

# Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement (TERM)

# Online Marketing of Tobacco Products

## Background

Article 13 of the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) recommends banning all forms of tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship (TAPS) across all channels. Online platforms, which are more difficult to oversee than traditional media channels, pose a significant challenge to controlling and curbing tobacco marketing. Vital Strategies' Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement (TERM) is a digital media monitoring and reporting system that tracks tobacco marketing on social media platforms and news sites with the widest circulation in each country. This situation report is part of a series that summarizes observed examples of online tobacco marketing in India. TERM does not allege or attempt to identify whether these tobacco marketing instances are in violation of local or international laws. Visit the TERM website to learn more and to view all reports.

### Definitions used in this report

**Volumes:** Total number of mentions (posts, including reposts/retweets).

**Views:** Online audiences' interactions in the conversations; Likes, comments, Views, Shares for a post online.

**Interactions.** Interactions are broadly defined as audience communication on a social post. Interactions are platform-specific, meaning that each social platform has its own unique interaction data. Twitter interactions include Likes, Replies, and Retweets against a Tweet. Facebook interactions include Likes and Reactions, Comments, Shares and Views against a Facebook Post. Instagram interactions include Likes and Comments against an Instagram Post. YouTube interactions include Likes and Dislikes, Comments and Views against a video.

**Interactions + views (total):** The total number of social interactions, including likes, dislikes, reactions, retweets, comments, replies and shares. The number of views is included when available.

**Potential Impression:** Total number of people who were potentially exposed to the mentions.

**Sentiments:** The underlying tone of the mentions classified as either neutral, positive or negative.

## Executive Summary

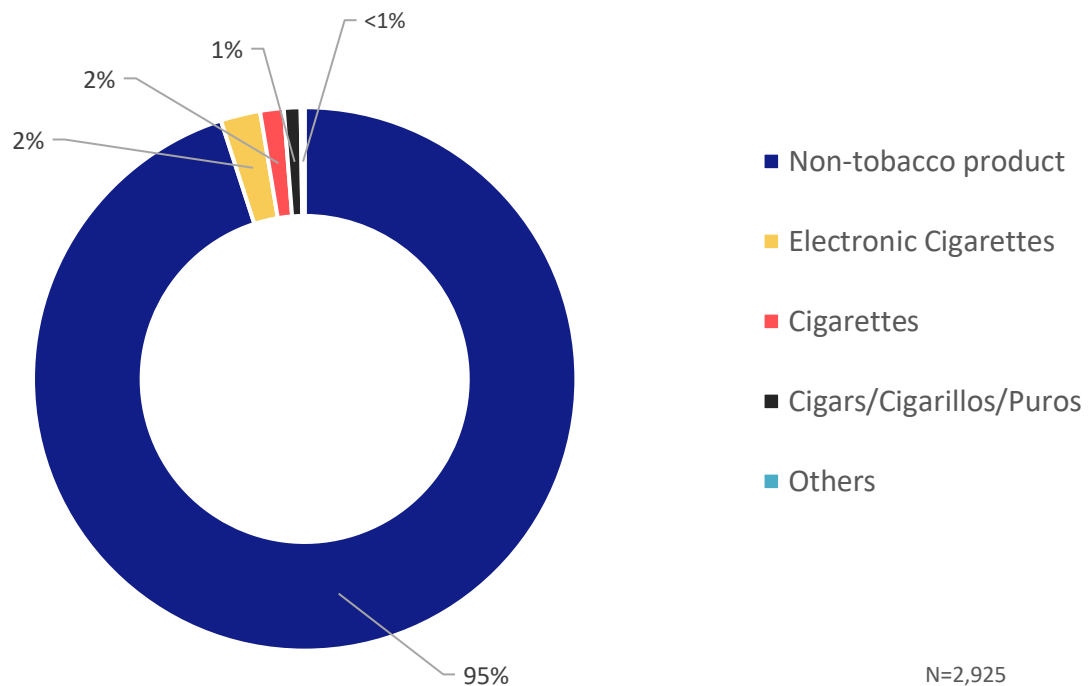
In response to evolving consumer preferences and regulatory pressure, the Indian tobacco industry is undergoing a notable shift, with companies like Godfrey Phillips India and ITC Ltd. emphasizing growth, shareholder value, and diversification into alternative products such as nicotine pouches and heated tobacco. Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) have emerged as the primary digital platforms for tobacco marketing in India during the September–November period, with brand extension and surrogate marketing being the most prominent strategies employed. Entertainment, nutritional, and wellness brands, as well as mouth fresheners, are being heavily promoted by companies like Miraj Group, DS Group, and ITC Ltd. through these tactics. The messaging primarily focuses on entertainment and product features, aiming to increase brand visibility, particularly for non-tobacco categories. Despite the industry's efforts to diversify, non-tobacco products continue to dominate the marketing landscape, accounting for more than 95% of the total marketing activity.

- Tobacco companies including Godfrey Phillips India and ITC Ltd. highlight their growth, focus on raising shareholder returns and explore alternatives like nicotine pouches and heated tobacco products: International players like Philip Morris International (PMI) are continuing to push for innovation in the tobacco sector by embracing newer products such as heated tobacco products (HTPs) and nicotine pouches.
- **Platforms:** From September to November, Instagram (42%) and X – formerly Twitter (28%), which together accounted for 70% of the overall share of posts, were the primary platforms used for online tobacco marketing in India. Facebook was also notable with 25%, while YouTube and news sites had 3% and 2% of posts, respectively. Instagram employed visual imagery and videos to increase visibility while X continues to be used by tobacco companies to drive “news-sharing” to amplify their messaging.
- **Marketing tactics:** Brand extension (78%) was the most common tactic by companies like Miraj Group, DS Group, and ITC Ltd. by promoting entertainment, processed food products, and household items such as Miraj Cinemas, Catch Foods, Sunfeast, Sunbeam, and Mangaldeep. Surrogate marketing (13%) was used by DS Group, Kothari, and DB Signature through pan masala brands like Rajnigandha Silver Pearls, and DB Signature Elaichi. General PR (4%) was minimally used, focusing on earnings and innovations in products like electronic cigarettes. Direct ads (3%) were primarily used to promote cigars and electronic cigarettes, featuring third-party retailers such as Cigar Conexion and Vape\_wholesaler\_india.
- **Message framing:** Entertainment (56%) and product features (15%) were predominantly used. This reflects the continued strategy of leveraging popular social pastimes like movies and focus on product benefits to drive brand visibility especially for the non-tobacco product category. Product features of electronic cigarettes were highlighted in posts to attract potential consumers.
- **Tobacco types:** Non-tobacco products dominated the marketing landscape, capturing over 95% of the share of marketing activity. This was because of the huge presence of brand extension and surrogate products which are marketed by the tobacco company brands.

