

# Hashtags, images, and promotions: E-cigarette messaging on social media associated with teenager smoking and e-cigarette use in Ireland.

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## Type selection

**Category:** Research

**Is your research:** Original

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**Track:** Track 1: Addressing Tobacco Control Challenges and Future-Proofing Tobacco Control

**Domain:** Innovations in Tobacco Control

## Research Abstract Text

**Background:** Teenage e-cigarette use in Ireland is now more prevalent than smoking. Young people remain key targets of tobacco and nicotine advertising, promotion, and sponsorship, which are strongly linked to both smoking and e-cigarette use. Despite regulations, the tobacco industry continues to target young people, with social media predominating for e-cigarette promotion. Research on e-cigarette promotion remains limited. This study examines Irish teenagers' exposure to e-cigarette messaging on social media and its association with smoking and e-cigarette use.

**Methods:** Our total valid sample comprised a nationally representative, stratified random sample of 5,587 15- to 18-year-olds from 268 classes (Years 3, 4, 5), with data collected online in 2024. Current smoking and e-cigarette use were assessed using past 30-day use. Social media exposure was measured by how often, on an average day, respondents reported seeing e-cigarette messaging.

**Results:** In our study, the prevalence of current smoking and e-cigarette use was 14.2% (n=758) and 20.6% (n=1,083), respectively. Overall, 52.7% (n=2,944) of respondents reported seeing social media e-cigarette posts on an average day. Exposure to various posts was as follows: posts with hashtags about e-cigarettes (e.g., #vapes) 45.9% (n=2,130); information about how to buy or get e-cigarettes 25.7% (n=1,181); positive images of people using e-cigarettes 33.8% (n=1,554); negative images of people using e-cigarettes 44.4% (n=2,038); e-cigarette "challenges" (e.g., competitions) 19% (n=870); posts about possible harm from e-cigarettes 44% (n=2,017); and promotions of e-cigarettes as a smoking alternative 29.9% (n=1,372). Exposure to each type of message, whether positive or negative, was significantly associated with both current smoking and e-cigarette use.

**Conclusions:** Over 50% of teenagers in our study encountered various e-cigarette messages on social media daily, with some reporting exposure 20+ times per day. Even minimal exposure significantly correlates with smoking and e-cigarette use, emphasising the need for stricter regulation of e-cigarette advertising on social media.

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