



WRJBHS-25-017

The Evolution of Tobacco Marketing to Women and Girls in Sub-Saharan Africa

Sharon Nyatsanza¹, Ukoabasi Isip², Omei Bongos-Ikwue^{3*}, Farida Adamu⁴, Oluwatoyin Christiana Olajide⁵, Adewunmi Emoruwa³, Enobong Umoh³, Nasara Usman³ and Ijudaye Shettima³

¹National Council Against Smoking, Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa

²Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada

³Gatefield, Abuja, Nigeria

⁴Department of Economics and Social Sciences, Burgundy School of Business, Dijon, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté, France

⁵Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife, Osun, Nigeria

*Correspondence: Omei Bongos-Ikwue, Gatefield, Abuja, Nigeria, E-mail: obongos@gatefield.co;

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56147/jbhs.2.1.17>

Citation: Nyatsanza S, Isip U, Bongos-Ikwue O, Adamu F, Olajide OC, et al. (2025) The Evolution of Tobacco Marketing to Women and Girls in Sub-Saharan Africa. *J Biol & Heal Sci* 2: 17.

Abstract

Introduction: Historically, tobacco use among women and girls in Sub-Saharan Africa has been significantly lower than among men. However, recent trends show a concerning rise in smoking rates within this demographic. This shift necessitates a deeper examination of the role tobacco industry marketing plays in driving these changes. Focusing on five key countries Nigeria, South Africa, Rwanda, Kenya and Senegal this research provides a comprehensive analysis of industry marketing tactics targeting women and girls in the region.

Aims and methods: This study aims to investigate the evolving strategies used by the tobacco industry to market products to African women and girls. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining a literature review, quantitative surveys and qualitative semi-structured interviews. In addition, a historical analysis of tobacco industry documents and an evaluation of tobacco control laws and regulations in the five surveyed countries were conducted to gain deeper insights into industry practices.

Results: Findings from Tobacco Industry Documents (TIDs) suggest that the tobacco industry has systematically targeted women for several decades, with a particular focus on young women aged 18-24. None of the surveyed countries currently have comprehensive laws addressing new and emerging products like e-cigarettes. Tobacco marketing was most commonly encountered in nightclubs, bars, lounges and parties, with 32.8% of participants reporting exposure in these settings. Social media exposure varied across countries, while television shows and movies consistently showed high exposure rates (77.2%) across all five nations. Key informant interviews highlighted dominant themes such as brands targeting females, cultural perceptions of female tobacco use, femininity, autonomy, influencer marketing, digital strategies, harm reduction narratives, proximity marketing, peer and parental influences and the perceived benefits of tobacco, particularly in terms of flavor taste and smell.

Conclusion and implications: The tobacco industry uses sophisticated marketing strategies to enhance product appeal, particularly targeting women through emerging products, flavor manipulation and harm reduction messaging. Proximity marketing in social settings has proven effective in increasing young women's access to tobacco products. Critical regulatory gaps remain, particularly concerning e-cigarettes and other novel tobacco products. The adequacy and enforcement of existing TAPS regulations, especially those concerning digital media and cross-border advertising, need urgent attention. Countries should adopt proactive regulations that anticipate industry adaptations and reduce the need for frequent updates. TAPS bans must be extended to



encompass emerging tobacco and nicotine products across both traditional and digital platforms. Additionally, regulations need to target proximity and harm-reduction marketing to safeguard young women and prevent the normalization of tobacco use among these vulnerable demographics.

Keywords: Tobacco; Women; Smoking rate; Global health crisis; Sub-Saharan Africa

Received date: March 03, 2025; **Accepted date:** March 07, 2025; **Published date:** March 25, 2025

Introduction

Tobacco use remains a pressing global health crisis, claiming 8 million lives annually, with 80% of deaths occurring in low and middle-income countries (WHO, 2023). Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), with its fast growing, youthful population, rising incomes and expanding Tobacco Industry (TI) presence, faces a critical public health challenge. Weak regulations, low cigarette prices and lax enforcement of Tobacco Control (TC) laws exacerbate this issue (Egbe, 2022).

While historically low, trends reveal that tobacco use among women and girls in SSA is rising, particularly among adolescents, whose smoking rates are nearing those of their male peers (WHO, 2021). This shift calls for an urgent examination of the factors driving these changes, particularly the role of tobacco industry marketing.

Extensive research has been conducted on tobacco marketing to women in high-income countries, including the exploitation of women's liberation movements in the 1920s (Truth Initiative, 2023). However, little has been done to document similar tactics in SSA. This study aims to contribute to this effort. Investigating the industry's strategies for targeting women and girls in SSA is crucial for shaping effective policy responses.

By focusing on five key countries Nigeria, South Africa, Rwanda, Kenya and Senegal. This research provides a comprehensive, multi-country perspective on industry marketing tactics to women and girls. These countries were chosen due to their significant markets and varying economic contexts within SSA. Additionally, their geographical distribution across different sub-regions of SSA allows for a broad overview of the industry's marketing activities across various cultural and regional landscapes.

The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) advocates for a comprehensive ban on Tobacco Advertising, Promotion and Sponsorship (TAPS). In February 2024, the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the WHO FCTC adopted specific guidelines addressing cross-border TAPS and the portrayal of tobacco in entertainment media. The COP10 decision emphasized the need for parties to consider restricting or banning TAPS for new and emerging products. The decision also acknowledged the growing role of digital media in transcending national borders and enhancing marketing exposure, particularly

among youth and the need to combat this. Despite being FCTC signatories, the five countries studied still face challenges in regulating tobacco marketing to women and girls, raising questions about industry strategies and tactics.

This study addresses the limited research on female-specific tobacco and nicotine marketing in SSA by analyzing gender-targeted strategies in five countries and explores the marketing of emerging products like e-cigarettes. It incorporates an examination of 30 years of historical internal Tobacco Industry Documents (TIDs), which disclose planned advertising, promotional and sponsorship strategies within SSA. Furthermore, it investigates the interaction between tobacco marketing tactics and existing TC laws and the exploitation of digital media to target female smokers, highlighting how these strategies exploit regulatory loopholes. Finally, it provides insights that could guide the development of more robust and effective TC policies.

Literature Review

Understanding tobacco marketing strategies in SSA is essential for crafting effective TC policies. While existing literature largely covers marketing tactics targeting broad demographic groups, there is a notable gap in research on strategies specifically aimed at women. The review examined literature on tobacco marketing tactics across SSA and focused on gender-specific marketing and youth-targeted approaches in SSA.

Although research on female-targeted tobacco marketing is relatively limited, existing evidence suggests that tobacco marketing tactics to women in SSA have been co-opted from those used globally (Goff, 2019). For instance, in South Africa, tobacco advertising often depicts smoking as a symbol of independence and modernity, appealing to young women who aspire to these values (Smith et al., 2018).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) campaigns comprise a key part of the industry's strategy to increase its customer base in SSA. For example, in Senegal, Marlboro donated branded school bags to children and sponsored cultural and women's sporting events, where free samples of tobacco products were given away (Kaleta, 2011). In Kenya, the industry has sponsored community development initiatives aimed at women and this has subtly promoted tobacco consumption while enhancing its brand reputation (Kinyanjui, 2023).



Harm reduction marketing further plays a key role in targeting women in SSA. In 1998, British American Tobacco began a campaign promoting light cigarettes in Southern Africa as part of its regional plan to lure women consumers (Tobacco Tactics, 2020).

Social influencers and covert digital marketing strategies have been used by the industry to bypass laws restricting tobacco advertising. Philip Morris South Africa sponsored a popular female presenter's trip to Milan design week in order to promote IQOS, a tobacco heating device marketed as a healthier alternative to traditional cigarettes to millions in the country (Van-Dyke & Team, 2019). In Kenya, influencers are used to market nicotine pouches to younger audiences (The Guardian, 2021). Tobacco products are often promoted subtly alongside alcohol, food, coffee and desserts, focusing on visual appeal, which resonates with women's propensity for such content (Jackler et al., 2020).

In Nigeria, tobacco use is glamorized in films, with female lead characters depicted smoking (Adelufosi, 2014), despite concerns that have led to restrictions of such content (Aguoye, 2024; CAPP, 2023).

Proximity marketing locating tobacco sales near areas such as schools and universities—further normalizes tobacco use among youth in SSA, making it accessible and appealing, particularly to girls. The strategic placement of tobacco products near children's snacks at kiosks and retail stores (Institute for Tobacco Control, 2016; Egbe, 2024) has been noted both in Kenya and Rwanda where e-cigarette kiosks are situated near university campuses (Agaku et al., 2021; Giovenco, 2016) and retail outlets close to schools (Nyirakamana, 2016).

Methods

Study design

This study analyzes the evolution of TI strategies and approaches in marketing to African women and girls over the past 30 years. The marketing analysis examines the industry's messaging strategy, tactics and channels targeting African females, including how it leverages cultural, economic and social trends to reach this growing demographic.

TI marketing strategies across five countries were investigated using a mixed-methods approach, incorporating quantitative surveys of women ranging from age 19 to 75, qualitative semi-structured interviews with female tobacco or nicotine users, as well as teachers, parents and TC advocates of either gender in these countries.

Qualitative interviews: In selecting participants for qualitative interviews, purposive sampling was used to identify initial respondents. Women who were either consumers of tobacco/nicotine products or exposed to tobacco marketing were identified and recruited.

Community leaders, parents/guardians, teachers and tobacco control advocates were also purposively selected to participate in the interviews, as representing those knowledgeable about social and cultural trends and tobacco use in the community. Snowball sampling was used to identify additional participants. Respondents were drawn from urban and peri-urban areas to capture geographic diversity. Forty-six key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted. Interview respondents were drawn from each focus country, with women comprising at least 50 percent of interviews.

Quantitative survey/poll: An online survey was administered to a sample of 593 women aged between 19 to 75, from each country, with diverse representation within the age range. Country proportional allocation was used in the distribution of survey respondents, with 153 respondents selected from Nigeria, 120 respondents each from Kenya and South Africa and 100 each from Rwanda and Senegal. Respondents were identified through social media, email lists and online community forums. Regional stratification was employed, with a focus on urban areas, which have a high media and retail presence. Inclusion criteria were women aged 18-49 who consented to participate. Girls 17 and below were excluded, as well as women who were unable or unwilling to provide written informed consent to participate in the study or to have their data published in ensuing publications (**Table 1**).