## Detailed Insight

**Which product categories dominate the marketing landscape?** Non-tobacco products (95%) dominated the social media marketing landscape (Figure 1). This was primarily driven by extensive brand extension and surrogate product activity, where tobacco companies promote non-tobacco goods and services to maintain brand visibility and circumvent advertising restrictions. Electronic cigarettes (2%) were promoted by third-party retailers. Marketing of cigarettes, cigars, and other tobacco product (3%) were also observed (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**  
**Distribution of Total Posts by Tobacco Type**

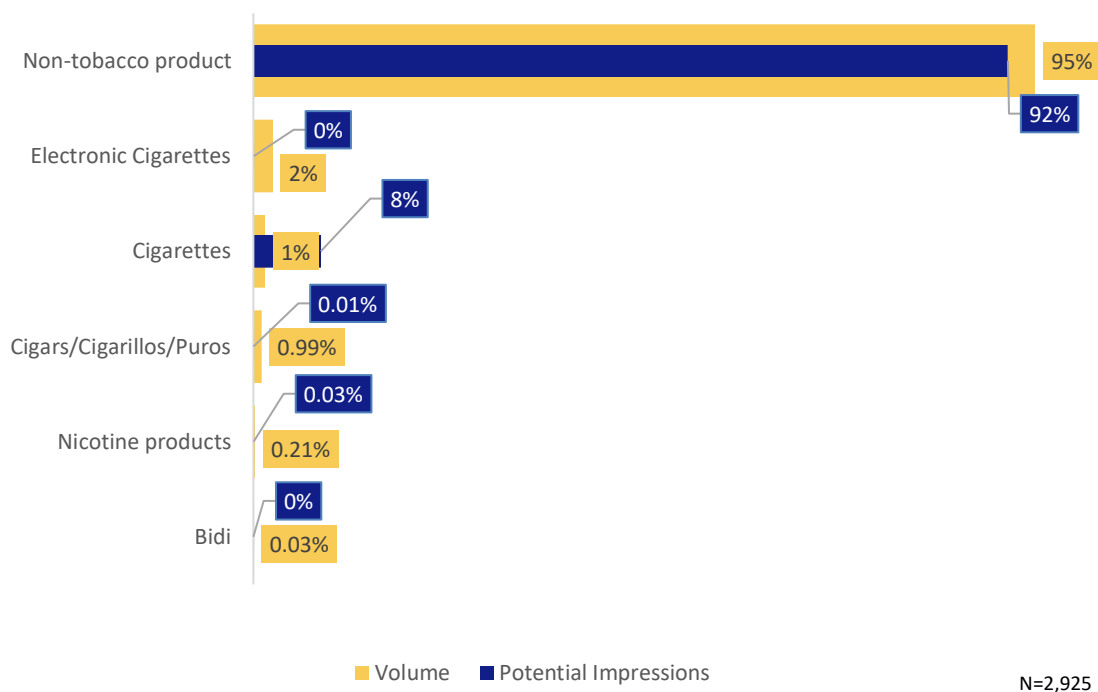


Base: 2,925 total posts, India (Sept – Nov 2024)

Note: The "Others" category includes nicotine pouches and beedi products.

**What is the marketing reach by product type?** The social media marketing landscape is heavily skewed towards non-tobacco products, which had a 95% share of the total marketing volume and 92% of the estimated reach (also called potential impressions) (Figure 2). In comparison, the combined marketing posts for tobacco products, including cigarettes, electronic cigarettes, cigars, nicotine pouches and beedi, were low. These categories collectively account for 5% of the marketing volume and 8% of the estimated reach (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**  
**Estimated Reach by Type of Product Marketing: 343 million**

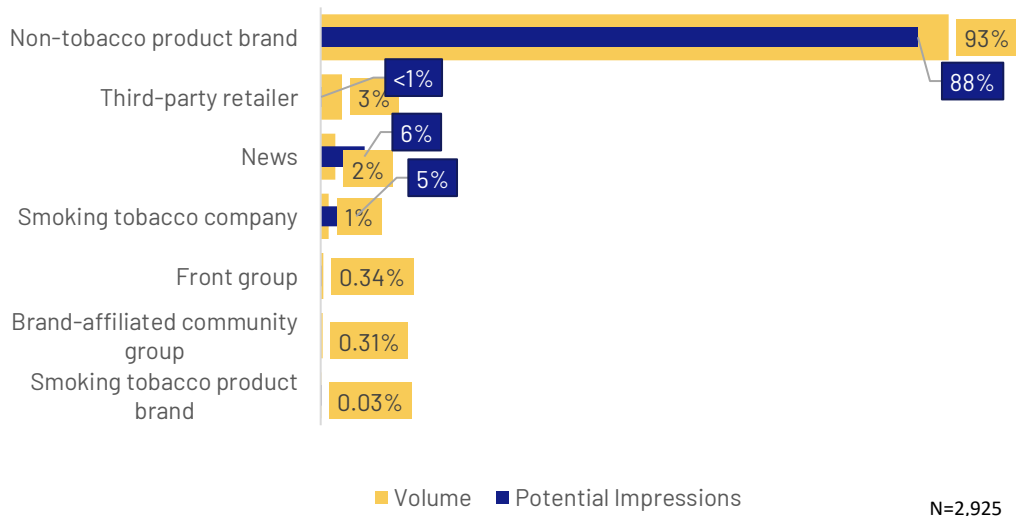


Base: 2,925 total posts & 343 million estimated reach (Sept - Nov 2024)

