



MEDIA KIT

MAY 2025

UNMASKING THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY'S ENTICEMENT TACTICS

To coincide with World No Tobacco Day 2025, whose theme this year is "Unmasking the Appeal", the World Health Organization (WHO) is calling for the tactics to attract new consumers used by the tobacco and nicotine industries to be unveiled. This year's campaign aims to raise awareness among the general public, decision-makers and health professionals of the increasingly sophisticated strategies being used to make these products, which are drugs, attractive – particularly to the young.

In France, the French National Committee for Tobacco Control (Comité national contre le tabagisme – CNCT) plays a central role in monitoring and enforcing a ban on all types of promotion for tobacco and nicotine products. The CNCT, as part of the monitoring mission entrusted to it by the French General Directorate for Health (Direction Générale de la Santé – DGS), and as part of its monitoring activities of emerging tobacco and nicotine products, analyses the strategies deployed by manufacturers to maintain the attractiveness of their products, particularly among the young. This work of analysis is accompanied by concrete actions, both legal and institutional (reports to the competent authorities, legal proceedings, interventions with public authorities). In recent years, these actions have helped to significantly reduce the visibility of promotional content and curb the industry's commercial leverage, by directly undermining its strategy of normalisation.

However, the challenge for manufacturers in developing new markets is such that they are constantly pursuing their marketing activities. Orchestrated on a global scale, the industry's tactics take on an even more insidious dimension in countries where legislation has already been tightened. This is particularly the case in France, where the regulatory arsenal strictly bans any form of promotion in favour of tobacco products, including heated tobacco devices. Advertising for vaping products is also strictly controlled, and no promotion is allowed either at points-of-sale or online. France has recently banned disposable electronic devices, which are very popular among teenagers. Oral nicotine products, such as nicotine pouches, have also been banned, and France has submitted a formal request to the European Commission.



Faced with this protective regulatory framework, manufacturers are stepping up their ingenuity to circumvent the law. In its reports, the CNCT documents current forms of covert marketing, particularly on digital platforms and social networks, where such content is massively targeted at a young and vulnerable audience.

The CNCT is launching a brand-new digital campaign entitled "The Taste of Lies" (Le goût du mensonge), aimed at young people. Streamed on TikTok, Snapchat, Meta and YouTube, this campaign aims to highlight the tobacco industry's actions, in particular the use of synthetic substances such as 6-methyl-nicotine (also known as metatine). It also denounces the strategies deployed to normalise products that are particularly powerful drugs. Finally, the campaign highlights the extent to which the real danger of these products is hidden behind their innocuous and attractive appearance.

6-METHYL-NICOTINE: A NEW LEVER FOR MANUFACTURERS TO ATTRACT AND GET PEOPLE ADDICTED TO THE DRUG

At the heart of the new tactics deployed by the tobacco industry to circumvent regulations and maintain the attractiveness of its products is the emergence of a synthetic molecule that is causing considerable concern: 6-methyl-nicotine. As part of its monitoring activities, the CNCT recently identified this molecule in vaping devices and oral products available in France. This substance is a chemically modified form of nicotine, obtained by adding a methyl group. In 2023, products such as Spree Bar electronic cigarettes were marketed in the United States containing 6-methyl-nicotine. More recently, this molecule has also been spotted in other European countries, notably Switzerland, where it is beginning to appear in some new nicotine products, reflecting its rapid international spread. It acts on nicotine receptors in the brain, with pharmacological effects similar to those of traditional nicotine: stimulation, dependence, and potentially harmful effects on brain development in the young.

But it is above all through its marketing potential that 6-methyl-nicotine is establishing itself as a new and seductive tool for the tobacco industry. Several products containing this molecule are now being marketed without any explicit mention of the word "nicotine", which can mislead consumers as to the true nature of their content. The terms "tobacco-free" and "nicotine-free" are also used, reinforcing the – false – idea that they are products without risk or harm.



