

E-cigarettes in Disguise: From Toys to Treats

Reiley Hartmuller, Tuo-Yen Tseng, Jennifer Brown,
Meagan O. Robichaud, Maryam Ibrahim, Raniyan Zaman,
Rozanne Lim, Joanna Cohen

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Background

Surveillance research shows that e-cigarettes are sometimes clandestinely designed to resemble other objects, such as USBs, based on research predominately from high-income countries.

This study examined e-cigarette products resembling other objects on brand social media accounts and retailer websites in Vietnam, a lower middle-income country where e-cigarette marketing and packaging were unregulated at the time of data collection. Since the study, Vietnam approved a ban on e-cigarettes, effective January 2025.

Methods

E-cigarette brands available in Vietnam were identified through searches on Google and e-commerce platforms and visits to local retailers. **186 posts** dated between **August 2022–January 2023** from **13 brand accounts** on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube were captured. The top **30 most visited retailer websites** targeting Vietnamese consumers were identified in **April 2023**. Screen captures of **497 webpages** within one click from the homepage on these sites were collected. A total of **9,019 products** were found on these sites. All posts and webpages were coded and categorized for the presence of products resembling other objects.

Results

Products resembling other objects were seen on 16% of social media posts and 2% of retailer site products, for a total of 170 products:

- Location: 29 (17%) from social media posts and 141 (83%) from retailer sites
- Product type: disposable (90%, n=153) and reusable (9%, n=16) e-cigarettes, and an e-cigarette case (1%, n=1)
- Object: cartoon/fictional character figurines (29%, n=50), drinks (24%, n=41), electronics such as phones (24%, n=40), space-themed items such as astronauts (9%, n=16), animals (7%, n=12), and food (4%, n=7)

Several products in these categories resembled toys. Other notable objects included a gun and a nitrous oxide bottle.

Conclusions

E-cigarette products resembling other objects were found online in Vietnam, perhaps taking advantage of the previous lack of regulations. Some of these products are disguised as toys or everyday objects that may appeal to youth.

Despite the ban on e-cigarettes, if implementation and enforcement are not done properly then we will continue to see these products online and potentially in retail settings.

E-cigarette products
disguised as toys and everyday objects
were found on social media posts
and retailer websites in Vietnam

Selection of Products Observed



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None.