*Note: Estimated reach (also called potential impressions) is an estimate of the actual number of audiences presumed to have been reached by the message. This is automatically calculated by the Synthesio system using the number of account followers/subscribers. The Synthesio system assumes all the followers of those accounts have seen the message.*

**What entities dominate tobacco marketing volume and reach?** Non-tobacco product brands hold a commanding lead in the social media marketing landscape, accounting for 93% of the total marketing volume and reaching 88% of the estimated reach (Figure 3). In comparison, all other entities combined, including third-party retailers, news sources, smoking tobacco companies, front groups, brand-affiliated community groups, and smoking tobacco product brands, make up only 7% of the marketing volume and 12% of the estimated reach. Among these entities, third-party retailers have a relatively low volume of posts (3%) but a higher estimated reach (7%), while news sources (2%) contributed 6% to the estimated reach (Figure 3). Smoking tobacco companies, front groups, brand-affiliated community groups, and smoking tobacco product brands have a minimal presence, collectively representing less than 2% of the marketing volume and 5% of the potential audience reach (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**  
**Estimated Reach by Type of Accounts: 343 million**



Base: 2,925 total posts & 343 million estimated reach (Sept - Nov 2024)

*Note: Estimated reach (also called potential impressions) is an estimate of the actual number of audiences presumed to have been reached by the message. This is automatically calculated by the Synthesio system using the number of account followers/subscribers. The Synthesio system assumes all the followers of those accounts have seen the message.*

**Key Highlights:** Tobacco companies continue to enhance visibility through brand extensions, while highlighting products such as nicotine pouches and heated tobacco products.

**Non-Tobacco:** The category has the highest frequency of marketing activity (95%). Focus is on the strategic marketing of various Brand extension products that are linked to the key tobacco products manufactures, including ITC Ltd., Miraj Group and DS Group. Brands enhance visibility by diversifying into lifestyle, food, and personal care sectors, while subtly promoting their core identity.

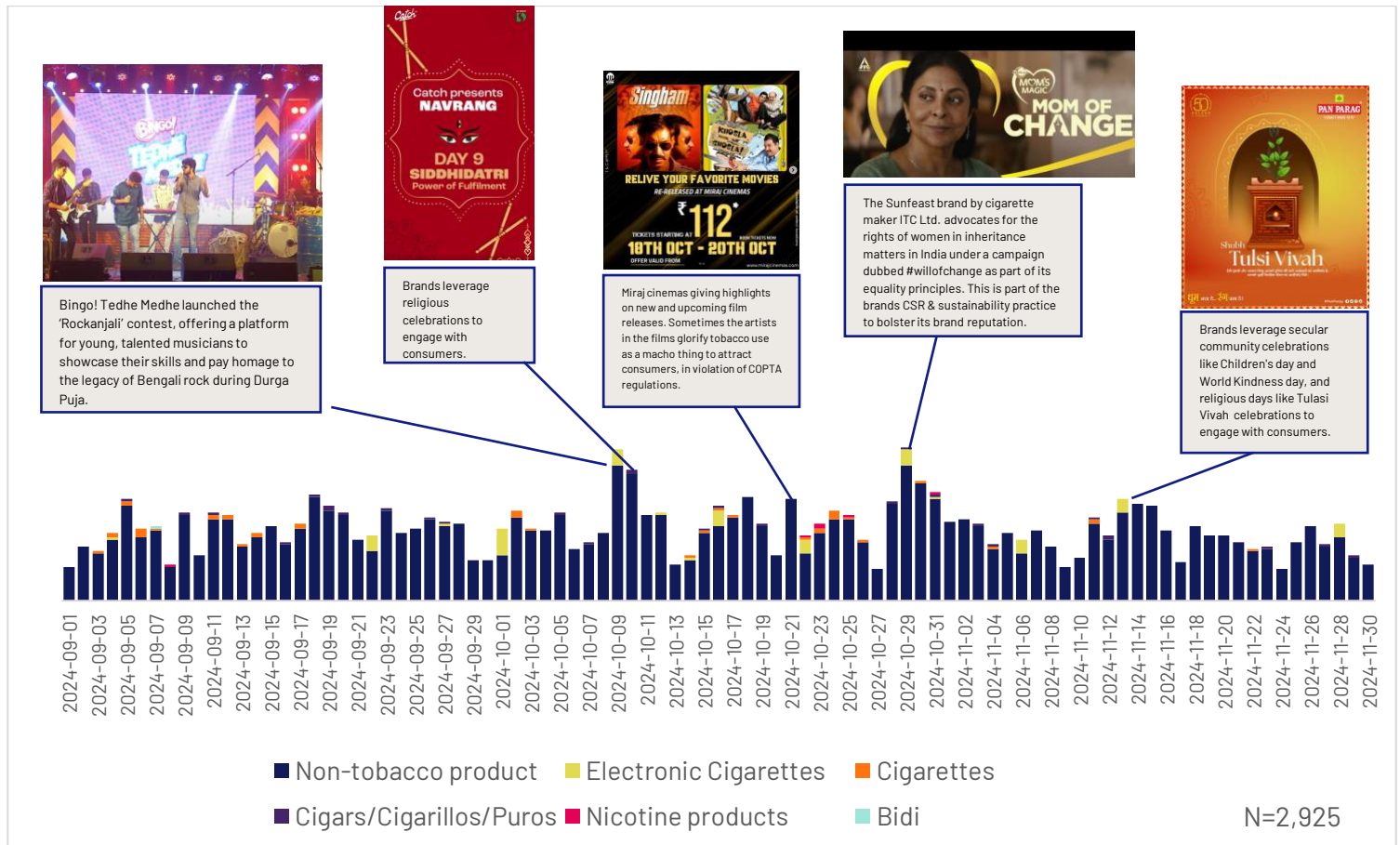
**Electronic Cigarettes:** The discussions emphasize product features as third-party retailers push product features and promotions for new arrivals and collections of vape products. Hashtags like #newreels, #newarrivals, #newpost, and #newcollection are used to attract attention to the latest products in the market.