©Comité national contre le tabagisme

Vaping product purchased from a French tobacconist

The marketing messages deployed by manufacturers play on three main levers:

- The idea of a “new generation” formula, presented as more modern, purer or more effective;
- The absence of the word “nicotine” on labels, even though the molecule is an active nicotine analogue;
- The use of vague or pseudo-technical terms, such as “clean formula” or “innovative formula”, which create confusion about the actual composition of the products.

Some products are also positioned as legal alternatives in contexts where the sale of nicotine-containing products is strictly regulated. These products bypass the legal requirements and avoid appearing as nicotine-containing products, thereby blurring consumers' reference points and attempting to appear as harmless everyday consumer products.

This marketing strategy is reinforced by the promotion of these products on social networks, particularly TikTok, where several France-based influencers promote oral pouches containing 6-methyl-nicotine. This content, which is very popular with teenagers and young adults, presents the products in an extremely positive light, comparing them to everyday stimulants such as coffee, which are purported to improve concentration, provide a “boost” or complement a sports session. This trivialisation, combined with carefully designed visuals, colourful codes and reassuring language, all help to normalise the use of addictive substances among a particularly vulnerable audience.



Screenshot of influencer Walid Chinwill on TikTok

This strategy is part of a wider drive to conceal and re-invent the image of nicotine products. It is based on minimising the risks, masking addiction and exploiting regulatory blind spots to appeal to a new generation of consumers. By transforming an addictive synthetic molecule into a trendy product, the industry is pursuing its objective: to normalise the use of nicotine, by promoting it in new forms that are more discreet, more acceptable and – above all – more difficult to regulate.

PROCEEDING FOR THE ILLEGAL PROMOTION OF VAPING DEVICES

In France, advertising of these products – whether they contain nicotine itself or nicotine analogues such as 6-methyl-nicotine (also known as metatine) – is strictly prohibited. Their promotion by influencers or the very existence of the Nonic.com website, property of the manufacturer Aroma King which offers products containing 6-methyl-nicotine, therefore constitute an infringement of French legislation. The website features laudatory advertising and promotional offers to encourage consumption. Moreover, there is a failure to comply with other requirements, such as health warnings which are not written in the language of the country where the product is sold. All these communication and sales techniques contravene the French Public Health Code. In view of these serious breaches, the French National Committee for Tobacco Control (CNCT) has decided to take legal action against the manufacturer.



L'avenir du vapotage ? NoNic écrit de nouvelles règles

Avec notre méthode brevetée d'utilisation de la 6-méthyl-nicotine comme substitut de la nicotine dans les produits oraux et d'inhalation, nous sommes à la pointe de l'innovation mondiale. Nos brevets, notamment dans l'Union européenne et aux États-Unis, font de nous le producteur exclusif de cette solution révolutionnaire dans le monde entier.

UNE ALTERNATIVE À LA NICOTINE :

NONIC OFFRE UNE SUBSTANCE ENTIÈREMENT NOUVELLE QUI AGIT DE MANIÈRE SIMILAIRE À LA NICOTINE, MAIS SANS SES EFFETS NÉGATIFS.

INNOVATION MONDIALE :

NONIC EST UNE RÉVOLUTION BREVETÉE DISPONIBLE SUR PLUSIEURS MARCHÉS, DONT LES ÉTATS-UNIS, L'EUROPE, L'ASIE ET LES ÉMIRATS ARABES UNIS.