Table 1: Overall exposure through social media.

Channel	Percentage (%)
Overall social media exposure	45.87%

Ethical approval was sought and obtained from the Federal Capital Territory Health Research Ethics Committee, after submission of the research protocol. The ethics committee also approved the written consent forms used in this study. Written informed consent was obtained for each participant. Consent forms included information about the purpose of the study. Participants were informed that the information collected in the study would be published for use towards potentially strengthening tobacco control policies to promote public health. Participants who agreed to participate were informed that no identifying information would be listed in resulting publications or provided to any third parties and further gave consent for their statements to be anonymously included in ensuing publications.

The study included a desktop analysis of current Tobacco Advertising, Promotion and Sponsorship (TAPS) policies to evaluate their effectiveness against industry tactics. Additionally, a literature review examined the evolution of marketing strategies, highlighting gender-specific marketing themes and targeted marketing strategies in the selected geographies. The multi-country research team comprises an interdisciplinary group of experts in global health law, tobacco industry marketing, gender and public health.



Study locations

The research focuses on five key countries—Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Rwanda and Senegal—selected for their significance as major Sub-Saharan African market to the economic interests of the TI, showing an upward trend in tobacco use among target demographic and their diverse spread across the different sub-regions of SSA. These geographies provide a comprehensive overview of the industry’s marketing activities across diverse geographical and cultural contexts, providing broader insights into the TI’s playbook in SSA.

Limitations

The study focuses on only five countries within SSA. While these countries represent a diverse set of markets,

the findings may not fully capture the state of play in the entire region due to varying economic, cultural and regulatory contexts. The study is also limited by the lack of weighted country polls which means prevalence results cannot be generalized. Access to comprehensive and current data on tobacco industry marketing strategies over the past 30 years was also limited by small sample sizes and time constraints.

Results

Historical analysis

The TIDs were systematically searched for content related to marketing targeted at women in SSA countries and the following results were obtained as shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Tobacco documents keyword search criteria.

S/N	Keywords search	Number of hits	Number of documents downloaded
1	((Tobacco) and (female)) and (marketing) and (Nigeria))	2692	10
2	((Tobacco) and (female)) and (marketing) and (South Africa)- title search)	17	3
3	((Tobacco) and (female)) and (marketing) and (Kenya)- title search)	19	0
4	((Tobacco) and (female)) and (marketing) and (Rwanda)- title search)	0	0
5	((Tobacco) and (female)) and (marketing) and (Senegal)- title search)	1	0
Total		2729	13

Even though the search in Nigeria appeared to have the most documents 10, the South African documents covered the most location-specific details. No country-specific information on female-targeted marketing was identified in documents for Kenya, Rwanda and Senegal. However, there was a significant amount of information on how the TI targets women globally. Some notable themes from the documents were: Growth markets and opportunities,

brands targeting females, market segmentation by socio-economic status, market segmentation by age-group, harm reduction marketing, cultural perceptions of female tobacco use and proximity marketing. **Table 3** identifies quotes from the TIDs under the major themes. The acronym HORECA represents Hotel, Restaurants and Casinos, while ASU 30 means Adult Smokers Under 30.

Table 3: Results of TID search.

Theme	TID Quote	Document
Growth markets and opportunities	The strategic challenge Projected growth in volume and profit driven by: Premium Lights Adult female smokers ASU 30	Unknown (1997)
	Trade marketing strategy HORECA Definitely appeals to strategic target consumers and has highest lights development. Strategy founded upon HORECA as communications opportunity to increase awareness, to build and improve image and to generate trial. Priority given to channel during launch periods with image-enhancing trial generating programs.	Unknown (1997)
	The opportunities matrix key learnings 2005 Why ASU 30? Value in and of itself as a segment	Unknown (1997)



	<p>-19% of contestable volume, 22% of contestable brands; may be critical to growth of premium brands -125 index vs. 25-34; 143 index vs 35+ -46% of male ASU 30's; 60% of female ASU 30's No major number two ASU 30 brand across markets in premium No number one ASU 30 brand across markets in medium Focused spend opportunity</p>	
	<p>Males account for all but one of the lost sales, whereas the split between males and females for switchers and impulse purchases are a third to two thirds respectively</p>	Unknown. (1996)
	<p>At the other end of the market, the 1985 test launch of Ritz proved very successful. The product appeals particularly to female smokers</p>	ERC Statistics International Ltd. (n.d.)
	<p>Philip Morris is also well positioned with Virginia Slims, the leading 'female' brand. National distribution of Virgin Slims 120 at the end to last year helped the brand to achieve a 2.9% market share and exploit the growing relative importance of women to the cigarette industry</p>	ERC Statistics International Ltd. (n.d.)
	<p>Capri is focused on the growing female segment</p>	Barton, H. (1994)
	<p>The snuffing habit is proportionately higher among the female tobacco-product users (59%), compared to the males (29%)</p>	Research & Marketing Services Limited. (1996)
Brands targeting females	<p>Males account for higher percentage of both volume and profit (77%) vs Females (23%). Females, however, provide a higher share of profit vs volume. BATS B&H is better positioned amongst Females.</p>	British-American Tobacco Company Limited, & Notikina, O. (1997)
Market segmentation by socio-economic status	<p>KENT BRAND Image/platform: Superior taste. For self-assured sociable adults. Perceived as an 'old' brand. Target Consumers: 21-40-year-old Urban Males and Females, relatively upscale and better educated. Price Positioning: Full revenue. Parity to or higher than mainstream US brands (Marlboro) Product: Light/Mild Blended</p>	RJR; RJ Reynolds Tobacco; GJB. (1993)
	<p>BENSON & HEDGES The B&H Mild (White Pack) family is strongly progressive with an enviable position amongst upper income YAUS both male and female. Having been almost exclusively a white brand, it is now beginning to make inroads in the black market</p>	Ross, I. (1992)
Market segmentation by age-group	<p>To be a credible contender, such a product needs to appeal to the key segment of 18-24 yr old male and female urban smokers</p>	RJR; RJ Reynolds Tobacco; GJB. (1993)
	<p>MORE BRAND Image/platform: Elegance, Sophistication Target consumers: 25-40yr old, Women, Upscale Product: Blended 120 mm, Brown-colored paper</p>	RJR; RJ Reynolds Tobacco; GJB. (1993)
	<p>VICEROY-The brand will be positioned to appeal to young, contemporary male and female smokers of U.S. International Full Flavor brands</p>	Unknown. (1981)
	<p>In 1983 52.2% of cigarette smokers opted for medium-tar varieties compared to 44.3% in 1981, whilst the proportion of high-tar consumers fell in the same period from 34.6% to 26.7%. Female regular smokers were more likely than males to smoke cigarettes with a low tar yield; approximately 32% of males smoked cigarettes with 16mg of tar and over compared to 21% of females. The tendency to smoke low tar yield cigarettes is directly related to education, with the better educated preferring lower-tar brands</p>	ERC Statistics International Ltd. (n.d.)
	<p>KIM BRAND Kim has a female bias but is smoked by some males in Italy. It is an American blend, in slims and ultra slims, 7 mg lights and 4 mg Ultralights</p>	Barton, H. (1994)
Harm reduction marketing	<p>KOOL SUPER LIGHTS-Super Lights will capitalize on the trend to single-digit tar products - It will be positioned to appeal to younger upscale males and females with less strength and harshness imagery than the Parent -To capitalize upon opportunities within non-U.S. oriented markets, a white tip will be utilized to reinforce the Mild, Low tar image of the brand and generate greater acceptance among females.</p>	Unknown (1981)
Cultural perceptions of female tobacco use	<p>In general smokers wanted to see women in the advertisements but there is still a substantial minority of older and Moslem smokers who believe that women smokers are prostitutes. The style of dress and presentation should not encourage this belief</p>	BAT (UK & Export) Limited. (1990)
Proximity marketing	<p>There were other reservations concerning women in clubs. 'Cigarette goes with enjoyment - beer and dancing</p>	BAT (UK & Export) Limited. (1990)
	<p>Crisps and snacks and confectionery should be in a high traffic flow area to optimize impulse</p>	Unknown (1996)



Findings from the TIDs suggest the TI has systematically targeted women for several decades. In more recent times, women have been considered an important growth market, especially in areas of high population and low smoking prevalence. The most popular age-group of women targeted by the TI in the documents was 18-24 years. Furthermore, the TIDs revealed the industry's plan to make smoking appear safer for women by introducing low tar and nicotine cigarettes, popularly called lights. These lighter products are cheaper to produce due to their relatively smaller sizes and thus more profitable when sold in large quantities.

The documents revealed targeting of urban women with high socio-economic status with low-tar products to enhance sales in that category. This strategy seemed to be particularly successful in South Africa. In Nigeria, the TIDs identified smokeless tobacco (snuff) as a possible growth market. This suggests the TI was already planning to leverage female preferences for smokeless tobacco in Nigeria and possibly other countries in the region. Furthermore, before comprehensive TAPS bans were introduced, the TI could give the cigarettes a very appealing feminine look. Since TAPS bans are now in place for cigarettes, the TI has shifted their packaging focus to new and emerging products, which, in many SSA countries, have less restrictive or undefined packaging requirements.

Legal and policy analysis

An analysis of the primary tobacco control laws and regulations revealed that none of the countries studied have regulations addressing new and emerging tobacco products. The current definitions of tobacco products are restricted to those containing tobacco leaf, whether wholly or partially, limiting the applicability of laws to non-tobacco products.

Senegal has the strictest tobacco control laws among the surveyed countries, imposing broad bans on both direct and indirect TAPS across platforms. Senegal's laws prohibit point-of-sale displays, as well as sponsorships and promotional activities. The laws are comprehensive, explicitly banning TAPS across domestic and international television, cross-border channels, internet-based media and "any medium whatsoever." This breadth ensures that cross-boundary materials, such as streaming channels and social media, are covered. Senegalese regulations also ban the use, import, advertisement and sale of shisha or hookah products.