**Cigarettes:** Companies like ITC Ltd. and PMI highlight their earnings which reflect growth in non-cigarette and brand extension products. With the traditional cigarette category also envisaged to grow in rural demographics as the post covid environment stabilizes according to the tobacco companies as they rally shareholders. The changing dynamics in the Indian cigarette market, with non-tobacco products gaining prominence, regulatory pressures mounting, see the tobacco companies adapting through premiumization and business restructuring.

**Cigars:** Cigar brands seem to be leveraging this lifestyle branding to position their products as symbols of sophistication and status. The marketing approach focuses on premiumization, promoting cigars as a premium, high-end indulgence rather than a mass-market commodity. By associating cigar smoking with a refined, elite lifestyle, brands can cultivate an aura of exclusivity and desirability around their offerings.

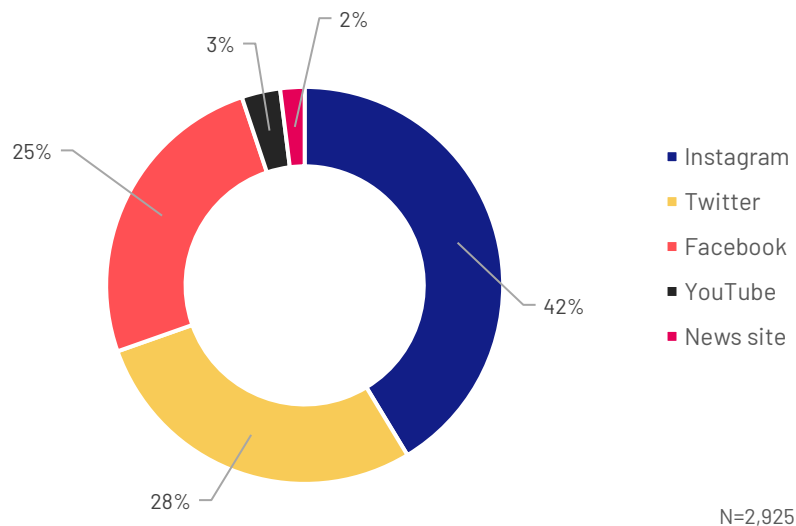
**Figure 4**  
**Trend of Different Tobacco Products**

From September to November, we observed multiple marketing instances from brand extension and surrogate product marketing leveraging events such religious occasions such as Durga Puja, and Navratri which are highly celebrated across the country (Figure 4).



**Where was the marketing observed?** Accounts in Instagram utilized vivid imagery and videos in posts (42%), which is a key marketing strategy of online marketing (Figure 5). Twitter emerged as a significant platform, representing 28% of the marketing content, as it is strategically used to share news and drive conversations. Facebook posts followed closely (25%). While news sites have a relatively low presence at around 2%, they play a crucial role in bolstering tobacco companies' reputation by showcasing shareholder value, social welfare initiatives, and corporate social responsibility efforts. YouTube (3%) had a smaller share of the marketing content (Figure 5).

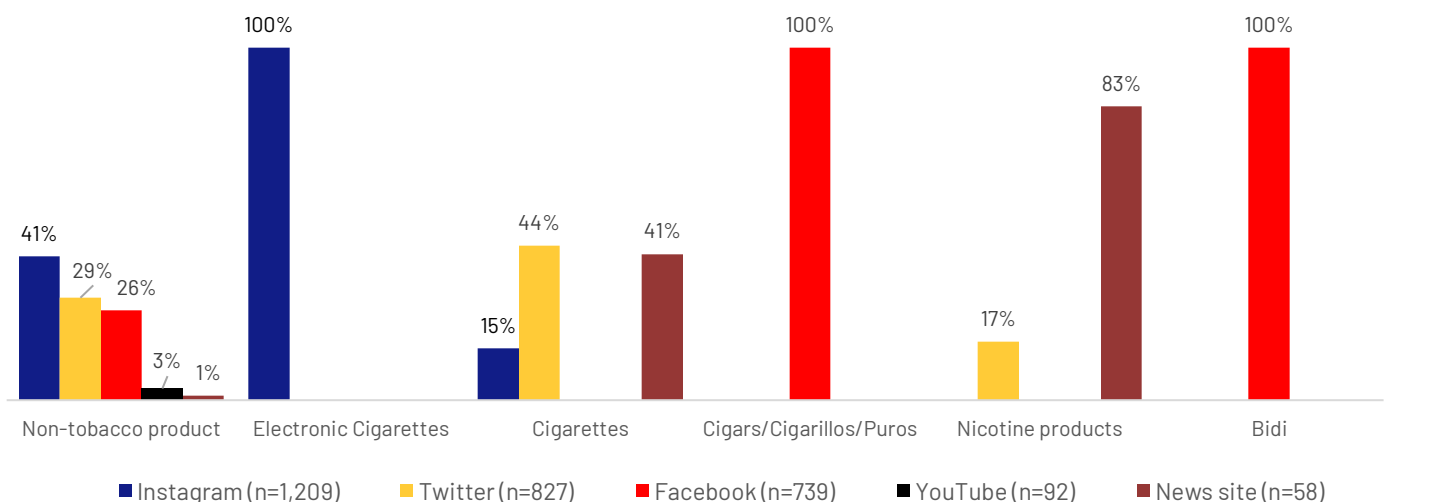
**Figure 5**  
**Distribution of Posts by Platform**



Base: 2,925 total posts, India (Sept – Nov 2024)

**How did the promotion of different tobacco products vary across social media platforms?** Non-tobacco products (41%) and electronic cigarettes (100%) were mostly marketed by accounts on Instagram (Figure 6). In contrast, cigarettes (44%) and nicotine products/pouches (17%) posts were observed in Twitter accounts. Cigars (100%) and beedi (100%) posts were observed in Facebook accounts. News articles reported on cigarettes (41%) and nicotine products/pouches (83%) (Figure 6).