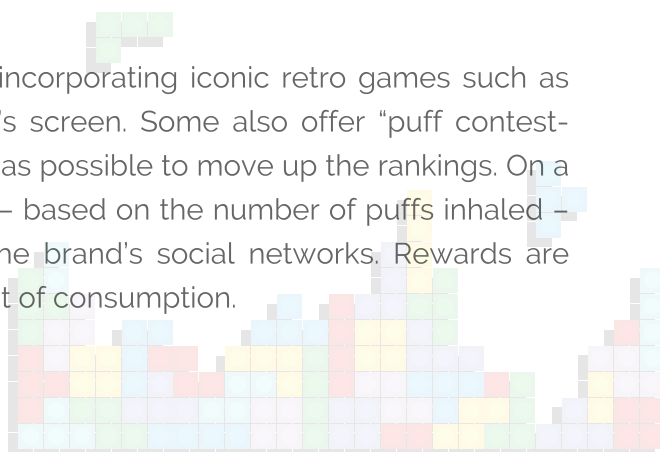
Screenshot of the Nonic.com website

CONNECTED ELECTRONIC CIGARETTES THAT DIRECTLY TARGET TEENAGERS AND ENCOURAGE CONSUMPTION

Another indication of the cynicism of the tobacco and nicotine industry, which turns every regulatory advance into a commercial opportunity, it is the use of new enticement tactics are adapting to bans to better capture the attention of the young. Since the ban on disposable devices, the market has been moving towards so-called "smart vapes", which incorporate advanced technological functions. Some of these models, which have recently appeared on the market in France and other European countries, feature a touch screen, a puff meter and a biometric locking system. They also offer integrated games, transforming the act of vaping into an interactive and entertaining experience, totally disconnected from the health risks posed by the product. This is the case with one model that features a fun interface with a virtual animal – similar to the Tamagotchis that existed some years back – which the user is invited to "feed" by vaping. The system is designed to reward regular nicotine intake, by unlocking levels or in-game accessories.



Other models go even further in encouraging use by incorporating iconic retro games such as Tetris or Pacman, directly accessible from the device's screen. Some also offer "puff contest-type" games, in which users are invited to puff as much as possible to move up the rankings. On a Lost Vape model, consumers can compare their score – based on the number of puffs inhaled – with that of other users and share their ranking via the brand's social networks. Rewards are offered, reinforcing the competitive and addictive aspect of consumption.



These devices don't just normalise the act of vaping: they incentivise it. By offering a fun, interactive experience, combined with tracking, classification and personalisation features, these products encourage more frequent, earlier and more addictive consumption. This technological sophistication is by no means insignificant: it is part of a well-honed tobacco industry strategy aimed first and foremost at attracting a new generation of consumers.

This new generation of devices, which are presented as harmless and technological devices, are part of a strategy designed to normalise and make nicotine use commonplace habit, deliberately targeting teenagers and young adults. The tobacco industry is once again demonstrating its ability to hijack digital tools and turn them into vectors of addiction.

NICOTINE POUCHES: A VISUAL AND NARRATIVE STRATEGY DESIGNED TO APPEAL TO YOUNG CONSUMERS

Although French legislation bans any form of advertising or promotion of nicotine-based products, including on digital platforms, the monitoring activities carried out by the French National Committee for Tobacco Control have, in recent years, revealed large-scale digital marketing campaigns orchestrated by tobacco manufacturers.

The latest campaign to date, identified by the CNCT, concerns British American Tobacco and its VELO brand of nicotine pouches. This campaign is based on a multi-channel strategy, deployed in the French digital ecosystem, which primarily targets a young audience, often unacquainted with nicotine use. The aim is clear: to normalise these products for a new generation and for new profiles of potential consumers, using the codes of quiet digital marketing, which are difficult to detect and are effective in circumventing regulation.

The levers identified include:

- The mobilisation of several French influencers on social networks to relay content promoting nicotine pouches as trendy products, compatible with an active or festive lifestyle. These publications – made without any mention of the presence of nicotine or health warnings – are fully in line with an implicit prescription logic, in disregard of the bans in force.
- The use of paid advertising on social networks via Meta Ads, targeted at young audiences. These advertisements explicitly promote VELO products, presenting them as “alternatives” to smoking, with wording relating to “harm reduction” or a “smoke-free lifestyle”.
- The organisation of competitions via the brand's accounts, with attractive prizes such as gaming consoles or trips to Ibiza, designed to generate engagement, boost the brand's visibility and recruit new consumers.



