses conducted in English

Thank you!

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