Kenya's laws prohibit TAPS across various settings including sporting, cultural, artistic, recreational, educational and entertainment events. However, gaps exist due to the law's traditional definition of tobacco products and vagueness on CSR activities and sponsorship. The law explicitly prohibits cross-boundary TAPS, banning all communication published or which originates outside Kenya. Kenyan laws also prohibit the sale, use or

advertisement of shisha.

South Africa enforces a general ban on TAPS across traditional channels, but allows point-of-sale displays and charitable contributions and sponsorship not aimed at advertising, representing a significant loophole for CSR. The South African law defines promotion to include various means including film, television production or the internet. A key limitation is that the TAPS ban does not extend to international satellite, film or video transmission made outside South Africa, leaving room for cross-boundary promotion.

Nigeria has a comprehensive ban on TAPS including point-of-sale displays, vending machines and internet-based communications. Among the countries studied, only Nigeria explicitly bans promotions by media and celebrities, applying directly to influencers. Nigeria's relatively comprehensive TAPS regulations are weakened by broad exemptions allowing TAPS directed at "consenting persons" aged 18 and over, creating loopholes and ambiguity around marketing in adult-only venues, such as nightclubs and bars. This exemption complicates enforcement of the TAPS ban in settings that should ideally be restricted.

Rwanda's TAPS regulations are narrow in scope, focusing on traditional restrictions prohibiting free samples, restricting CSR activities by tobacco companies and advertising at cultural and sporting events. However, the Rwanda law does not cover cross-boundary TAPS, point-of-sale advertising or new products, leaving significant gaps. The law also bans the sale, import, use and advertisement of shisha or hookah.

Despite the implementation of some form of TAPS regulations in each country, substantial gaps persist, particularly regarding new and emerging products, which remain unregulated. Additionally, there is a lack of clarity, consistency and explicitness in laws addressing the evolving media landscape.

Key findings from quantitative surveys

Prevalence and social acceptability of tobacco and nicotine use

A total of 593 female respondents aged 19 to 75, with an average age of 34, were surveyed from the five countries: Nigeria (32.5%), Kenya (16.9%), South Africa (16.9%), Senegal (16.9%) and Rwanda (16.9%). For age distribution, the largest group were those aged 24-28 years (23.6%). Nearly half of the respondents (46.9%) had completed college or university education. The largest group consisted of self-employed women (29.8%), followed by non-government employees and the unemployed, both making up 17.4% of the sample (**Table 4 and 5**).



Table 4: Tobacco use prevalence by employment status.

Employment Status	Kenya	South Africa	Senegal	Rwanda	Nigeria
Self-employed	38%	68%	23%	24%	0%
Government employees	32%	62%	20%	20%	0%
Non-government employees	35%	65%	22%	22%	0%
Students	20%	50%	15%	14%	0%
Unemployed	25%	55%	18%	18%	0%
Retired/Hom e-makers	18%	48%	12%	12%	0%

Table 5: Tobacco use by education and employment.

Category	Prevalence (%)
Self-employed	38%
Employed	33.50%
Unemployed	25%
Students	20%

The survey examined the prevalence of tobacco and nicotine product use among target demographics across the five countries. Overall, 28.43% of women surveyed have tried or experimented with tobacco and nicotine products (Table 6), though prevalence varied widely among the countries, from 0% in Nigeria to 65% in South Africa. Senegal (21%), Kenya (34%) and Rwanda (22%) recorded notable prevalence rates (Table 7).

Table 6: Prevalence of tobacco use.

Category	Prevalence (%)
Prevalence of tobacco use	28.43% (excluding Nigeria's 0%)

Table 7: Prevalence of tobacco and nicotine use.

Country	Kenya	South Africa	Senegal	Rwanda	Nigeria
Prevalence of Tobacco Use (%)	34.20%	65%	21%	22%	0%

In Nigeria, no respondents reported tobacco use, although other studies indicate low smoking rates among Nigerian women (1.1% in GATS Nigeria 2012). It is important to note that this sample is not weighted and respondents might have underreported smoking behaviors due to cultural stigma and the social disapproval of smoking in their context.

Cigarettes were the most commonly used tobacco product, with high usage rates reported in Kenya (85%), South Africa (92%), Senegal (78%) and Rwanda (80%). E-

cigarettes were notable in South Africa (35%) and Kenya (20%), while shisha use was highest in Senegal (30%) and Kenya (25%). Shisha use is less prevalent in South Africa (18%) and Rwanda (15%) recorded low prevalence of shisha, while Senegal (15%) recorded lower use of e-cigarettes. Nicotine pouches and similar products recorded low usage rates across the board, with the highest prevalence in South Africa (8%) and Kenya (5%) and lowest prevalence in Senegal (3%) and Rwanda (2%) (Table 8).

Table 8: Product usage among those who have tried tobacco products.

Product	Kenya	South Africa	Senegal	Rwanda	Nigeria
Cigarette	85%	92%	78%	80%	0%
E-cigarettes or Vapes	20%	35%	15%	0%	0%
Shisha	25%	18%	30%	15%	0%
Nicotine Pouch	5%	8%	3%	2%	0%
Nicotine/Lozenge/Gummies	2%	5%	1%	1%	1%
Others	3%	2%	1%	1%	0%

Tobacco use was generally viewed as unacceptable in most of the surveyed countries, with disapproval rates as high as 92% in Senegal (Table 9). In Senegal, 92% of respondents view tobacco use as "not at all acceptable," followed closely by 89% in Rwanda and 88% in Kenya. In contrast, South Africa showed a significantly different pattern. 35% of respondents in South Africa view tobacco use as "not at all acceptable," while 5% of respondents consider tobacco use to be very acceptable and 20% view it as somewhat acceptable. Besides South Africa, no respondents in the surveyed countries deemed tobacco use very acceptable and only 1% saw it as "somewhat acceptable."

Table 9: Perceptions of acceptability for tobacco use by country.

Acceptability level	Kenya (%)	South Africa (%)	Senegal (%)	Rwanda (%)	Nigeria (%)
Not at all acceptable	88%	35%	92%	89%	0%
Slightly acceptable	11%	40%	7%	10%	0%
Somewhat acceptable	1%	20%	1%	1%	0%
Very acceptable	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%
Extremely acceptable	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%



When looking at product usage by age, 29.2% of respondents had tried tobacco or nicotine products. Specifically for e-cigarettes or vapes, the 24-28 age group had the highest usage rate at 15.7%. This was followed by the 29-33-year-olds at 11.2% and the 18-23-year-olds at 9.1%. Usage was lowest among those aged 40 and older, with no reported usage in the 50+ age group. Additionally, e-cigarette or vape usage was highest in South Africa, where 25% of the country's sample reported usage. College and university graduates had the second-highest usage rate at 12.2%, with post-graduate degree holders reporting the highest rate at 13.6% (Tables 10 and 11).

Table 10: Tobacco use prevalence by level of education.

Education level	Kenya (%)	South Africa (%)	Senegal (%)	Rwanda (%)	Nigeria (%)
No formal schooling/primary school	15%	45%	10%	10%	0%
Secondary school completed	30%	60%	20%	18%	0%
College/university completed	40%	70%	25%	25%	0%
Post-graduate degree	35%	65%	22%	22%	0%

Table 11: Prevalence of tobacco use by education level.

Education level	Prevalence (%)
No formal schooling/primary school	~15%
Secondary school completed	~30%
College/university completed	~40%
Post-graduate degree	~35%

Common marketing channels

The survey results provide critical insights into the patterns of tobacco marketing exposure across various channels. Overall, television shows and movies were the dominant marketing channels, with 77.2% of respondents across all five countries encountering tobacco-related content—including advertisements or usage of cigarettes, shisha or e-cigarettes—through traditional broadcast and streaming platforms such as DSTV (cable TV), Netflix or Showmax (Table 12).

Table 12: Marketing channels exposure.

Channel	Percentage (%)
Nightclubs, bars, lounges	35.30%
Parties	33.37%
Points of Sale	31.27%

Social media marketing was particularly strong in South Africa, where 30% of respondents reported seeing influencers promoting tobacco products. Respondents also

encountered product placement in user-generated content (25%) and through giveaways or competitions (18%). Influencer activity was minimal in Kenya with 7% of respondents encountering influencer promotions. The question assessed marketing across various social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube and WhatsApp (Table 13).

Table 13: Marketing exposure by age group.

Marketing channel	18-23	24-28	29-33	34-39	40-49	50+
Nightclubs, bars, lounges	37.40%	36.40%	35.60%	34.80%	33.60%	32%
Parties	35.20%	34.20%	33.40%	32.80%	31.60%	30%
Points of sale	33.40%	32.60%	31.80%	31.20%	30%	28.60%
Social media influencers	16.60%	15.60%	14.40%	13.60%	12.80%	11.80%
Social media giveaways	10%	9.20%	8.40%	8%	7.20%	6.60%
Social media product placement	14.40%	13.40%	12.40%	11.40%	10.60%	9.80%
No social media exposure	51%	52%	53.40%	54.80%	56%	57.60%
Media (TV, movies, streaming)	75.80%	75.20%	74.60%	74%	73%	71.80%

Social media exposure to tobacco marketing, including influencers promoting products, giveaways and product placements, is highest among younger age groups. Individuals aged 18-23 have the highest exposure to online tobacco marketing across all categories: 20.6% were exposed to influencer promotions, 10% to giveaways and 14.4% to product placements. We found that there was a gradual decline in exposure with age, with respondents above 50 years encountering the lowest exposure (15.8% influencers, 6.6% giveaways, 9.8% product placements). Conversely, 57% of people older than 50 years saw no social media marketing, while the numbers for people aged between 18 and 23 was 51% (Table 14).

Table 14: Social media exposure by age group.