Lancée en septembre 2024

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Pour participer, rien de plus simple:

Abonnez-vous à @velo__france

Likez le post En bonus: partagez ce post en ...



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Sponsored ads by British American Tobacco on META networks

These strategies are complemented by the systematic use of sweet and fruit flavourings, which are particularly prevalent in VELO products. Flavours such as "iced watermelon", "strawberry ice", "cherry ice" or "spicy lemon" play an active role in blurring the addictive dimension of the product. As many international scientific studies – including those conducted by the WHO – have shown, these flavourings make the first experience more pleasant and encourage initiation among the young.



★★★★★ 4.8/5 - Mini - 6mg

Fraise Ice

Fraise avec un effet fraîcheur



★★★★★ 4/5 - Mini - 6mg

Cerise Ice

Une saveur de cerise et d'agrumes avec un effet fraîcheur



★★★★★ 4.5/5 - Mini - 6mg

Raisin Violet

Un mélange de raisin rouge avec une pointe d'acidité



★★★★★ 4.6/5 - Slim - 8mg

Citron Epicé

Citron épicé et piquante

This overall strategy enables the company to reach consumers who were neither initially familiar with these products, nor, necessarily, nicotine users. It combines a no-holds-barred approach, engaging visuals and short formats, adapted to the logic of virality on social networks. By normalising the use of pouches in innocuous contexts (sport, relaxation, work), it blurs the aspects of danger and addiction, and presents these products as harmless, even functional.

Nicotine pouches can contain extremely high concentrations of nicotine – up to 50mg per pouch. Several healthcare professionals are warning of the toxic effects of such doses and the difficulties involved in helping patients to give them up. Treatment for patients using pouches containing 20mg of nicotine is already problematic. If used repeatedly throughout the day, exposure to nicotine can far exceed that delivered by nicotine replacement therapy (NRT).



Professor Ivan Berlin, senior lecturer and hospital practitioner, explains:
“For example, five pouches a day provide 100mg of nicotine, whereas a nicotine patch contains between 21mg/24h and 25mg/16h, and the maximum unit dose of oral forms is 4mg. To date, we have no suitable therapeutic tools for effectively helping chronic nicotine users to stop using”.

Thus, even for smokers who want to stop smoking, the use of these pouches can lead to exposure to much higher doses of nicotine than those administered in the context of a medical treatment, increasing the risk of undesirable effects. However, the main risk lies in the use of these products by non-smokers (particularly young people and minors) seeking the psychostimulant effect of nicotine. Given the highly addictive nature of this substance, the risk of developing a chronic dependence on nicotine or of subsequently taking up smoking is particularly high.

These practices are in clear breach of French regulations. They also reflect a deliberate strategy to conquer a new, young market by exploiting the dynamics of digital ecosystems, contrary to the industry's official commitments to the protection of minors.



BEHIND INNOVATION, THE PERSISTENT PROMOTION OF TOBACCO



Despite the proliferation of emerging nicotine products on the market – connected electronic cigarettes, oral pouches and devices containing synthetic molecules such as 6-methyl-nicotine – the tobacco industry's fundamental objective remains unchanged: to ensure the long-term survival of tobacco use by continually adapting to regulatory and societal changes.

In this global strategy, heated tobacco products, and in particular the IQOS device developed by Philip Morris International (PMI), take centre stage. Under the guise of technological innovation, PMI's pitch is calibrated around harm reduction, suggesting that IQOS is a "less harmful" alternative to conventional cigarettes. This cleverly constructed narrative conceals the real risks linked to these products: exposure to toxic substances, continued nicotine dependence, and unknown long-term health effects.

**Brûle
le tabac.**



VS

**Chauffe
le tabac.**



Comme IQOS chauffe le tabac au lieu de le brûler,

IQOS génère 95% en moins de composants nocifs par rapport à la cigarette.*

INFORMATION IMPORTANTE : cela ne signifie pas nécessairement une réduction des risques de 95%. L'utilisation d'IQOS n'est pas sans risques.

