

Capitalism, Multinational Companies and Tobacco

Cigarettes and Vape are becoming a significant problem amongst the youth. There is a rising trend on college campuses, encouraging new students to adopt the habit and possibly develop a lifelong addiction.

“Between 2017 and 2019, the 30-day prevalence of vaping nicotine increased from 6% to 22% among college students and from 8% to 18% among 19-to-22-year-olds not in college.”

Source

For decades, smoking was an accepted practice. But now, people are becoming more aware of the dangers of traditional cigarettes.

There are over a billion smokers on earth and 7 million of them will die of their addiction in 2021 alone, bringing with them an additional million victims of secondhand smoke.

Source: WHO

“Tobacco remains the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. Smoking kills some 480,000 people a year — more than AIDS, car accidents, illegal drugs and suicide combined — and costs \$170 billion in annual health care expenditures” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

As a result, the popularity that smoking enjoyed for the last few decades is receding in some parts of the world. And vaping has been growing in popularity due to the view that it is a ‘safer’ option.

But this shift in the use of products doesn’t mean that the tobacco industry is suffering. As with any Capitalist industry, it has adapted to ensure that it maintains its profit- even though this is to the detriment of the youth across the world.

“Use of the e-cigarette products have soared — almost exclusively by young people. In 2018, more than 20% of high schoolers had used an e-cigarette in the past month, prompting the surgeon general to declare an epidemic. The problem is only getting worse — preliminary data for 2019 show that number increasing to 27.5%.”

“This doubling to tripling of prevalence of vaping marijuana and vaping nicotine over just two years are among the largest increases in MTF history for any substance since the study began over 40 years ago.... This is a worrisome trend given the health risks associated with vaping.... For decades, we saw consistent drops in nicotine use in the form of cigarette smoking among young adults, especially college students. And now, with this rapid increase in vaping across a few short years, over one-in-five 19-to-22-year-olds currently vapes nicotine.” Source

Sports and the Tobacco Industry

Sports, youth and the tobacco have been linked together for decades. While it is true that FIFA, Qatar and WHO chose to ban smoking and vaping this year, this isn’t always the case and as always it’s certainly not as simple as it may seem.

“Footballs won’t be the only things kicked in Qatar at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™. Tobacco and e-cigarettes will also be kicked out of Doha’s eight stadiums, ensuring fans can enjoy smoke-free air while sitting in their seats watching world football’s biggest event.” Statement by FIFA

What this statement doesn’t mention is the fact that it was only prohibited in the stadium bowl and fan zones. It was allowed in outdoor designated smoking areas in the outer perimeter of the stadiums.

The statement doesn’t mention that one UK-based manufacturer of e-liquids has promised to pay the fines of England fans caught using such products. Or the fact that the

Indonesian clove cigarette manufacturer, Djarum, continued the tradition of sports companies promoting their products through sports by sponsoring community-based world cup screenings, including World Cup-themed promotional material.

This isn't an isolated practice.

“Tobacco companies have sponsored football leagues, clubs and cups around the world. The practice is helped by the fact that the global governing body of football, FIFA, and its continental confederations such as UEFA, often have little authority over national leagues which are structured in a variety of ways. In these regulatory gaps tobacco companies continue to exploit football brands, in particular in the continents of Africa, Asia and South America.”

This is because tobacco brands are well aware of the attention that the youth give to sports, and have used the weak anti-tobacco legislation in various countries to their advantage. A study that looked at cigarette packs from 14 low- and middle-income countries, showed that brands used sports related themes to appeal to their customers. And it found 36 brands with distinct “sports appeal” including the use of football imagery and text.

“When looking at the benefits for targeting the Asian football market to promote the Marlboro brand in 1994, an internal presentation by Philip Morris that proposed sponsoring regional and national cups and leagues and identified China, Indonesia, South Korea and Hong Kong as priority markets. It proposed spending US\$9m over three years sponsoring the China National Football League. That deal went ahead despite the fact there was a law banning tobacco advertising in sports stadiums, though it ended a year later.” Source

In 2022, VPZ, a company that operates the e-cigarettes stores in the UK launched a campaign to coincide with National No Smoking Day, calling for a “complete ban on smoking”. They enlisted the help of former Tottenham and Liverpool player Neil “Razor” Ruddock to act as the campaign ambassador. But their campaign wasn't aimed at stopping people from using tobacco related products completely – it just encouraged them to move to vaping instead.

This move towards vaping isn't a positive one. It's just seen as the lesser of two evils

“There are still many unanswered efficacy and safety questions about e-cigs. It's unclear how well they work as a smoking cessation tool. And while they are almost certainly safer than regular cigarettes, they are not necessarily safe. Health officials know next to nothing about the flavorings or about other chemicals generated by the heating of e-liquids. They also don't know how many teenagers who start using e-cigs will move on to tobacco products” NY Times

“The more we learn about e-cigarettes, the more detrimental health consequences we discover. For one, vaping products contain nicotine, which is highly addictive, so what starts as a habit can develop into serious nicotine addiction.

There have been 2,807 hospitalized cases of serious lung injury associated with vaping products, resulting in 68 deaths as of February 2020.

Nearly 5,000 children younger than 5 received emergency room treatment for e-liquid nicotine exposure between 2013 and 2017.” Source

But e-cigarettes are still being promoted under their harm reduction strategy.

“Harm reduction is a public health strategy to reduce the negative health effects of certain behaviors. These approaches do not aim to completely eliminate behaviors or solely emphasize abstinence, since doing so may be unrealistic or ineffective.