Social media exposure	18-23	24-28	29-33	34-39	40-49	50+
Influencers promoting	20.60%	19.60%	18.40%	17.60%	16.80%	15.80%
Giveaways or competitions	10%	9.20%	8.40%	8%	7.20%	6.60%
Product placement	14.40%	13.40%	12.40%	11.40%	10.60%	9.80%



No marketing seen	51%	52%	53.40 %	54.80 %	56%	57.60 %
-------------------	-----	-----	---------	---------	-----	---------

In-person tobacco marketing was predominantly encountered in nightclubs, bars and lounges, with 32.8% of participants reporting exposure in these settings. Parties followed closely at 32.2%, while points-of-sale, such as stores and kiosks, accounted for 28.5%. Social events were noted by 22.8% of respondents and community events showed the least exposure at 8.4%. Additionally, 21.6% of respondents reported no encounters with tobacco marketing. Social events likely refer to more formal or organized gatherings, while parties imply more casual, private settings.

Country-specific insights reveal variations in marketing exposure. In South Africa, the highest exposure occurred in TV shows and streaming channels (84.17%), followed by parties (55.83%), points of sale (50.83%) and social events (46.67%). In Kenya, tobacco marketing was most prevalent on TV shows (84.17%), followed by nightclubs, bars and lounges (59.17%), parties (42.50%) and points of sale (33.33%).

In Nigeria, TV shows were the primary channel of exposure (84.97%), with lower exposure reported in points of sale (9.80%), nightclubs, bars and lounges (8.50%) and parties (7.84%). Rwanda followed a similar pattern, with TV shows being the highest exposure source (69%), followed by parties (37%), nightclubs, bars and lounges (31%) and social events (20%). In Senegal, TV shows also topped the list (64%), with points of sale following closely (34%) and exposure in nightclubs, bars and lounges (28%) and parties (24%) (Table 15).

Table 15: Exposure through TV shows and movies.

Channel	Percentage (%)
TV shows, movies, streaming	77.20%

Findings from key informant interviews (qualitative)

A total of 10 interviews were conducted in Nigeria, 10 in Kenya, 9 in South Africa, 9 in Rwanda and 7 in Senegal. The following themes and sub-themes were generated to analyze the interviews:

Market segmentation (sub-themes: Segmentation by age-group, segmentation by socio-economic status, segmentation by environmental factors); cultural norms (sub-themes cultural perceptions of female tobacco use, deviant subcultures, western influence on local cultures, culturally acceptable use of tobacco); users' perceptions of advertising; Socio-economic status of tobacco users; marketing strategies (sub-themes: Global marketing strategies, regional/local marketing strategies, digital marketing, celebrity or influencer marketing, movies and shows, mainstream media advertisements, point-of-sale ads, event marketing, proximity marketing, billboards,

harm reduction marketing, free samples and gifts); users' perceptions of packaging; growth markets and opportunities; Brands targeting females; feminist ideals and women's autonomy (sub-themes: Agency of choice, women's autonomy, GBV, social exclusion); Peer and/or parental influence; Pricing of tobacco products; Tobacco regulatory and policy environment; Suggestions for improving tobacco policy; Femininity and acceptability; taste, flavor and smell; perceived harms of tobacco use; perceived benefits of tobacco use.

After extensive analysis of the interview transcripts in Nvivo 14 software, accessed through Simon Fraser University. A completely free alternative to Nvivo 14 is Qualcoder.

The dominant themes observed across the five countries were:

➤ **Brands targeting females:** Historical tobacco industry documents confirm that some brands were made specifically with women in mind as shown in the quote below:

At the other end of the market, the 1985 test launch of Ritz proved very successful. The product appeals particularly to female smokers. Philip Morris is also well positioned with Virginia Slims, the leading 'female' brand. National distribution of Virgin Slims 120 at the end of last year helped the brand to achieve a 2.9% market share and exploit the growing relative importance of women to the cigarette industry. (ERC Statistics International Ltd., n.d.)

Furthermore, the KIIs identified some brands targeting women in SSA such as Velo, a nicotine pouch product in Kenya, Vuse and Modi e-cigarettes (South Africa) and Strawberry cigarettes (Rwanda). Many KII respondents also believed shisha was particularly targeted at women. The KII quote below confirms Strawberry as a female brand for Rwandan women.

Strawberry, most of the time you can see that it attracts a lot of women and the ladies. Because even the design and also how it looks even the color is attractive for ladies. (Rwandan Woman 18-49, 2024)

➤ **Cultural perceptions of female tobacco use:** All five study countries have cultures that stigmatize female tobacco use. This led to a lot of female tobacco users being isolated from their families, particularly parents who feel ashamed by their behavior. Many SSA cultures see smoking by women as irresponsible and depicting a lack in moral values:

There is a specific perception regarding women who smoke. People tend to think you are kind of like loose or you don't have order... This guy sees me smoking - says 'you have a great personality; I didn't think you would smoke. (South African Female Smoker, 2024)

➤ **Femininity and acceptability:** The use of colors and packaging that appeal to females was a major theme identified across all five countries. Particularly, the use



of the color pink, portability of novel tobacco products and the sales of products near other products regularly purchased by women and girls. The quote below corroborates this:

When it comes to packaging, it's usually the colors that attract people. Certain colors may attract women or certain aromas...in other cases, you'll see lip glosses. So, this is specific to attracting women. So, these are strategies to attract ... more young women, more young girls. (Senegalese TC advocate, 2024)

➤ **Women's autonomy:** To counter the stigma associated with tobacco use, the TI has used feminist ideals to market tobacco as a symbol of choice and freedom:

"That the women who smoke are perceived to be tough. They are like men because that's principally a man's product and you realize Kenya has had a long history of campaigning for the culture - making the culture powerful. So as a way of showing that powerful girl they tend to want to smoke to prove that "we are just like men. We are powerful" (Kenyan TC Advocate, 2024).

➤ **Celebrity/influencer marketing:** The use of celebrities and influencers to market novel tobacco products online and on television has been observed as a strategy to normalize female tobacco use:

Sometimes you find it on Instagram. They would use a famous influencer randomly on Live. She will be smoking a water pipe and probably speaking about a particular flavor and people start commenting 'I'd like to try it.' 'Where did you get it.' Or in prominent TV shows they would have a character that is loved and randomly with a vape and they produce to the population that probably watches that program because of that person who's on that show. And I think it really does also vary for various groups of girls or university students that would have parties and probably states that first 20 people to come through will receive a free vape, for all hubbly bubbly (shisha) free for the girls that night at that party. (South African Woman 18-49, 2024)

➤ **Digital marketing:** With TAPS bans in place in many SSA countries, the TI is exploiting the social media space to promote their products. Tiktok and Instagram were mentioned as possible advertising and promotion channels. Another use of the digital space was for online sales of tobacco products.

Moreover, a KII quote notes that:

The girls in Africa [are] so much into the social media...including advertisements on the social media platforms...and a lot of information ...online...has exposed these products to our people. (Kenyan School teacher, 2024)

➤ **Harm reduction marketing:** Harm reduction marketing has historically targeted women for a number of reasons. Women are more likely to be cautious about health outcomes of their tobacco use than men, who are more likely to exhibit risk-taking behavior. (Uwimana, Okowa and Habtu, 2023; Beia, Kielmann and Diaconu, 2021). Furthermore, increased education among women and girls raises the likelihood that they will opt for tobacco products which appear to be less harmful to their health. Tobacco can adversely

affect maternal and reproductive health (Tsiapakidou et al., 2023). The TI thus markets products with lower tar and nicotine as light products to women to encourage their use. A TI insider noted the following:

In 1983 52.2% of cigarette smokers opted for medium-tar varieties compared to 44.3% in 1981, whilst the proportion of high-tar consumers fell in the same period from 34.6% to 26.7%. Female regular smokers were more likely than males to smoke cigarettes with a low tar yield; approximately 32% of males smoked cigarettes with 16 mg of tar and over compared to 21% of females. The tendency to smoke low tar yield cigarettes is directly related to education, with the better educated preferring lower-tar brands. (ERC Statistics International Ltd., n.d.)

The KIIs revealed that many respondents viewed emerging products as being safer than traditional cigarettes. One of the quotes is presented below:

Q: DO you think products like vapes, e-cigs are safer than traditional cigarettes? A: Yes, because they look like softer options of smoking which to my end is good and safe for women and young girls (Kenyan Female Tobacco User, 2024).

Historically, the prospects for weight loss have been factors in women's adoption of smoking (Potter et al., 2004), reinforced by the marketing of light or slim cigarettes. Emerging product marketing is picking up this narrative, as highlighted in this KII response:

And it was actually advertising electronic cigarettes where the e-liquid assists you to lose weight. There was also some that had vitamins in them. So, they were introducing this through the e-cigarettes. So, if you miss a meal, you have an e-cigarette that gives a vitamin boost to your body. If you continue to vape these products, it can assist you with losing weight. (South African Female Former Smoker, 2024).

➤ **Movies and TV shows:** To counter the negative image of tobacco use among females, there has been increased depiction of tobacco use in movies and shows across SSA. Some of these are on cable channels like DSTV while others are on streaming sites like Netflix and Showmax. Although tobacco adverts are not shown with these movies, there is a proliferation of smoking scenes in the movies even when they are not essential to the storylines. Nollywood is the world's third largest film producer, with content widely viewed across the SSA region. A study of 60 Nollywood movies found 73% containing smoking scenes and 78.9% of female lead characters smoking (Adelufosi, 2014). Recent hit movies Oloture and King of Boys, available on Netflix, show female leads smoking. Such depictions of tobacco use, particularly by women, tends to normalize the public view of smoking as acceptable and can influence tobacco initiation among women and girls (**Table 16**). (Allem et al., 2022) A KII quote corroborates this:

But from South Africa here, there's a channel on DSTV which we call Mzansi. Sometimes they tell stories based on what is happening locally and you'll find that they will be showing their young girls in beautiful clothes smoking and obviously the young ones which are seeing that will want to definitely copy it's all about and making this cigarette thing as if it's a cool thing (South African



Tobacco Stakeholder, 2024).

Table 16: Encounter with tobacco adverts on TV and streaming platforms like Showmax and Netflix.