* "95% en moins" représente la réduction moyenne des niveaux des 9 composants dont l'Organisation Mondiale de la Santé recommande la réduction dans la fumée de cigarettes, excluant la nicotine. Voir les informations importantes sur [iqos.com](https://www.iqos.com).



But beyond the rhetoric, Philip Morris' marketing strategy is proving to be particularly fearsome. Presented as a desirable object, the intention has been to distance IQOS, visually and symbolically, from the traditional tobacco product, whose image has been tarnished. The device takes the form of an electronic object with a refined design, metallic finish, that is customisable and available in several colours, inspired by the codes of top-of-the-range consumer technology. This premium aesthetic, more reminiscent of a lifestyle accessory than a toxic product, helps to reduce the perception of harm, and reinforces the idea that this is a "modern", "clean" and "well-designed" product.



At points-of-sale, this strategy is reflected in the product's meticulous presentation: elegant window displays, supervised demonstrations, pseudo-medical advice designed to reassure consumers, and sober, minimalist packaging. IQOS is often presented as an alternative way to "free yourself from cigarettes", while continuing to smoke – a paradox that is never acknowledged but is systematically disguised by deliberately ambiguous language ("smoke-free", "combustion-free", "controlled experience", etc.).

This marketing approach is consistent with the other tactics analysed in this brief: the use of deceptive technological innovations, attractive visual presentations and the misappropriation of the codes of technology, well-being and luxury. In each case, the aim is the same: to normalise addictive products by blurring any aspect of danger to health, and creating a reassuring, aspirational and highly attractive image around them – particularly for young adults.

Behind this showcase of innovation and apparent responsibility, the tobacco industry continues to promote its historic products, while forging a new legitimacy among decision-makers and the public, through "new generation" products that mask the ongoing health risks.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE LONG-TERM PROTECTION OF THE YOUNG AND A FRAMEWORK FOR EMERGING PRODUCTS

In light of the analysis carried out on the strategies being deployed by the tobacco and nicotine industries to develop their markets, the French National Committee for Tobacco Control (CNCT) has formulated a series of recommendations aimed at countering them and anticipating potential circumvention practices, in order to effectively protect the younger generation.

1 Enforce the ban on the marketing of unauthorised nicotine products

Products such as nicotine pouches or nicotine pearls, which do not have any marketing authorisation, must be effectively banned, as must any form of promotion or advertising for them, including on social networks and search engines.

2 Limit access to products by extending the ban on online sales of tobacco products to all products containing nicotine or nicotine analogues

In addition to emerging nicotine products, such as pouches and pearls that are already subject to a marketing ban, the CNCT recommends an extension of the current ban on online sales of tobacco products to include vaping products. This measure would be accompanied by strict supervision of physical points-of-sale, by limiting their number and introducing specific authorisation criteria.

3 Reinforce controls

It is essential to mobilise control authorities to ensure that existing bans are effectively enforced.



4

Make sanctions a deterrent

The CNCT is calling for the system of sanctions against offenders to be strengthened so that they have a real deterrent effect and prevent repeat offences. The current impunity on many online channels undermines the effectiveness of French legislation.

Regarding nicotine analogues, and in particular 6-methyl-nicotine – recently identified in vaping products and oral pouches – the CNCT recommends that the regulations should apply to any substance with a pharmacological effect on nicotine receptors – whether it actually contains nicotine in the strict sense.

This approach would make it possible to anticipate industrial diversionary tactics, prevent the marketing of potentially dangerous and highly addictive products, and better protect the young – the primary target of these toxic innovations.

This approach would make it possible to:

- Anticipate regulatory circumvention strategies deployed by the industry,
- Prevent the marketing of unassessed addictive substances,
- Provide upstream protection for young people from the effects of products falsely presented as nicotine-free or harmless.





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