

Findings from a TERM content analysis of e-cigarette marketing on social media:

Mexico



January 2023

Country Overview

Summary:

Mexico has a large population of children and youth (ages 12 to 24) using the internet, which has been found to be a leading source of exposure for e-cigarette/e-liquid marketing. After gradually restricting e-cigarettes, in 2022 the government of Mexico fully banned them.

Total population: 130 million

Internet and social media use rates:

- 88.6 million people actively use the internet, approximately one-third of which are between 12 and 24 (30 million).
- 78% of the total population uses social media (102.5 million).
- Mexicans spend an average of 3 hours and 20 minutes using social media each day.
- The top three most-used platforms are WhatsApp, Facebook and Facebook Messenger.
- 33.1% of Meta's ad audience are between 13 and 24 years old.

Exposure to e-cigarette marketing on social media:

47.4% of Mexican adult smokers/e-cigarette users were exposed to e-cigarette and e-liquid marketing on the internet, which was the highest of any source.

E-cigarette use rate:

0.6% among people 15 and older, with a higher prevalence for those ages 15-24 than for older age groups.

E-cigarette regulations:

In May 2022, the sale of e-cigarettes was completely banned. At the time of the study, the importation of e-cigarettes was banned, and the national tobacco control law (revised February 2022) banned the trade, sale, distribution, exhibition and promotion of any product that resembles a tobacco product.

Sources

United Nations Population Division: *World Population Prospects*. International Association of the Internet Mexico: *2022 study on internet habits (Asociación de Internet Mx: Estudio sobre los Hábitos de Personas Usuarías de Internet en México 2022)*. We Are Social, Kepios, Hootsuite: *Digital 2022 Mexico*. Barrientos-Gutierrez et al. "Exposure to e-cigarette advertising and vaping websites, and the social acceptability of their use among nicotine users" in *Pan American Journal of Public Health*. Pan et al. "Electronic cigarette use among adults in 14 countries: A cross-sectional study" in *eClinicalMedicine*. Government of Mexico: *Decree banning the trade of ENDS (electronic nicotine delivery systems) and devices with similar use (Gobierno de México: Decreto contra cigarros electrónicos y vapeadores)*.

Vital Strategies' systematic digital media monitoring system, the Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement (TERM), collected and analyzed three months of data on online e-cigarette marketing from Dec. 15, 2021 to March 16, 2022 in three countries: India, Indonesia and Mexico.¹ This fact sheet summarizes data from Mexico based on TERM's three-country study published in the journal Frontiers in Public Health. It can be used by tobacco control stakeholders to inform policy and advocacy efforts. Please refer to the full article for additional detail, including data visuals.

¹Please note that this study uses purposive sampling, which means our observations are based on a proportion of the marketing that is actually out there. Specifically, our study relied on text-based searches and was not able to capture any content that solely contains images. This may have led to an undercounting of marketing content on heavily visual media such as YouTube or TikTok.

Summary of key findings:

Most of the tobacco/nicotine product marketing observed online was for e-cigarettes, which were promoted exclusively by third-party retailers, many of which had multiple in-person locations. Most marketing messaging focused on product features and highlighted a range of youth-friendly choices in e-liquid flavors, design (colors or customizations), and technical specifications. Age warning labels were inconsistently applied to marketing posts.

Total volume of tobacco/nicotine product marketing observed:

- **E-cigarettes: 75% (318 posts)**
- Smoking products (cigars): 22% (95 posts)
- Heated tobacco products: 2% (10 posts)

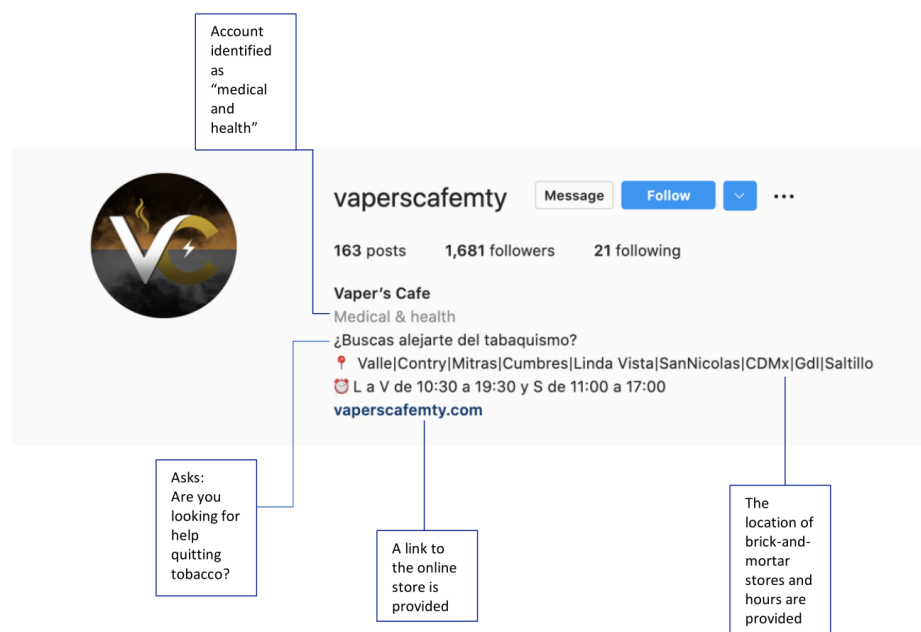
Number and type of e-cigarette-related accounts identified:

13 accounts, 100% of which were third-party retailers (Table 1).