Country	Kenya	SA	Senegal	Rwanda	Nigeria
Yes	84.17%	84.17%	64%	69%	84.97%
No	15.83%	15.83%	36%	31%	15.03%

➤ **Taste, flavor and smell:** As observed earlier, female tobacco use in SSA is highly stigmatized compared to male use. This stigma has led to reactions such as many women smoking in secret, away from their families, especially parents (**Table 17**). To ensure the secrecy of their tobacco use habits, many female smokers use products that are less detectable and have a more appealing taste, flavor and smell:

Table 17: Acceptability of women smoking.

Level of acceptability	Percentage (%)
Not at all acceptable	76%
Slightly acceptable	17%
Somewhat acceptable	6%
Very acceptable	1%
Extremely acceptable	0%

Currently, Dunhill is more popular for us and we like to smoke it more than other kinds of cigarettes. They like it because of the smell, no one can know that you smoke. It is a modern one, which does not smell (Rwanda Woman 18-49 VIII, 2024).

Perhaps in perfumes (flavors) you'll find that some are much more attractive to women than to men. Like strawberry, mint, among others. Cigarettes flavored with menthol, fruit, vanilla or apple are more appealing to women because they like sweetness. The odor is masked, so they don't smell like cigarettes (Senegalese Female Tobacco User, 2024).

Other notable quotes from the KIIs are provided in **Table 18**.

Table 18: Results of qualitative analysis of KIIs.

Theme	KII quote	Source
Brands targeting females	It is mostly the electronic cigarettes. And we have something we've been fighting over in Kenya called the nicotine pouch Velo. It used to be called Switch, I think. I'm trying to remember that there's a name that it came with and then became Velo. That's a nicotine pouch that has been targeted mostly for young girls and women. We also have shisha which is what they smoke in the clubs targeting young people. That's a very common product now very popular for young women and girls	(Kenyan TC expert, 2024)
	That particular one was linked with Vuse. Actually, Twisp came up with it as well. It was one of the original vaping brands that came up with something like that. And I found that my boyfriend's daughter was actually interested in something like that. When I was scrolling through the adverts one day, there's a brand a South African brand of e-cigarettes and I think it's called Modi vapes. And the actual vape device, you have them looking like little ice creams, some of them look like lipstick, they look like little bottles of foundation for your face, so you can put them in your handbag. The other one was like, you get these little children's toys that look like they play dollhouse with the little food things? There were actually little milk cartons in the flavour of chocolate milk, soda bottles. There were some that actually looked like USB sticks, that they cannot be identified with kids in schools. And I noticed that when we were sitting together, she was attracted to that. She said, "Oh look, it will go nicely with my dollhouse." It looks like a toy for her and that's very attractive for her	(South African Woman 18-49, 2024)
	Q: In your opinion, which product do you think is marketed more aggressively towards women and girls?	(Senegalese Female Tobacco User, 2024)
	A: Generally speaking, slim cigarettes are the most popular. They also consume classic cigarettes	(Rwanda Woman 18-49 VI, 2024)
	So, when we compare to other brands, Strawberry is better than other brands because most women, they like to use it. But when we talk about Intore and Impala, somehow it is not comfortable for ladies...Most women are using shisha. You can't find most men using shisha on their mouth	(Rwanda Woman 18-49 VI, 2024)
Celebrity/influencer marketing	There was not really proper marketing, but they would market it when a club would want to introduce to say, now we have shisha, they would take videos of women smoking shisha or...really pretty celebrities. I feel like the poster child of shisha was the female influencers	(Kenyan Female Tobacco User, 2024)
	Let me just say to just promote their products. Sometimes you find it on Instagram. They would use a famous influencer randomly on live. She will be smoking a water pipe and probably speaking about a particular flavor. She has never heard of it before but trying for the	(South African



	<p>first time and people start commenting 'I'd like to try it.' 'Where did you get it' or in prominent TV shows they would have a character...that is loved and randomly with vape...and they produce to the population that probably watches that program because of that person who's on that show and I think it really does also vary for various groups of girls and college students or university students that would have parties and probably states that first 20 people to come through will receive a free vape first for all hubbly bubbly (Shisha) free for the girls that night that party...they use various tactics to lure various kinds of girls into actually using the products at any given time</p>	<p>Woman 18-49, 2024)</p>
	<p>They use female celebrities. There was a time when a female celebrity started a challenge whereby, she was making ring smokes and getting people to do the same</p>	<p>(Nigeria Public Health Expert, 2024)</p>
<p>Cultural perceptions of female tobacco use</p>	<p>I feel like women are shunned a lot. For example, personally in my experience, I've had guys where I've spoken to who would ask me 'Do you do this, do you like smoke shisha, Do you like smoke vapes Do you take cigarettes' and when you say you actually do that, they usually have this, like they tend to not communicate with you anymore because they're always like 'women shouldn't do this', Yeah. But when it's for them, it's okay. It's absolutely fine. Because when you ask him, he's like 'yeah, I do it but I don't think women should</p>	<p>(Kenyan Female Tobacco User, 2024)</p>
	<p>There is a specific perception regarding women who smoke. People tend to think you are kind of like loose or you don't have order. I mean, I remember there was one time I traveled with a group of people. This guy sees me smoking-says 'you have a great personality; I didn't think you would smoke</p>	<p>(South African Female Smoker, 2024)</p>
	<p>I feel like they think a lady is not supposed to be smoking. They will say what will you teach your children you are not responsible as a woman who smokes</p>	<p>(Nigeria Female Non-Tobacco User, 2024)</p>
	<p>Because women who smoke in Senegalese society hide. They're frowned upon. It's a disgrace...A woman who smokes is not very well perceived in this country. There's a lot of taboo and prejudice against women who smoke. In the past, women who couldn't smoke at home because of their families took advantage of the fact that they could go to places like restaurants and nightclubs to do so...A girl who smokes is seen as a bad girl. The first thing people will say about her is "ah she smokes!". Even if you're seen smoking in the street or in certain public places, people will look at you a bit strangly. There's always a judgment towards women who smoke</p>	<p>(Senegalese Female Tobacco User, 2024)</p>
	<p>Respondent: So, when I am with my family in the countryside, I can't even know what happened to me about smoking. But when I am in Kigali, because people around me know me, I can try to smoke. But when I am in the countryside, I can't smoke because even my grandmother says it is a bad image to the family. So the women who smoke, so now to their families, it's somehow awful and also it is a bad image for them. It has been like this every time, so people say no, this is a bad girl. We don't want you in our family, you have to go away...In Rwandese culture it is bad to smoke in the face of your family. Most of them say you have changed the face of the family and the culture and you are an unkind person. They can harm you due to smoking... I decided to leave my family and start now having my own house. It was due to smoking. Once they found me smoking, they said to me, "Go away. We don't want this in our house, so go and find yours. So currently, I live alone with my son because the family has chased me away because of smoking</p>	<p>(Rwanda Woman 18-49 IV, 2024)</p>
<p>Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)</p>	<p>Give them a sense of 'we are good' industry. So you see them trying to do a lot of CSR. They do this even in schools...they're giving scholarships, but we know that in the end, it's about making them look good to the public such that it's easy for people including girls and groups to associate with them. They do a lot of partnership sometimes with student organizations where they organize practice tests and scholarships. These partnerships eventually expose them to tobacco use</p>	<p>(Nigerian Public Health Expert, 2024)</p>
<p>Digital marketing</p>	<p>The girls in Africa are so much into the social media...including their advertisements on the social media platforms, which currently the youth and the young girls are so much into and a lot of information that is available online...has exposed these products to our people</p>	<p>(Kenyan School Teacher, 2024)</p>
	<p>I spend a lot of time on TikTok and I notice that a lot of vape stores here in South Africa-maybe it's a form of advertising - I don't know. What they do is that they go live on their feeds, on their TikTok feeds and they show people how to use the vapes, how to fill them up with the e-liquid, how to smoke it, how to change the settings on your vape to get more cloud release, so it's an educational video on how to use their electronic products. With regard to traditional cigarettes I haven't seen advertising, aside from like, if you walk into a store or a gas station or</p>	<p>(South African Female Former Smoker, 2024)</p>



	convenience store, you'll see they have adverts, buy two for the price of one, buy a pack of cigarettes and get a lighter for free	
Event marketing	Yes, there is the clubbing culture, the music, where there are concerts and they take that opportunity to target girls and women. Where there is music or most women like going for music concerts and events like that, they take advantage of that	(Kenyan TC Stakeholder, 2024)
	That's a backup industry also gets away now with having pop-up stores in various malls and that's also form of advertising and they would have another even markets their products at various festivals and concerts. They won't sponsor it in a way that you would see it in broad daylight. But as you see you go into the website you then realize that these are all the partners of this particular festival and then it's for example as part of the partners...means that [they] are sponsoring a particular Festival particular concert...Market the products since they can't show them on TV. I did say that they will then go and market their products in festivals and they'll have a photo booth	(South African Female, 2024)
	Usually, events that are sponsored by drink brands usually have these tobacco brands sponsoring the events so they give out the products for free sometimes or they come to those events and sell their products as well	(Nigerian Woman 18-49 II, 2024)
Femininity and acceptability	From my own observation. Yeah. What I've seen mostly when they're advertising this thing, is that these girlie colors that most ladies and women will prefer. So, you'll find some of these cigarettes like the vape and shisha. These are enticing colors like pink, purple, so as a lady or a girl when they see that they'll be like, 'This looks nice	(Kenyan School Teacher, 2024)
	So, you would find more feminine colors, like brighter colors, pink and the rest, in the designs of those products. You also find them around premises where female items, where women would congregate or shop	(Nigerian TC Advocate, 2024)
	Strawberry, most of the time you can see that it attracts a lot of women and the ladies. Because even the design and also how it looks, you can see that this is designated for ladies. Even the color is attractive for ladies.	(Rwandan Woman 18-49, 2024)
	When it comes to packaging, it's usually the colors that attract people. Certain colors may attract women or certain aromas. I've mentioned that you'll see tobacco products and cigarettes which are didactic products used in teaching that have the same shapes. In other cases, you'll see lip glosses. So, this is specific to attracting women. So these are strategies to attract more women, more young women, more young girls	(Senegalese TC Advocate, 2024)
	In my opinion, I would think that the electronic cigarettes are more aggressively marketed because of the use of color. I mean if you think of using the color pink, I mean young girls who always love pink even though you grow up you like f I'm not really a person who loves pink but pink is an attractive color	(South African Woman 18-49, 2024)
Harm reduction marketing	Q: Do you think products like vapes, e-cigs are safer than traditional cigarettes? A: Yes, because they look like softer options of smoking which to my end is good and safe for women and young girls	(Kenyan Female Tobacco User, 2024)
	With nicotine products, they've made it seem like they are helping you quit the traditional cigarettes because they say they're much safer	(South African Female Former Smoker, 2024)
	You'll see marketing content that suggests healthier alternatives. There's a lot of buzz around being healthy, choosing healthy alternatives, going green, less harm to the environment. Those are the marketing bents we've seen. Oftentimes, you'll find shisha and e-cigarettes being promoted as healthier alternatives. Also, they'll say with electronic cigarettes, you don't need to litter because there are no cigarette butts, so you can consume your thing without affecting the environment. There are claims to say that this is just vapor so you're really not harming the environment, you're not affecting the people around you. Those are the kinds of things that, because of the level of enlightenment around climate change, environmental rights, being healthy and the rest, what the industry has done is crafted their arguments to mirror those sentiments. Oftentimes, not true, but that is the direction they've taken to present those products to younger women...Shisha is presented as harmless, just flavor and vibes, nothing in it...Terminology like ultra-light, low tar, high tar. And many of the ones that are labeled as low or softer or more agreeable to the palette or any term they use to make it seem like this is not so strong, not so bad, are designed in a way to make them more appealing to women	(Nigerian TC Advocate, 2024)
	The difference between the marketing strategies for e-cigarettes and traditional cigarettes is that e-cigarettes are presented as healthy forms of smoking, <i>i.e.</i> , less dangerous or not dangerous at all, according to the way they are presented... We've managed to combat smoking in religious housing estates, but if you go to Camberene (Non-smoking city) with your electronic cigarette, who's going to stop you? Nobody will. Because it's not perceived as a	(Senegalese TC Advocate, 2024)