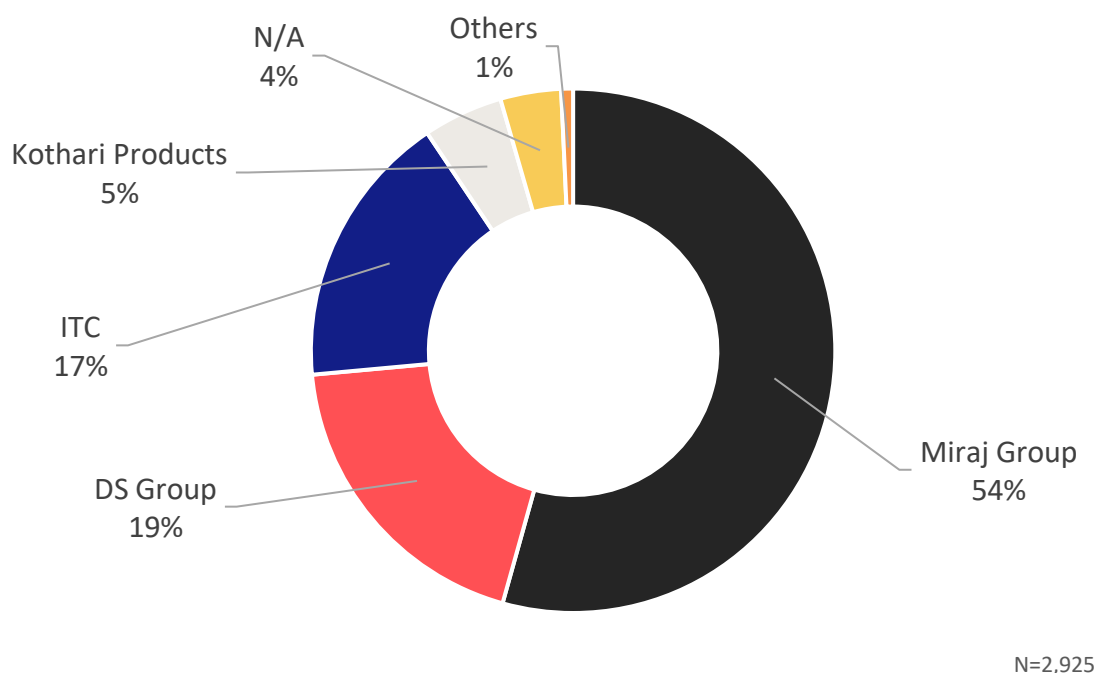
**Figure 6**  
**Platform by Tobacco Type**



Base: 2,925 total posts, India (Sept – Nov 2024)

**Who are the key players?** Tobacco companies' marketing strategies differ considerably based on their individual focus and target audience (Figure 7). The Miraj Group, dominated the marketing landscape (54%) by indirectly marketing through its chain of Miraj Cinemas. Marketing activity of DS Group (19%), ITC Ltd. (15%), and Kothari Products Limited (5%) were also observed (Figure 7).

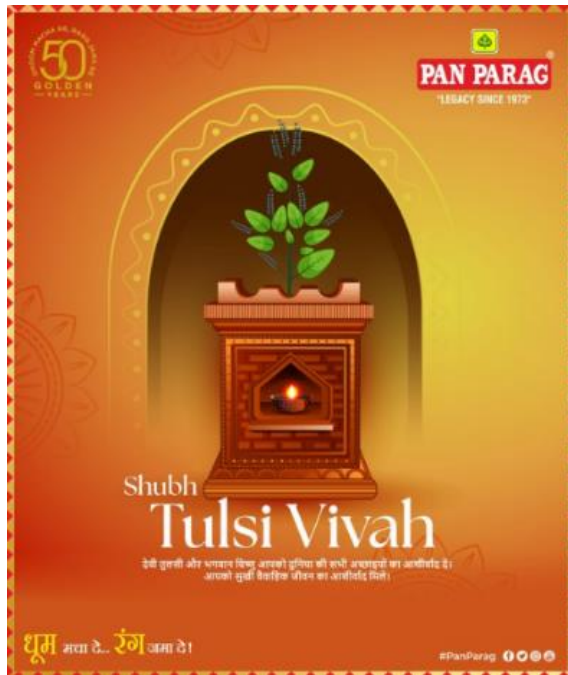
**Figure 7**  
**Total Posts by Tobacco Company**



Base: 2,925 total posts, India (Sept – Nov 2024)

*Note: Others category include third-party retailers conducting store general promotions while N/A category means unidentified companies that manufactured electronic cigarettes and hookah products.*





## ITC reports 3% rise in Q2 profit, beats revenue estimate

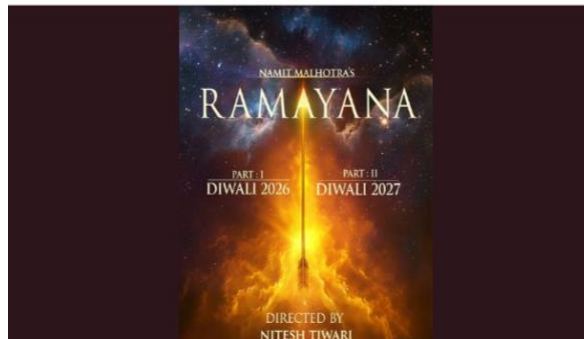
Net profit at the maker of Gold Flake cigarettes and Bingo chips stood at ₹5,078.34 crore in the three months through September, versus ₹4,927 crore a year earlier.



Revenue from operations grew 16% to ₹20,537.35 crore, from ₹17,705.08 crore a year ago. The revenue for the quarter exceeded Street estimates of ₹18,070 crore. (Reuters)



Miraj Cinemas  
November 7 · 🌐  
Presenting the most visually stunning adaptation of our history and our culture - our 'RAMAYANA':  
#RamayanaPart1 is releasing at #MirajCinemas in Diwali 2026 & #RamayanaPart2 is coming to you in Diwali 2027.  
#RanbirKapoor #SunnyDeol #SaiPallavi #NiteshTiwari #NamitMalhotra #ShridharRaghavan



*DS Group, which produces smokeless tobacco products, actively promotes its Pan Parag mouth freshener to stay top of mind of the public.*