How social media accounts promoted sales:

Directed traffic to both online stores and physical locations, providing hours for locations (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.
Sample Instagram account in Mexico



Social media platforms where e-cigarette marketing was observed:

Facebook (56%), Instagram (43%), TikTok (1%)

Platform that hosted e-cigarette-related content that generated the highest engagement:

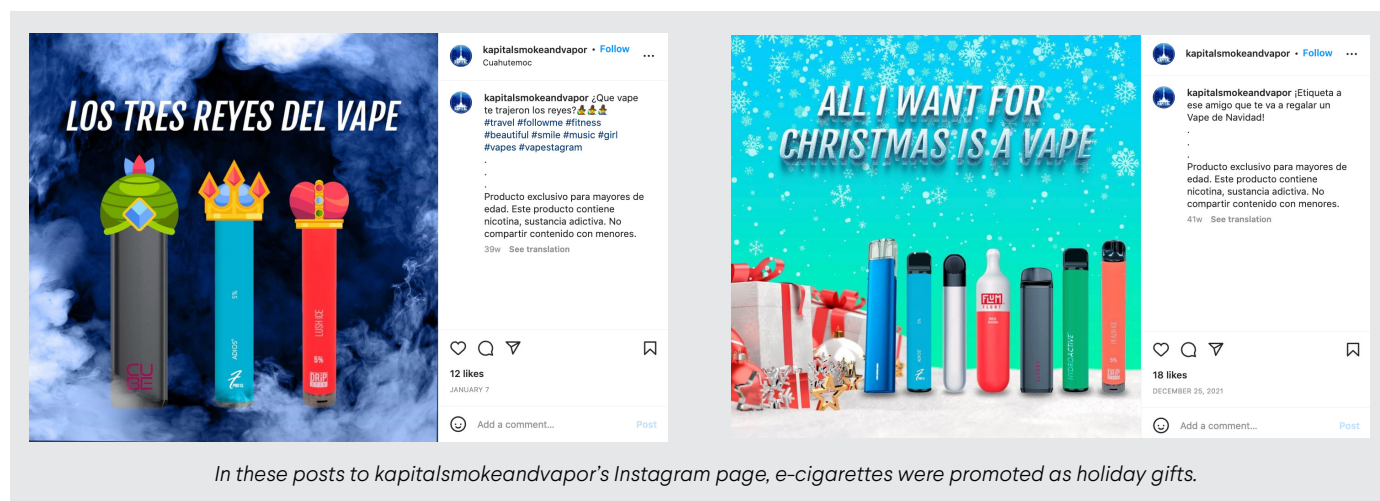
Videos posted to TikTok generated an average of 89 likes/loves, reshares and replies/comments.

Number of product brands that were observed being marketed:

48 product brands were observed being sold in Mexico, the majority of which were e-liquids. These included: Relx, Snowplus, Fantasia, Geekvape, Eleaf and more.

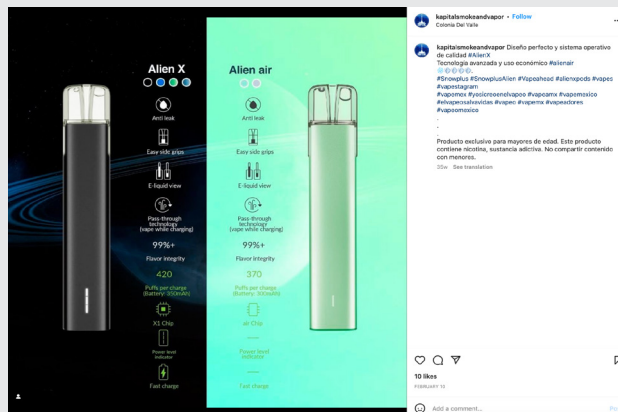
Marketing tactics used to promote products:

Direct advertising, or the promotion of products with clear visuals and the product brand name, was the predominant tactic used (93%). General marketing to promote the company (4%) and some price promotions (2%), sometimes pegged to holidays, were observed.



Message framing that was used to promote products:

Most marketing messaging focused on product features and highlighted consumer choice. These included device colors and design, e-liquid flavors, technical specifications and the usability of products (73%). Of the posts that focused on product features, 68% gave a general overview of the product without mentioning specific features or e-liquid flavors, while 18% focused on e-liquid flavors. These posts pictured either e-liquids or e-cigarette devices and often used vibrant colors; they occasionally pictured fruit and/or other natural imagery—often accompanied by terms such as “refreshing,” “delicious,” “ice,” “sugar,” and “exquisite.” The remaining product feature posts (14%) focused on technical specifications that were intended to highlight the ease of product use, including battery power, number of estimated inhalations, etc. The second most common message framing was health claims that positioned e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation aid (8%); the hashtag #elvapecosalvidas (#vapingsaveslives) was used in 48% of posts with this framing.