	<p>tobacco product and as dangerous. So as you can see, there are still a lot of difficulties that leave the tobacco industry a lot of room to maneuver!</p> <p>I can say that shisha it's good because even on shisha they don't write anything about smoking is harmful, but when you compare to Impala or Intore, most of the time they say you can have some disease from smoking those kinds. And also about nicotine, you can have more sicknesses like not producing children or other things that can be harmful to your health. But shisha, they don't write anything as an effect... think most ladies I have seen, they like to use the Impala or normal cigarettes than shisha, because shisha it has no strong feelings. So you may find that they prefer to take normal cigarettes than using shisha, because shisha it's like drinking water</p>	(Rwanda Woman 18-49 VI, 2024)
Market segmentation by age-group	<p>We have noticed that some of the clubs where these things happen, the bars and the clubs where these things happen are where young people frequent, for example, there's a common bar in Nairobi it is called 1824. It essentially means between ages 18 and age 24. And most young people who are between those ages end up in that pub all the time and that's where most of these promotions are going on</p>	(Kenyan TC Stakeholder, 2024)
Movies and shows	<p>But from South Africa here, there's a channel (on DSTV) which we call Mzansi. Sometimes it's a channel where they tell stories based on what is happening locally. It's things which I happening here in South Africa and you'll find that the issue of smoking there will be showing their young girls In beautiful clothes smoking and obviously the young ones which are seeing that and they will want to definitely copy that and leave that place so it's all about and making this cigarette thing as if it's a cool thing and targeting this one's which can afford and you'll find that in our high school in our universities</p>	(South African Tobacco Stakeholder, 2024)
	<p>The only place I see them market the tobacco products is through musical videos that I have seen and movies</p>	(Nigeria Female Non-Tobacco User, 2024)
Peer/parental influence	<p>Peer influence is the most, like the key thing that is help spreading the tobacco yield in among school girls...So, if I'm someone who likes partying then I've been told next time when you come in you'll have a free shisha night, Next time I'll try and motivate my fellow peers and that's something that's happening. So rampant in school, you'll find that someone who didn't even know anything about these they just go to try out because their peers are doing this. So, peer influence is very rampant and it's spreading</p>	(Kenyan School Teacher, 2024)
	<p>Specifically, I can say that, for me, with my friends, not a lot of my friend's smoke and they didn't even like me smoking around them. So, with the change to e-cigarettes, it made me more palatable around them. As much as I used to smoke cigarettes, I would keep a disposable vape to smoke when we went out. Because it always took me away from them, I would miss part of the conversation at the restaurant because I would have to walk out of the restaurant or the mall. And afterwards, I would have to wash my hands and use lotion and all that. But with the vapes, I didn't need to leave their presence. Obviously, at the time, I wasn't aware that vaping wasn't okay. With vaping, nobody would smell or cringe at the smell of vapes. So, I never needed to leave the conversation. Even in my work life, it was easier for me than walking outside for a smoke break. I didn't have to leave my desk to vape...I actually grew up in a family where my dad smoked, my uncle smoked and on my dad's side, my aunties smoked as well. Even on my mum's side, one or two of my grandparents, the ladies who smoked cigarettes. I was the only girl among a lot of the guys I grew up with, my brothers, my cousins. I was the only girl and I was the youngest. I hung out with them and it started out as, you're going to do this with us and you can't rat us out. Some of them stopped smoking. Most of them are still smoking. Some of them went into way worse things than cigarettes. But I got to a stage when I was around nine years old, I had to have a cigarette. I would pick up stumpies and smoke and try to act cool...you'll find parents buying vapes for their kids and by kids, I mean 9-year-olds. You'll find kids, still holding their parents' hands to walk in the mall, but vaping</p>	(South African Female Former Smoker, 2024)
	<p>"When you see them using it you would want to use it also. And also, peer pressure, that is one. Peer pressure in the sense that when you go out to a house party and you see 90% of the people indulging in it, you want to give it a try. So, it's not like they come out and post on the billboards like "do this". I think basically most of the adverts for tobacco usage have to be people that use it without hiding...while I was younger, I think the first time I actually did smoke was when I was 18 and I was walking to get an admission. We went to a party and a whole lot of our friends were guys and they were smoking. We all knew smoking was bad, but they were smoking and it was like, okay, they can so why can't we do the same and give it a try. That was how I started, but I wasn't a constant smoker. I started taking it once I was stressed to relieve stress until I stopped. Peer pressure goes hand in hand and when your circle of friends keeps posting something or doing the same thing every time unconsciously you want to know what it is and how it is</p>	(Nigerian Woman 18-49, 2024)



	You can see a person who doesn't smoke, who goes out clubbing because of a need to escape. Around, friends are smoking and that can lead to starting smoking	(Senegalese Female Tobacco User II, 2024)
	Okay, so it was at the party of my son. The friends who came to the party came with cigarettes. So, while they are smoking, I try to ask them, can you give me to taste the tobacco? So that is the first time. The second time it was now in the club, so the friends now gave it to me and I started smoking	(Rwanda Woman 18-49 III, 2024)
Perceived benefits of tobacco use	The young girls are smoking making it that this is a cool thing to do, in addition to the reason to know that they'll be saying there's smoking because they are trying to reduce or maintain an acceptable weight	(South African Tobacco Stakeholder, 2024)
	So, most of the time after I smoke strawberry, which is for ladies, after smoking strawberry, I feel like I don't want any feeling from men, because now I feel more comfortable...Most of the time they use words, they say, we have a new product. It is somehow good, compared to the other product you are using. Also, if you smoke it, it's like a stress killer	(Rwanda Woman 18-49 III, 2024)
	I believe in the current society what is okay, some of the ladies who are giving a new market to the tobacco company and those ladies in the universities. These are ladies mainly aged between 18 to 24...because in Kenya their universities...you go to a place just even very far away from your family, it's like you are grown up. You have the freedom to do what you need your 18 years and above you have an idea you can access clubs. You can go to shops the way you want...you are treated as an adult. Now in Kenya one of the best ways to sell any product, whether to ladies, whether to men, it's by targeting those in universities currently in Kenya ladies are more in universities than gents. In the universities there's just a lot of peer pressure where if two ladies are smoking and they have two friends the two friends are very likely to join these two ladies in the near future in smoking	(Kenyan Community Leader, 2024)
Proximity marketing	No regulation, anywhere. That's a research that I think my profile can probably say if you have interviewed some of them they would tell you that they target University students the shops would be within five kilometers radius of the tertiary education institutions so that they are accessible...so they advertise it at such cues, because here we call them tuck shop because tuck shop would normally sell the basic things bread, milk and the normal things the food that you need at home, but they also sell it in the related or the newer products	(South African Tobacco Stakeholder, 2024)
	So, they've made those zones very open to girls. They can impose some strict rules on the guys -don't come here with a singlet, but a girl can come in with a bra. So, girls have way more access to these places because they need the girls around to make the place lively. And these are places where people smoke to stupor. And these are places where people have been able to create this no-judgment ambience. So, everybody comes out of their shell to do everything they cannot do outside. So, the clubs, the private bars and lounges, where your parents cannot just see you, where your partner cannot just pass by and see you. You know, the more private places are the places where I have seen a lot of women and girls smoking. The more private the setting, the more you see women and girls smoking. So you have a lot of cigarettes and cigarette products in those kinds of enclosed bars and clubs, entertainment areas	(Nigerian Parent, 2024)
	"Unlike in Cameroon, for example, where you'll see young girls wearing tobacco colors, cigarette colors and used in races or sporting activities. This has disappeared in Senegal. The only alternatives today are social networks and advertising objects in bars and restaurants."	(Senegalese TC Advocate, 2024)
	Q: How do women in your community get tobacco products and shisha? Perhaps at parties or events? A: Small shops in the village. Not all shops, but you can't pass 3 or 4 shops without having it... Q: Okay, what about maybe in the clubs or parties in their place? Is there a place where you get tobacco? A: Most of the clubs and the bars, so there are some places away from the public and you can find someone with them	(Rwanda Woman 18-49 III, 2024)
Taste, flavor and smell	Yeah, mostly I'd say the double mint. Or the gum mint like anything that has mint. I feel like most of the places I've gone to smoke shisha, women gravitate towards that mostly	(Kenyan Female Tobacco User, 2024)
	Especially from the way it smells, that's very attractive to women. The fact is that we as women are very conscious of the way we look, the way we smell, the way we portray ourselves in a social environment...When I smoked, I used to smoke brands like Camel, the one with the little balls inside that released the flavors. Not for the taste of it but more for the fact that it never smelt like cigarettes. If I came home, no one would know that I had been smoking a cigarette. They would smell mint on me, it smelt like a sweet rather than cigarette. Especially	(South African Female Former Smoker, 2024)



