

# TOBACCO-FLAVORED? PRESENCE OF DESCRIPTORS AND ADDITIVES ON CHINESE E-CIGARETTE PACKAGING AFTER A FLAVOR BAN

## SIGNIFICANCE

Flavored e-cigarettes are attractive to youth, and flavor descriptors on packaging can increase product appeal and reduce perceived risk. In Oct. 2022, China banned non-tobacco-flavored e-cigarettes and published a list of 101 permitted additives under the Chinese National Standard for Electronic Cigarettes. We examined e-cigarette packs purchased from China, in 2023, for the prevalence of flavor descriptors and additives after policy implementation.

## METHODS

- TPackSS (Tobacco Pack Surveillance System) systematic protocol used to purchase e-cigarette packs from six major cities in China
- Native Chinese speakers trained to code flavor descriptors on packs (selecting all that apply):
  - tobacco
  - concept
  - non-tobacco
  - none
- Additive presence determined by ingredient listed on packs; experts reviewed flavoring proprieties of permitted additives
- Descriptive statistics used to assess prevalence of flavor descriptors and presence of listed non-tobacco flavoring additives

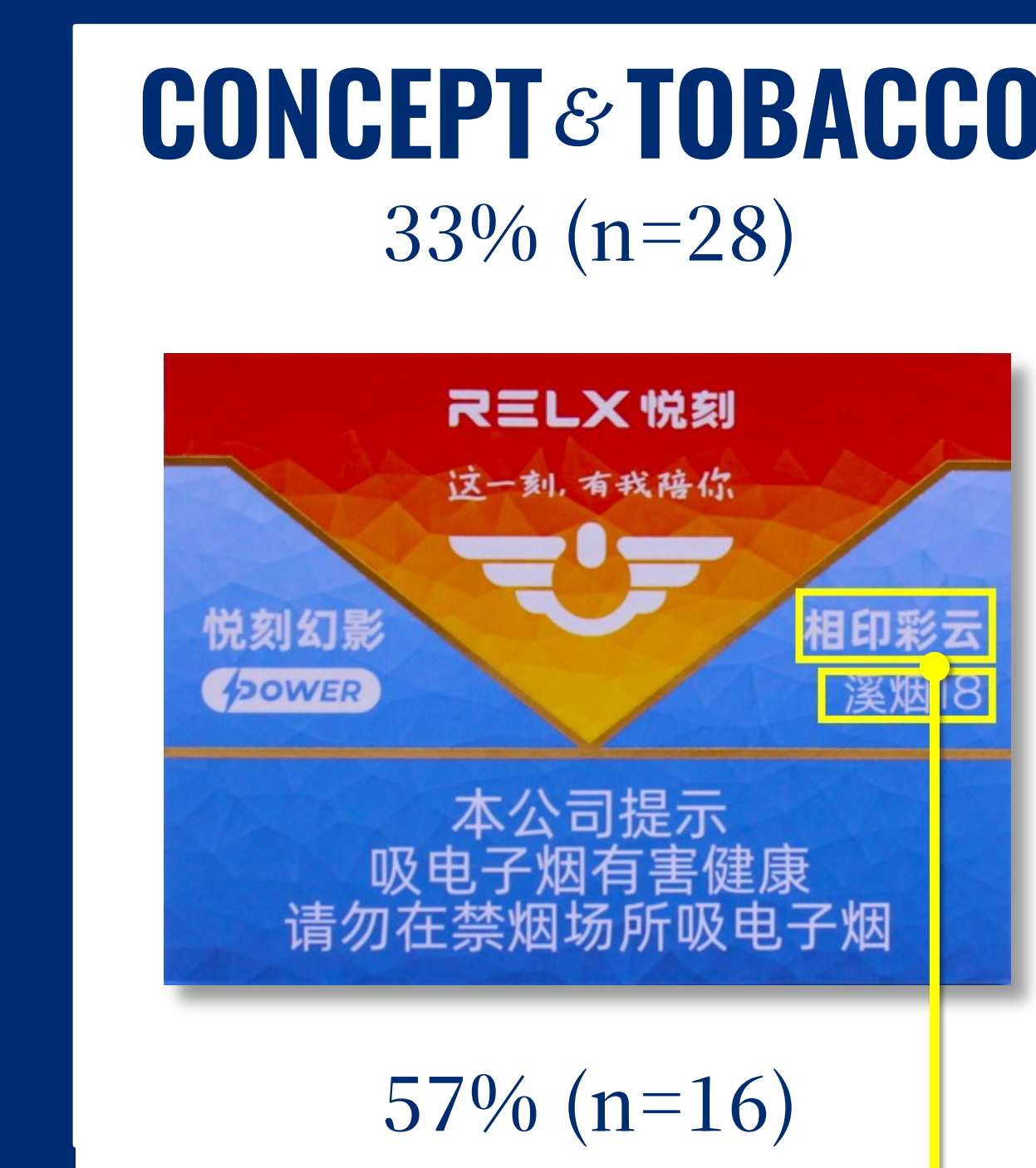
# DESPITE CHINA'S E-CIGARETTE FLAVOR BAN, CONCEPT DESCRIPTORS AND FLAVORING ADDITIVES REMAIN COMMON ON "TOBACCO-FLAVORED" PACKS

**PACKS WITH FLAVOR  
DESCRIPTORS**  
(n=84)

**LISTED AT LEAST ONE  
PERMITTED, NON-TOBACCO  
FLAVORING ADDITIVE**  
(n=35)



Translated text:  
"Colorful Summer"



Translated text:  
"Colorful Clouds;  
Creek Tobacco"



Learn more about the  
Tobacco Pack Surveillance  
System (TPackSS)

**GLOBALTOBACCOCONTROL.ORG**

This work was supported with funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies' Bloomberg Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use (bloomberg.org).

The work being presented has received funding or other means of support from any of the following sources:

Any of the authors have received funding (including consultancy) from any of the following sources in the past five years:

	Tobacco industry	E-cigarette & nicotine product industry	Pharma industry
The work being presented has received funding or other means of support from any of the following sources:	NO	NO	NO
Any of the authors have received funding (including consultancy) from any of the following sources in the past five years:	NO	NO	NO

Competing Interests: Dr. Cohen was a paid consultant in litigation against a tobacco company.

## RESULTS

- 219 packs collected; 143 unique
- 84 packs (59% of the unique packs) were **manufactured after the ban was fully implemented and included an ingredient list**

Of these:

- 19% (n=16) had **tobacco descriptors**
- 48% (n=40) had **concept descriptors**
- 33% (n=28) had **concept and tobacco descriptors**
- 42% (n=35) listed at least one **permitted additive capable of imparting a non-tobacco flavor**, most commonly ethyl maltol (n=10), imparting a sweet flavor, and coffee extract (n=9)
- No packs had any **non-tobacco characterizing flavor descriptors** (e.g., watermelon) or listed **unpermitted additives**

## CONCLUSIONS

Concept descriptors and flavoring additives are commonly listed on tobacco-flavored e-cigarette packs sold in China and implicitly convey flavor to consumers—including minors—thereby sustaining the sensory and marketing appeal of products and undermining the flavor ban. Stricter regulations (e.g., ban on concept descriptors, tighter additive restrictions) and strengthened enforcement could better protect public health.

## AUTHORS

Qinghua Nian, Katherine Clegg Smith, Kevin Welding, Jennifer L. Brown, Wentai Luo, Shuai Zhang, Pinpin Zheng, Lorraine Luo, Joanna Cohen