This post on kapitalsmokeandvapor's Instagram page compares the specifications of two Snowplus products and promotes their technical capabilities.



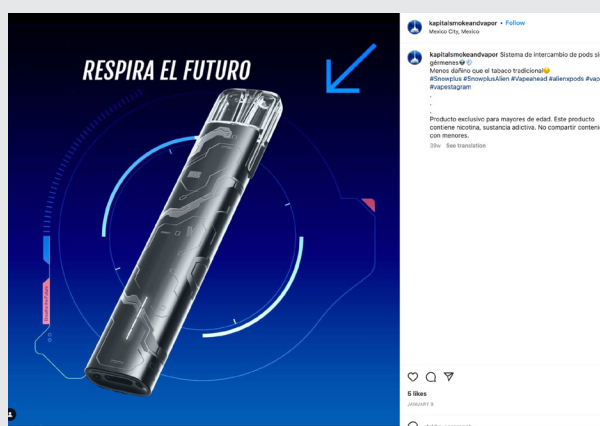
This post on kapitalsmokeandvapor's Instagram page encourages viewers to "taste the rainbow" while promoting fruity e-liquid flavors.

Messaging framing that generated the highest engagement:

Posts making health claims about e-cigarettes being safer than combustible cigarettes generated an average of 14 likes/loves, reshares and replies/comments.



The caption of this post shared to the kapitalsmokeandvapor Instagram account claims that there are many athletes that use e-cigarettes, including former smokers who experienced better lung capacity and felt stronger after switching to e-cigarettes.



This post on the kapitalsmokeandvapor Instagram account page encourages viewers to "breathe the future."

Age warning labels:

Some posts had no age warning labels; some had a label imprinted on the post image that indicated products were for 18+ or 21+; and some had more general warnings in post captions mentioning that their products were for “adults only” without giving a specific age (see Figure 2). Posts with this generalized warning would often mention that the products contain nicotine.

Figure 2.
Type of age warning label used

No age warning	18+ or 21+ label	General “adults only” warning
 <p>Source: ecig.mx Instagram</p>	 <p>Source: ecig.mx Instagram</p> <p>Source: kapitalismokeandvapor Instagram</p>	 <p>Source: kapitalismokeandvapor Instagram</p>

Recommendations

- 1. Counter industry messaging:** Disseminate accurate, youth-focused health information on digital platforms where young people gather to counter e-cigarette and conventional tobacco marketing claims. Campaigns may also be used to make policymakers aware of the dissonance between claims being made in policy contexts that e-cigarettes are a harm reduction device and the marketing messages that are being produced, which primarily frame them as desirable and harmless products.
- 2. Strengthen monitoring and enforcement:** Develop or strengthen rapid and continuous digital media monitoring surveillance systems to track players, marketing trends and policy interference efforts, with mechanisms for enforcement. Citizen-led reporting may be used to complement these efforts.
- 3. Bring online data offline:** Use digital media as a starting point to track and record retailers that are selling and marketing e-cigarettes through brick-and-mortar locations and online, in the wake of the government's ban on e-cigarettes.

Table 1. Observed social media accounts marketing e-cigarettes and e-liquids

Platform	Social Media Account Name	Account Description (Self-identification)	Total Followers / Subscribers (n) *
Instagram	ecig_depot	Personal blog	2,630
Instagram	kapitalismokeandvapor	No classification	3,020
Instagram	Ecigmexvapeshop	E-cigarette store	2,600
Instagram	Vaperscafemty	Medical & health	1,680
Instagram	centralsmokeandvape	No classification	1,320
Facebook	ecig.mx	Shopping & retail	5,433
Facebook	Vapor a la Mexicana MX	E-cigarette store	11,000
Facebook	lavaperiamx	E-cigarette store	7,430
Facebook	kapitalismokeandvapor	Product/service	5,592
Facebook	thehighclubsmokeshop	Accessories	42,050
Facebook	Vapers Cafe Monterrey	Product/service	10,838
TikTok	La soberbia store	No classification	1,170
TikTok	ecig.mx	No classification	2,270

*As of June 2022

About the Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement

Vital Strategies' Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement (TERM) is a real-time digital media monitoring system that tracks tobacco marketing online on social media platforms and news sites. TERM is currently operating in India, Indonesia and Mexico.

About Vital Strategies

Vital Strategies is a global health organization that believes every person should be protected by equitable and effective public health systems. We partner with governments, communities and organizations to reimagine public health, and the result is millions of people living longer, healthier lives. Our goal is to build a future where better health is supported across all facets of our lives, in our families, communities, in our environment and our governments.

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