	<p>with electronic cigarettes, that really appeals to women more than it does men. You're smelling of strawberries and toffee</p> <p>I know other brands but I feel women will prefer this brand because the smell of regular cigarettes is not really that appealing, but the smell of Oris is better. So women will go with the one that has different flavors like strawberry and the rest. There are different other brands like Benson and the rest, but those ones don't have flavors, which is why I think most ladies will rather do shisha</p> <p>Perhaps in perfumes (flavors) you'll find that some are much more attractive to women than to men. Like strawberry, mint, among others...Cigarettes flavored with menthol, fruit, vanilla or apple are more appealing to women because they like sweetness. The odor is masked, so they don't smell like cigarettes</p> <p>Currently, Dunhill is more popular for us and we like to smoke it more than other kinds of cigarettes.</p> <p>Q: Why is Dunhill more popular for women? A: They like it because of the smell, no one can know that you smoke. It is a modern one, which does not smell. You stay sober after smoking it</p>	<p>(Nigerian Woman 18-49 II, 2024)</p> <p>(Senegalese Female Tobacco User, 2024)</p> <p>(Rwanda Woman 18-49 VIII, 2024)</p>
Tobacco policy/regulatory environment	<p>People don't follow those rules, so a 16-year-old can go into a shop and buy a packet of cigarettes or a vaping device...In South Africa, the vaping products don't fall under the tobacco act, so there's actually no legislation that covers them... There is a tax on vaping products, but it's quite small and it's not very effective</p>	<p>(South African Public Health Expert, 2024)</p>
	<p>Yes, there is and that's what stopped the conventional media because at a point we partnered with APCON. So, there are TAPS bans but the digital space is not properly regulated. The industry is so smart. In Nigeria there's an agency that is in charge of the digital space. We've called them out several times to do the needful because adverts are adverts. When you go to them, they would say that that aspect is beyond their scope. So, there are TAPS bans in Nigeria, but industry is obeying the bans on the conventional media, but digital media TAPS bans are not as effective as they should be</p>	<p>(Nigerian TC Advocate, 2024)</p>
	<p>The 2014 law formally prohibits all forms of direct and indirect advertising of tobacco and tobacco products. Now, in the definition of all these forms of prohibition, we too TC advocates, would have to manage to incorporate precisely the formal prohibition on the use of shisha, the formal prohibition on the sale and use of electronic cigarettes. Unfortunately, we can't do anything about heated tobacco...But it's (e-cigarettes) flavored, whereas Senegalese law forbids flavors...The law pushes us to, shall we say, weaken regulatory provisions by introducing bypass techniques. There you have it. This, too, is the definition of all forms of tobacco delivery and tobacco derivatives. As long as we don't change our legislation to include all these forms of circumvention using forms of smoking and forms of use of tobacco derivatives, then there may be gaps there through which the tobacco industry can get in...Then there are the health warnings. For the moment, we've managed to solve the problem of health warnings on tobacco packets, but not on new forms of tobacco delivery</p>	<p>(Senegalese TC Advocate, 2024)</p>
	<p>It's not allowed to do any advertisements of tobacco. So you might find the products on the market, but according to Rwandan law, it's not allowed to do any form of marketing or advertising of tobacco products...Then I can say that most of these brands have moved out of Rwanda. There is no tobacco manufacturing in Rwanda; they have moved to Kenya, Uganda and some other countries. They are mostly imported brands...Q. You mentioned that there are TAPS bans in place in Rwanda. Are there also bans on flavored tobacco products and vapes? A: Yes, vaping and shisha, those were banned. So what we have is mostly processed tobacco and cigarettes on the market. But I've seen electronic cigarettes. One or two people smoke them in public, but they don't smoke them on the streets. When it comes to smoking itself, there's a ban on tobacco smoking in public places. The law has been strict and mostly campaigns about smoking. Now you see people who are foreigners or maybe tourists who come to the country and they find it hard to smoke in public and...they do smoke from their culture or countries. But by and large, you see smoking prevalent among tourists more in public places until people tell them you're not allowed to smoke here. Those bans on smoking in public places are the ones that I think are breaking down smoking in public places, but you see there's a big change in smoking in public places</p>	<p>(Rwanda Key Stakeholder, 2024)</p>
Women's autonomy	<p>That the women who smoke are perceived to be tough. They are like men because that's principally a man's product and you realize Kenya has had [a] long history of campaigning for the culture making the culture powerful. So as a way of showing that powerful girl they tend to want to smoke to prove that "we are just like men. We Are Powerful" and so that's the perception that they are looking for but otherwise it is not very attractive when a woman smokes because that for men who don't smoke, they probably don't want a woman who smokes But that's the picture they want to portray that We also just powerful like you</p>	<p>(Kenyan TC Stakeholder, 2024)</p>



	<p>They didn't stop there. They also associated the image of smoking among women with the arrival of the women's liberation movements and therefore women should be able to do as men do and have exactly the same prerogatives...another cultural factor that make it easier for tobacco manufacturers to market their product to women and young people is the fact that before, girls weren't allowed to stand up. Now we accept it. We accept that our girls and boys can assert themselves. Secondly, the rights we recognize for children</p>	<p>(Senegalese TC Advocate, 2024)</p>
--	---	---------------------------------------

Discussion

Acceptability of tobacco use among women

The quantitative data indicates strong cultural and social resistance to tobacco use among women in most surveyed countries, particularly in Senegal, Rwanda and Nigeria. In these regions, smoking is heavily stigmatized. However, South Africa, where Western influences are gradually shifting traditional views, emerges as an outlier, showing comparatively higher levels of acceptance of tobacco use. Despite a generally higher acceptance of tobacco in South Africa, females especially among Black and Indian communities, still experience stigma.

In Senegal, female tobacco use is heavily stigmatized, driving women to smoke in private or in nightclubs where they are less likely to be judged. Similarly, in Rwanda, the strong cultural taboo against female smoking often leads to severe social repercussions, including familial rejection and violent harm. In Nigeria, regional differences persist: Northern Nigeria's adherence to Islamic Sharia law restricts tobacco access, keeping female smoking rates low. In Southern Nigeria, Western cultural influences have led to a greater acceptance of tobacco use among women. These nuanced perspectives reveal a strong cultural resistance to tobacco use in SSA and present an opportunity for the public health community.

Key Informant Interviews show that the TI portrays smoking as a symbol of autonomy and empowerment for women, especially in Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria. This narrative appeals to women by framing tobacco consumption as a statement of power and independence in male-dominated societies. However, it contains contradictions: Tobacco use has traditionally been associated with men and women's use of tobacco, as some respondents have submitted, is seen as a challenge to dominant gender socialization. Many women see tobacco use as a way to assert equality with men. Yet, while women's agency and autonomy of women is a pivotal aspect of gender equality, the industry's rhetoric manipulates this concept, promoting smoking as a false symbol of empowerment and misleading women. Men's risk-taking and poor health-seeking behavior has been attributed to expectations of masculinity which negatively affect life outcomes (Uwimana, Okowa and Habtu, 2023; Beia, Kielmann and Diaconu, 2021). However, this approach undermines long-term health and economic empowerment, exposing women to health risks and financial burdens.

Regulatory gaps

The legal analysis reveals significant regulatory gaps in

addressing new and emerging products. While most countries have bans on conventional cigarettes, e-cigarettes often bypass these restrictions, allowing the tobacco industry to market these products, particularly through digital platforms. In Kenya, Senegal and Rwanda, laws banning shisha and hookah exist, but regulations on e-cigarettes remain absent. A recurring theme in the KIIs was the significant gap in the regulatory and policy frameworks governing new and emerging products. This aligns with the quantitative findings, which show significant use of e-cigarettes and nicotine pouches among respondents, further normalizing tobacco use. While cigarettes remain the most common tobacco product, e-cigarette use is notably high in South Africa (35%) and Kenya (20%), highlighting a growing acceptance and the need for comprehensive regulations.

The lack of clarity and consistency in laws addressing the evolving media landscape further complicates enforcement. While some countries, like Kenya, ban cross-border TAPS, others, such as South Africa, have exemptions for these materials. The COP 10 guidelines emphasize the need for comprehensive regulations covering all media forms, including films, streaming services, video games and influencer promotions. As tobacco marketing becomes increasingly digital and global, clear and robust laws will be essential to keep pace with new tactics.

This issue is closely related to the exposure to TAPS in television shows and movies. Survey results reveal that 77.2% of respondents across five countries encountered tobacco-related content—including advertisements and the use of cigarettes, shisha and e-cigarettes—on platforms like Netflix, DSTV and Showmax. A significant portion of the content on these platforms is cross-border, indicating a shift beyond traditional broadcast television. Tobacco marketing is now pervasive in streaming services and entertainment media, enabling content to be easily shared across borders, often in areas where such products or marketing practices may be illegal, complicating enforcement efforts.

Updating laws is often burdensome and time-consuming, so countries should adopt forward-thinking regulations. By broadly defining tobacco and nicotine products, including emerging innovations like nicotine analogs and implementing comprehensive TAPS bans that address evolving digital marketing, countries can minimize the need for frequent revisions. Establishing dedicated teams or consulting experts to monitor industry trends will enable proactive steps. Cooperation between member states and collaboration with international bodies like the WHO FCTC Secretariat can further help anticipate



industry changes, resulting in more resilient, long-term regulations.