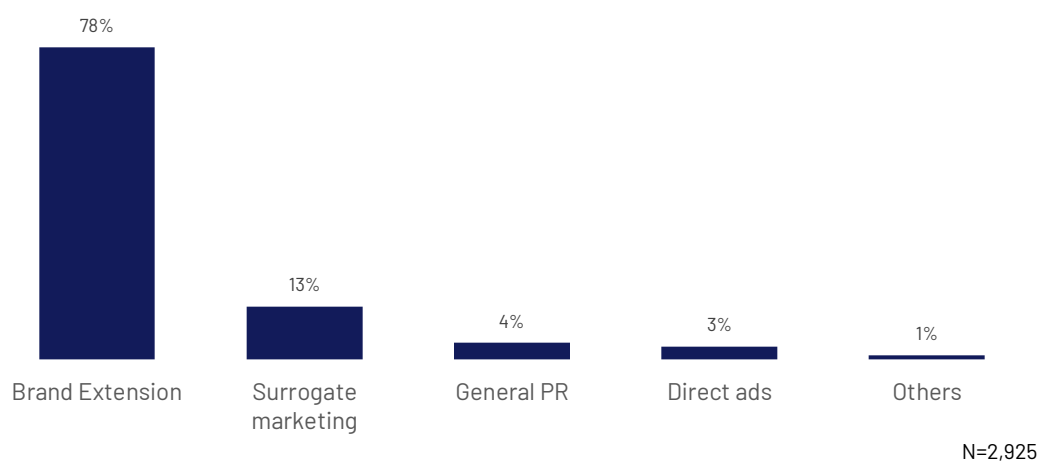
*ITC Ltd. highlighted its Q2 profits to influence shareholders.*

*Miraj Cinemas, a brand extension of Miraj Group (manufacturer of smokeless tobacco), promoted cinema release updates, featuring the company's logo to foster loyalty and align with user interests.*

**What marketing tactics were used?**<sup>1</sup> Brand extension (78%) and surrogate marketing (13%) emerged as the primary tactics employed by tobacco companies to bypass Tobacco Advertising, Promotion, and Sponsorship (TAPS) bans (Figure 8). Due to strict regulations prohibiting direct advertising, tobacco brands rely heavily on indirect methods to maintain visibility and consumer recall. Direct marketing (3%) was observed mostly for cigars and electronic cigarettes, often through third-party retailers.

Tobacco companies in India employed brand extension and surrogate marketing tactics to enhance visibility by diversifying into entertainment, lifestyle, food, and personal care sectors, while subtly promoting their company logos and branding. Examples of brand extended food products include ITC Master Chef, Aashirvaad, and Sunfeast.

**Figure 8**  
**Total Posts by Marketing Tactics**



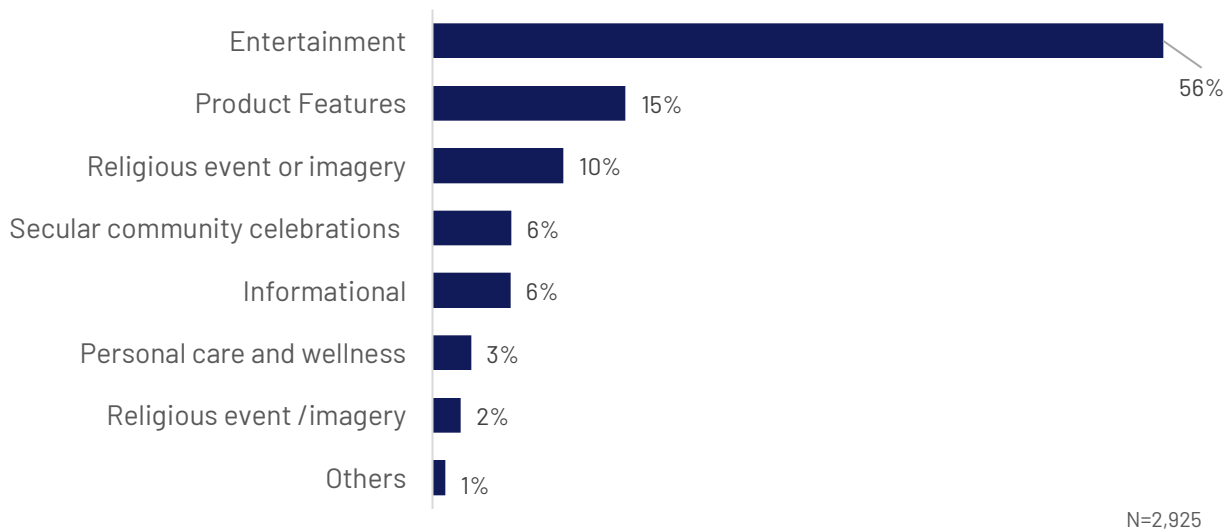
Base: 2,925 total posts, India (Sept – Nov 2024)

*Note: Other tactics include events occasions and sponsorships, corporate social responsibility, and price promotion.*

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 for definitions of marketing tactics.

**What messaging was used?** Majority of the marketing activities used entertainment messaging (56%), which was mostly observed in the Miraj cinemas accounts (Figure 9). This strategy reflects the continued leveraging of popular social pastimes, such as movies. Product features (15%) especially of electronic cigarettes were highlighted in posts. Religious events or imagery (10%) and secular community celebrations (6%) were also used by the various accounts to increase engagement. Greetings during Diwali, and commemorative posts during Mahatma Gandhi's birthday were observed.

**Figure 9**  
**Message Framing Used in Marketing**



Base: 2,925 total posts, India (Sept – Nov 2024)

*Note: Other tactics include social welfare, Glamorization, Health Claims and Environment eco-awareness.*

**What were the most frequently used hashtags?** The word clouds below are a visual representation of the hashtags that were used most frequently in tobacco marketing observed across all social media platforms in India (Figure 10). The larger the word in the visual, the more commonly it appeared in tobacco marketing messages.

The most frequently used hashtags during this period (September to November 2024) promoted brand extension and surrogate brands' associations with aspirational imagery. Most of the marketing observed was indirect marketing for Miraj Group (smokeless tobacco company) through their Miraj Cinema brand extension, which was intended to make the companies more relatable, and improve brand visibility. These included the hashtags #Bollywood, #EntertainmentRedefined, and #Life. Hashtags related to trending content formats were also frequently used to reach wider audiences, these hashtags included: #NewReels, #NewPost, #NewCollection, and #ExplorePage. Common hashtags that normalized tobacco use as a lifestyle were also observed, including #LiveBoldly, #SmokeFree, and #TobaccoFree. The hashtag #FestiveSeason is specific to the Indian festival period of Diwali.

