



Vital Strategies' Expanded Initiative to Protect Youth from Harmful Digital Marketing



Kids around the world spend more time on devices than ever before, and as they move through digital spaces; they are targeted by companies eager to peddle addictive substances, from electronic cigarettes to sugary drinks, alcohol and beyond. Such marketing encourages children to become repeat consumers of harmful products, raising their risk of disease and premature death.

Canary is a real-time media monitoring and reporting service that harnesses AI tools alongside expert analysis to identify emerging threats in the marketing of dangerous substances.

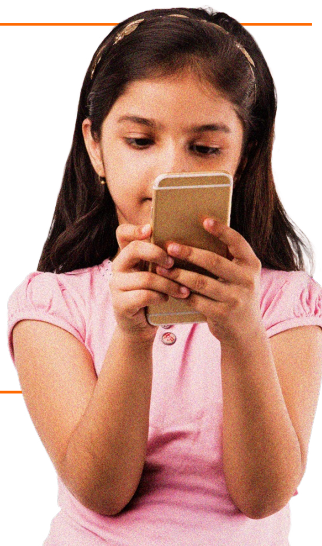
Since 2021, Canary has operated in India, Indonesia and Mexico, and in late 2024 the service expanded to Brazil, South Africa, and the Philippines.

What Kids See Shapes Their Choices—and Their Future

Our information environment guides the choices we make, and young people are especially vulnerable to the influence of messages and offers they find online. Using an AI platform to achieve scale, Canary has scanned tens of thousands of digital ads in a monitoring process that is real-time and continuous. **After pinpointing unsafe content and bad actors, Canary packages its findings into data sets, reports and actionable warnings that are shared with tech partners, public health advocates, policymakers and multilateral agencies such as the World Health Organization.**

You see her as the next tech genius. They see her as a target for addictive products.

Canary exposes the covert promotion of addictive products on digital platforms.



Impact and Growth

- Since its launch in 2021, Canary has partnered with governments and brought the issue of digital marketing of addictive products to mainstream media outlets, with media mentions collectively reaching **more than 920 million people**. Such coverage helps the public understand the scope of the threat and galvanizes action and support for policies that will protect young people.
- Canary is expanding its monitoring of alcohol marketing that targets youth in Mexico, Brazil, South Africa, and the Philippines, delivering timely, actionable evidence through its collaboration with RESET Alcohol, a program funded by Open Philanthropy, to inform stronger policies and corporate accountability.
- In Indonesia, Canary data intelligence strengthened SAFEnet's work through the YouTube Priority Flagger program, enabling systematic identification and reporting of tobacco-related promotional content that violated platform policies and the Health Law (Law No. 17/2023). The effort led to removals and the shutdown of major influencer accounts with more than one million followers, and informed the Free Net From Tobacco (FNFT) coalition's report documenting more than 3,000 tobacco-related videos. The findings point to enforcement gaps under PP No. 28/2024, the implementing regulation for the Health Law.
- Canary earned a 2024 gold award at the NYX and APEX Awards, which recognize excellence in creative communication, for its report "The Next Frontier in Tobacco Marketing: The Metaverse, NFTs, Advergaming and More."
- In India, Canary data intelligence strengthened enforcement of the Tobacco Advertising, Promotion and Sponsorship (TAPS) ban through two linked efforts: raising public awareness and supporting regulatory action. The counter-marketing campaign increased recognition of tactics that conflict with India's film rule under the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003, reaching about five million people on social media. In parallel, data was shared with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, enabling a more coordinated response to non-compliant content.

Beyond 2025

Solving a Dangerous Problem For More People in More Places

China

In late 2024, Canary partnered with the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention and Beijing Jiaotong University to launch portfolio projects, expanding the number of people it serves and setting the stage to protect a new generation from the promotion of harmful products.

Identifying Emerging Risks in Digital Spaces

Canary has deep expertise in tracking pernicious marketing on social media platforms. The monitoring shows that companies now link their promotions to metaverse environments, advergames and NFTs, alongside other emerging formats, to reach young people. Canary tracks these tactics as they appear in social media content.

Scaling Rapidly, Effectively

Canary is scaling up to achieve its potential and promise. Its mission to expose the covert promotion of addictive products on digital platforms is ambitious, and, as its growing operations indicate, the service is moving boldly in the direction of that ambition, to protect many more young people worldwide from reduced life quality and life expectancy. That is, **Canary is poised to do enormous good.**

But this cannot happen without additional resources. Holding substantial assets in methodology and expertise, Canary seeks new like-minded partners and sponsors who bring financial and technical capacity to the table, ensuring that the technologies shaping our future are directed toward measurable public health impact and the broader social good.

Featured Publication

The Next Frontier in Tobacco Marketing: The Metaverse, NFTs, Advergames and More.

Scan to read the report



About Canary

Canary is a project of Vital Strategies, a public health organization that partners with governments and local organizations to tackle the growing burden of noncommunicable diseases and injuries, using data and evidence to assess health and environmental threats and to move policy, practices and people. Our team of 400+ includes epidemiologists, policy experts, communicators, data analysts, and others who work in 80+ countries around the world.

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