In relation to tobacco, the strategy aims to encourage those who will not quit smoking to less harmful forms of nicotine use (e.g., long term use of nicotine gum or patch).

But the current U.S. approach where e-cigarettes are widely available without any sort of evaluation of their public health impact, let alone their effectiveness as a harm reduction tool, and little regulation, has been an abject failure.” Source

This limited regulation is what facilitated e-cigarette sales. The FDA was lax in asserting its jurisdiction to regulate new tobacco products and then decided to delay fully regulating e-cigarettes until 2022. This allowed the industry to make a profit, largely due to massive use of the product amongst youth.

“Top Obama administration officials rejected a vaping ban as a result of intense tobacco and e-cigarette industry lobbying and a cost-benefit analysis, which suggested that the costs of banning vape would outweigh the potential health benefits of the ban.” (Source)

The e-cigarette industry is dominated by the tobacco industry

“Since 2009, when independent manufacturers started introducing them, the new electronic products have been transformed into an opportunity by big companies. Anxious not to lose any customers, they sell their own e-cigarettes: Vuse (British American Tobacco), Juul (of which Altria is a minority shareholder), Logic (Japan Tobacco International) or Blu (Imperial Brands).

As for the market of "heat-not-burn," devices that release an aerosol by heating tobacco to a lower temperature than cigarettes, it is dominated by IQOS, made by Philip Morris International, the manufacturer of the famous cigarette brand Marlboro. All these new products already represented a market of 13 billion euro” Source

Over the decades, there has been a dramatic decline in cigarette sales. As a result, the tobacco industry capitalized on new products, which allowed them to protect their profits and increase their customer base. So, they have an interest in protecting the e-cigarettes from oversight and enticing more customers towards using these products. Their success has meant that despite a decline in cigarettes sales in the United States, the tobacco industry continues to maintain an upward trajectory in profit. Especially as the nicotine liquids used in vaping are derived from tobacco leaves.

And this industry has immense influence across the world

The efforts to stop legislation that is harmful to the tobacco industry or to ensure that industry friendly bills are passed isn't limited to the USA. This may be a result of the influence that Western multinational companies have on the middle and lower income world.

The western based tobacco companies entered new markets and acquired smaller companies across the world, using the investment and trade liberalization to their advantage and expanding into Latin America in the 1970s, parts of Asia in the 1980s and the former communist bloc in the 1990s.

The result of this is that the global tobacco industry is dominated by four privately owned TTCs (Transnational tobacco companies) - Philip Morris International, British American Tobacco (BAT), Japan Tobacco International (JTI) and Imperial Tobacco.

And they use their money and influence to ensure that the harmful legislation wasn't introduced on a number of occasions. Some examples of this are:

- In Sri Lanka, Ceylon Tobacco Company (CTC), a BAT subsidiary, has brought a series of legal challenges against the Sri Lankan Ministry's legislation (requiring an increase in pictorial health warnings for tobacco packs). This led to a change in the legislation to weaken its effect and a significant delay in its implementation.

- The Tobacco Industry's interference hindered progress in tobacco control in Africa. Their interference in Kenya led a situation where it took over 13 years for the Tobacco Control Act 2007 to be approved by Parliament. In Namibia, their Tobacco Products Control Act, was introduced in the early 1990s, but it was not passed until 2010. And if legislation is

passed, the industry looks for ways to work around it.

- In Kenya mandated health warnings on cigarette packages are often applied as removable stickers.
- In Nigeria, BAT has been accused of misleading senior police staff on the definition of “public places” in order to prevent enforcement of smoke-free legislation.
- In Namibia, BAT used legal intimidation to prevent implementation of the 2010 Act.

Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4382920/>

They have no desire to protect people... their focus is profit

Whether we are looking at vaping or traditional cigarettes, the tobacco industry’s lack of care for the general population is clear. And it’s further illustrated through the fact that they are involved in the illicit trade of tobacco. This is harmful to users, as contraband cigarettes contribute to higher addiction rates, especially among lower-income populations, fueling the tobacco epidemic and undermining tobacco control policies.

This is a significant issue, especially when you consider the fact that around 60-70 per cent of all illicit cigarettes are produced by the tobacco industry itself. (Source) At the same time they target women and youth when they are marketing tobacco use in low and middle income countries.

“The weight of the evidence from extensive and increasingly sophisticated research conducted over the past few decades shows that the industry’s marketing activities have been a key factor in leading young people to take up tobacco, keeping some users from quitting, and achieving greater consumption among users” (NCI)

But none of this should come as a surprise...

You’ll find that exploitation for profit is a key characteristic of every Capitalist industry, and the Tobacco Industry is no exception. The industry is actively taking steps to ensure that their profits do not dwindle, even if it means pushing addiction amongst the youth and providing them with low quality products that have increased risks.

To ensure their actions aren’t thwarted, they manipulate legislation in countries across the world to limit any restrictions and limitations being placed upon them.

But under the Islamic System, this wouldn’t be allowed. In Islam, Allah (swt) is the legislature- not man. So the rulers would implement Allah’s laws, and the Islamic State’s infrastructure would ensure that those laws are implemented without corruption.

So companies would not be in a position to tamper with the legislation or influence the officials as they do today, which would help to keep their actions in check. And ensure that the people are not harmed because of them.

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ فَإِن تَنَازَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ إِن كُنتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا﴾

“O believers! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. Should you disagree on anything, then refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you ‘truly’ believe in Allah and the Last Day. This is the best and fairest resolution.” [TMQ Surah an Nisaa 4:59]

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