Figure 10  
Top Hashtags Used by Tobacco Related Accounts



Base: Top 50 hashtags with highest frequency within the total posts, India (Sept – Nov 2024)

## Examples of News Articles

Based on observed news articles, tobacco companies highlighted their growth, and focused on raising shareholder returns. Philip Morris International (PMI) pushed for its heated tobacco products (IQOS) and nicotine pouches (Zyn). Godfrey Phillips capitalized on the premiumization trend, with their high-end cigarette offerings gaining traction among consumers.

## ITC reports 3% rise in Q2 profit, beats revenue estimate

Net profit at the maker of Gold Flake cigarettes and Bingo chips stood at ₹5,078.34 crore in the three months through September, versus ₹4,927 crore a year earlier.



**ITC Ltd. positions its revenue earnings as moving towards non-cigarette products to enhance its reputation amidst tighter regulations.**

Companies like ITC Ltd. and Philip Morris International highlight their earnings which reflect growth in non-cigarette and brand extension products.

**Godfrey Phillips India bonus issue: Board to consider bonus share issue on Sept 20; stock hit 12% upper circuit**



The Indian [Marlboro](#) cigarette maker [Godfrey Phillips India Limited](#) announced that the company's Board of Directors will meet on September 20 to discuss and consider a bonus issue of shares, according to the company's Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) filing on Friday, September 19.

## Tobacco companies raising shareholder value.

Tobacco companies in India highlight to shareholders that the India market remains strong, driven by premiumization, innovation in product offerings, and growing financial performance.

## 4 reasons to buy British American Tobacco shares like there's no tomorrow

**R** In *The Bharat Express News*, October 8, 2001.




**BAT is also riding the  
"newer tobacco  
products" bandwagon.**

BAT also positioned itself as leveraging non-cigarette products, with the news article urging investors to consider the company shares owing to “Success in smokeless products.”

**Leading the Industry: The Best Flavored Cigarette  
Manufacturing Company in India**

Written by [Pratik Sharma](#) • Updated on October 27th, 2023



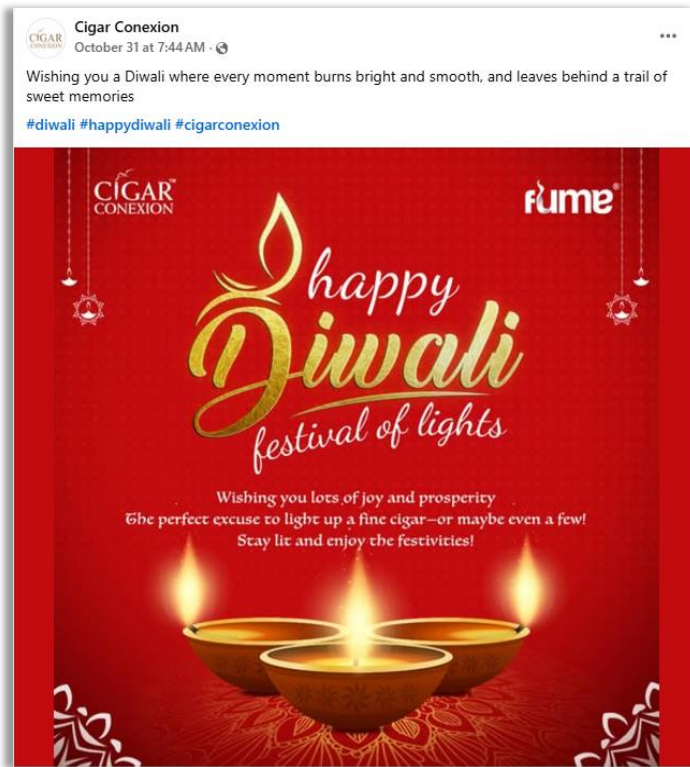
In the ever-evolving tobacco industry, flavored cigarettes have carved a niche among smokers who seek variety, smoothness, and distinct flavors in their smoking experience. For many, flavored cigarettes offer an enjoyable alternative, appealing to both seasoned and occasional smokers. Regarding flavored cigarettes manufacturing in India, Godfrey Philipps India Limited emerges as a front-runner, standing out as **the best flavored cigarette manufacturing company** in India for its commitment to quality and innovation. Godfrey Philipps has established itself as a trusted name in Indian and international

## Tobacco companies using niche blogs to market cigarettes

Some niche bloggers were marketing flavored cigarette products via blog articles with a focus on variety and quality. The article elevated the flavored cigarettes being manufactured by Godfrey Philips in India.

## Examples of Marketing Tactics

Religious events and imagery and CSR initiatives were used to amplify the visibility of tobacco related companies in the public eye.



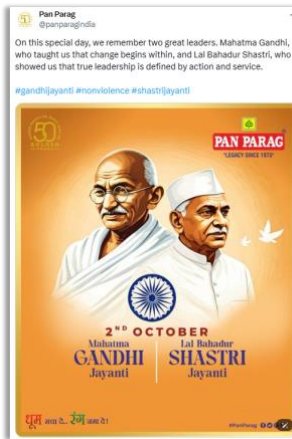
*Cigar Conexion, a third-party cigar retailer, leveraged the Diwali festival to engage with consumers.*



*ITC Ltd. showcased its CSR efforts by providing sanitation and waste management services to community.*



## Examples of Message Framing



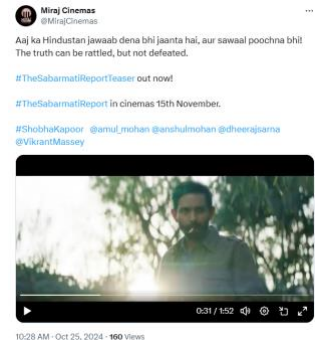
**Secular community celebrations:** The post places tobacco companies in a context that highlights social solidarity during Gandhi Jayanti. This approach might seek to improve brand image by linking the company to positive societal perception.



**Social welfare:** The post positions tobacco companies as contributing to social welfare by raising awareness and promoting behaviour change around critical health issues - ITC Ltd. highlights its nutrition and wellness initiatives with the launch of the Aashirvaad Smart India program which aims to raise awareness and promote behaviour change around iodine deficiency and healthy eating habits.



**Glamorization:** The marketing highlights the sophistication and elegance of cigar smoking, linking it to high-end experiences like golf events and whisky pairings.

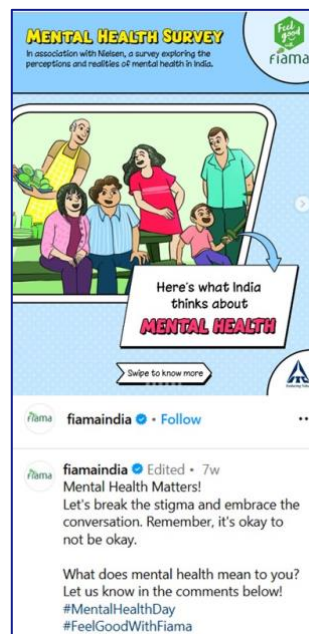


**Entertainment:** Miraj brand continues to push local and international films. The films advertisements sometimes feature artists using tobacco products which are positioned as being "macho" or masculine in a bid to attract young people. The video lacks the health warnings mandated by COPTA.



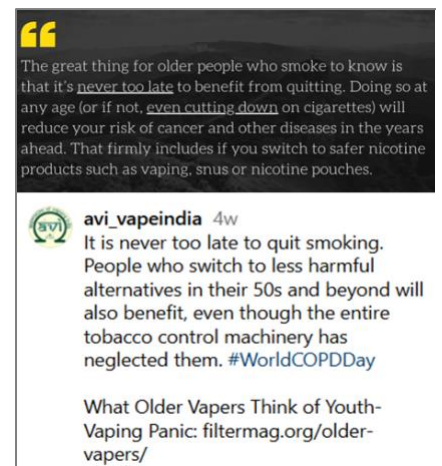
### Product Features

Third-party retailers showcasing features like durability of vape products and enhanced thrill options to attract consumers.



### Personal Care and Wellness.

ITC Ltd. through its brand extension Fiama, leverages the Mental Health Day to drive brand engagement with its consumers.



### Health Claims.

Front groups evangelizing the benefits of electronic cigarettes in helping people who are looking to quit smoking, despite their inherent health risks.

Appendix Table 1. Definitions for Marketing Tactics and Message Framing Identified

Marketing tactic	Type of marketing strategy used, which captures the intention of the marketing (to sell products, create brand endearment/loyalty, etc.)
Brand extension	A separate brand of non-tobacco items that are produced by tobacco companies/conglomerates. The products may use the trademark logo or the name of the parent tobacco company. These products do not show any features that indicate association with any tobacco products.
Community-based marketing	Promotes the sale or use of tobacco products indirectly by creating brand connection to a specific community or subculture. (e.g. Photography enthusiasts, electronic music lovers).
Corporate social responsibility	Pairs the company/brand or product with socially responsible activities (e.g., water conservation projects, financing vaccination drives).
Direct ads	Promotes the sale or use of tobacco products in a straightforward manner; shows images of the product.
Events, occasions, sponsorships	Pairs the company/brand or tobacco product with events, occasions, sponsorships and contests (e.g., product sponsorship of sports events, live concerts, holiday greetings).
General PR	Intended to raise the profile of the brand/company but does not fall into any of the other categories (e.g., brand/company wishing a happy new year).
Price promotions	Promotes the sale or use of tobacco products and new nicotine and tobacco products through price discounting (e.g., 10% off).
Message Framing	Underlying theme around which the whole message of the post is built.
Entertainment	Posts that promote the product as being entertaining and fun. This category also includes posts that use entertainment-related content including memes, funny videos or jokes.
Environment eco-awareness	Any post that addresses climate change, conservation, sustainable development goals, or encouraging people to support environmental causes.
Glamorization	Posts that associate use of products as aspirational, luxurious or part of an ideal, fashionable lifestyle.
Health claims	Posts that present the product as healthier than other products or as being less harmful than conventional tobacco products.
Informational	Posts that instruct viewers how to use a product. This category also includes posts that provide background information on the company.
Personal care and wellness	Posts that associate products with relaxation or stress management. This category also includes posts that frame products as being used for social bonding, including forming community around use of the product with like-minded peers.
Product features	Posts that primarily emphasize the available choices of product flavors and design including device colors, as well as technical specifications of the product. Posts without any text descriptions or keywords that only display the product are also included in this category.

Religious event or imagery	Posts that feature religious imagery or celebrate religious festivals and events.
Secular community celebrations	Posts that offer celebrations or greetings for non-religious social and sporting events that are celebrated globally or nationally. This category also includes content celebrating achievements or honoring the memory of those who passed away.
Social welfare	Posts that showcase activities sponsored or supported by company/brand that are meant to improve their public image. Any posts associating the company with social welfare schemes, livelihood initiatives, women's empowerment, entrepreneurship, educational scholarships, etc.

## Methods

The Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement (TERM) is a digital media monitoring and reporting system that is AI-supported and human expertise-driven that tracks tobacco marketing on social media platforms and news sites. The primary purpose of TERM is to identify instances of tobacco marketing, a known public health risk. TERM does not allege or attempt to identify whether these tobacco marketing instances are in violation of local or international laws.

This report summarizes information gathered by an AI-supported monitoring tool from publicly available posts on social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and TikTok (except in India), and from online articles on news sites. Instances of tobacco marketing on social media are identified using keyword-based queries and through the regular monitoring of social media accounts that were identified purposively via input from tobacco control experts, market research data and keyword searches. News articles are identified by tracking the top 20 newspapers based on circulation in English and the commonly spoken language in each country through their social media accounts, RSS feeds and Google Alerts and via LexisNexis if behind a paywall. Data coding is first conducted automatically and is then reviewed by Vital Strategies researchers using a theory-driven codebook. The analysis is currently restricted to content in English and Hindi. The platform does not track targeted paid ads, peer-to-peer marketing, or marketing in private groups. Data restrictions and privacy laws followed by social media platforms may lead to undercounting of marketing activity. [Read our full methodology here.](#)

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### About the Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement

Vital Strategies' Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement (TERM) is a 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.

## Join the movement



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