While having laws in place to regulate cross-border and digital TAPS is crucial, the capacity and availability of financial resources to enforce and regulate digital media has to be assessed. Countries like Kenya may have comprehensive laws banning TAPS on digital platforms, but KIIs reveal stakeholders' concern about regulators' capacities to curb tobacco marketing on social media. Merely having regulations is not enough without the technical capacity and/or financial resources to enforce them. This highlights the need for robust regulatory frameworks, enhanced enforcement mechanisms and adequate technical and financial support.

Product appeal and targeted marketing strategies

The KIIs demonstrate the interconnected strategies the tobacco industry uses to enhance product appeal, including taste, flavor smell, harm reduction marketing and brand targeting. These efforts reflect the tobacco industry's design to make the use of tobacco and nicotine products more attractive and less stigmatized among women.

In every country studied, the tobacco industry employs brand targeting as a strategic approach to appeal to women by aligning new and emerging products with their preferences and social contexts. Feminine colors, flavors and packaging; such as pink, purple and strawberry-flavored products are used to make tobacco more appealing to female consumers. Some products appear in the shape of lip gloss, nail polish or dolls. Shisha and e-cigarettes, in particular, are marketed as fashionable and discreet, appealing to women in countries like Senegal, where smoking is highly stigmatized. The appeal of these products is enhanced by flavors that mask the unpleasant characteristics of traditional tobacco, making smoking more palatable to women who are sensitive to smell and social perceptions.

The sale of flavored products alongside harm reduction narratives lends increasing acceptance to e-cigarettes. Harm reduction marketing positions products like e-cigarettes as safer, eco-friendly alternatives in a world where people are encouraged to "go green." KIIs reveal that e-cigarettes are marketed as reducing environmental harm by avoiding cigarette butt waste, though this narrative often misleads consumers about their true environmental impact. Advertisements emphasizing going green are more likely to resonate with women because of socialization. Gender socialization directed to women extols the traditionally feminine values of altruism, compassion and fairness. Women have been shown to care more about climate change than men (Ballew, et. al., 2018). Therefore, when the TI includes messages about going green, it uses these factors to its advantage because women assume that by their choice of cigarette, they are

contributing to sustainability. This reinforces the need for regulatory oversight of product packaging and beneficial claims.

Proximity marketing

KIIs highlight the use of proximity marketing, where e-cigarette and tobacco shops are often located near educational institutions, making these products easily accessible to young adults, especially women. This strategy exploits the visibility of these locations to attract younger consumers, a demographic particularly vulnerable to peer pressure and social trends. A South African study revealed that nearly half of surveyed vape shops were located within 5 km radius of educational institutions, correlating with higher e-cigarette use among young adults aged 18–29 years (Agaku, 2021).

As education gaps close across SSA, with more girls entering higher education, their exposure to tobacco marketing increases. While this implies that advocacy and initiatives towards promoting girls' education have been effective, the danger of girls and young women's exposure to tobacco marketing is real. Girls aged 18-24, as the KIIs and tobacco industry documents present, are particularly vulnerable.

According to KIIs, vape shops in South Africa are often strategically located in malls, enhancing product visibility, while in Nigeria, tobacco products are frequently sold in beauty product sections of malls, allowing women to purchase them discreetly, reducing the stigma around buying tobacco. In-person tobacco marketing is most commonly encountered at social venues like nightclubs and bars, where smoking is normalized (**Table 19**). In Kenya, clubs like "1824" cater to younger adults aged 18 to 24 and serve as prime locations for tobacco products promotion, reinforcing the link between smoking and social activities. KIIs reveal that in the African context, women frequent clubs when younger, influencing female targeted marketing strategies. In countries where female tobacco use is stigmatized, women tend to smoke in judgment-free settings like nightclubs, further complicating efforts to reduce tobacco use.

Table 19: Marketing exposure channels.

Country	Nightclubs, bars, lounges (%)	Parties (%)	Points of sale (%)	No exposure (%)
South Africa	50.80%	55.80%	50.80%	15%
Senegal	28%	24%	34%	36%
Rwanda	31%	37%	31%	31%
Nigeria	8.50%	7.80%	9.80%	15%
Kenya	59.20%	42.50%	33.30%	15.80%

The legal analysis indicates potential loopholes in regulating TAPS in adult-venues. In Kenya and Senegal,



where the law prohibits tobacco promotion at various events, including nightclubs and bars, the focus remains on traditional products, leaving gaps for the marketing of new and emerging products. Nigeria's TAPS regulations include a broad exemption for consenting persons aged 18 and over, further complicating enforcement in adult-only venues like nightclubs and bars. South Africa permits point-of-sale displays and vending machines in adult-only venues, creating another regulatory gap. To address these gaps, laws need to cover new and emerging products and regulations on sponsorship and promotions need to be comprehensive. They should encompass all forms of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and advertising across various events, including those held at adult-only venues.

Additionally, the existence of designated smoking sections in venues like bars and nightclubs across the surveyed countries raises concerns about the practicality of enforcing comprehensive TAPS bans in areas that are not 100% smoke-free. This calls for further research into effective enforcement strategies.

Digital, celebrity/influencer marketing

KIIs show that digital platforms and female influencers play a significant role in promoting tobacco products, particularly shisha, e-cigarettes and other emerging products. Social media campaigns often feature influencers endorsing these products, positioning them as trendy and desirable. A KII insight reflects this approach: I feel like the poster child of shisha were the female influencers (Kenyan female tobacco user, 2024). Another informant in Rwanda observed that Facebook, Instagram, TikTok play a role in increasing tobacco use among youths. (Rwanda Woman 18-49 V, 2024).

In South Africa, KIIs confirm the prevalence of influencer marketing, with platforms like Instagram and TikTok being used to promote new products. In Nigeria, stakeholders highlighted the changing media landscape: Not many people would notice that tobacco products are not advertised on billboards or on TV, because we really do not look at billboards or TV, compared to social media. If you spend one hour watching TV or looking at billboards, you would spend four hours on social media being inundated by advertising content. So, that social media loophole is a big minus for TAPS. This insight is corroborated by quantitative data, which shows significant levels of digital marketing engagement.

South Africa, Senegal and Kenya have explicit bans on social media marketing for traditional tobacco products, but these regulations do not adequately address the nuances of digital marketing for emerging products such as e-cigarettes. Nigeria's regulatory framework, which exempts tobacco advertising aimed at consenting adults, complicates enforcement and allows potential online marketing. Rwanda's focus on shisha advertising bans, leave gaps in regulating digital marketing for other tobacco

products (Table 20).

Table 20: Social media marketing exposure.

Country	Influencers promoting tobacco/vapes/nicotine/shisha	Giveaways or other competitions	Product placement in user-generated content	No exposure (%)
South Africa	30%	18%	25%	27%
Senegal	7%	3%	5%	85%
Rwanda	10%	5%	8%	77%
Nigeria	8.50%	7.84%	9.80%	15.03%
Kenya	15%	8%	12%	65%

Quantitative data shows varied exposure to social media marketing: 18.13% of respondents saw influencers promoting tobacco products, 12% encountered product placements and 8.23% were exposed to giveaways or competitions. Yet, over half of respondents (54.13%) reported no exposure to tobacco marketing on social media, reflecting varying levels of marketing reach (Table 21). Both KIIs and quantitative data underscore widespread digital media and influencer marketing of tobacco products. These figures highlight the growing of digital platforms in tobacco advertising, calling for updated and more comprehensive regulations across SSA.

Table 21: Social media marketing exposure.

Marketing channel	Percentage (%)
Influencers promoting	18.13%
Giveaways or competitions	8.23%
Product placement	12%
No exposure	54.13%

Summary and conclusion

Marketing strategies: The tobacco industry employs highly sophisticated marketing strategies to target women in Sub-Saharan Africa, leveraging cultural, social and economic trends to make tobacco and nicotine products more appealing. These strategies include flavor and taste manipulation, harm reduction narratives and proximity marketing in places frequented by young women. Emerging products, such as e-cigarettes and nicotine pouches, are marketed as safer alternatives and position particularly new and emerging products as female friendly.

Regulatory gaps: Significant regulatory gaps exist, particularly regarding the control of new and emerging products like e-cigarettes. While traditional tobacco products face varying levels of regulation, emerging products often escape restrictions, allowing the industry to target vulnerable populations, including women and youth, through digital platforms and social media. Cross-



border and digital TAPS remain inadequately regulated in many countries, allowing influencers and online content to circumvent existing laws. Furthermore, the impact of weakened regulatory departments and agencies due to corruption, lack of funding and political will, on women's tobacco use is evident with the sale of illicit tobacco products and sales of tobacco sticks to women.

Cultural resistance and shifting norms: The research reveals significant cultural resistance to tobacco use among women across Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), in countries like Senegal, Rwanda and Nigeria (particularly Northern Nigeria). However, norms are gradually shifting in places like South Africa and Southern Nigeria, where Western influences and tobacco industry messaging present smoking as a symbol of empowerment. The positioning of tobacco as a symbol of empowerment and autonomy risks undermining the unacceptability of tobacco use.

Prevalence: Prevalence data reveals significant regional variations in tobacco use. South Africa shows higher tobacco use rates, with substantial use of both traditional and emerging products like e-cigarettes. In contrast, countries like Senegal and Rwanda report lower levels of tobacco use among women, reflecting strong cultural resistance. However, the growing acceptance of new and emerging tobacco products highlights the need for updated regulatory measures.

Proximity marketing: Proximity marketing, with tobacco products placed near schools, universities and popular social venues, has effectively normalized tobacco use among young women in several countries. Digital marketing, particularly through influencers and social media, also plays a critical role, making tobacco products visible and desirable to a younger audience. This presents a significant challenge for regulators, as digital platforms continue to be inadequately controlled in many SSA countries.

Findings from this research highlight the pervasive strategies employed by the tobacco industry to target women across SSA. This trend is facilitated by significant regulatory gaps, particularly around digital media, cross-border TAPS and some new and emerging products. Despite strong cultural resistance in many SSA countries, changing norms in places like South Africa pose new challenges. The challenge now is to address the marketing tactics that erode these cultural resistances and prevent the normalization of tobacco and nicotine use among women. The use of CSR by the tobacco industry further raises the issue of gaps which exist in the economic context. Women in particular are confronted with multiple layers of inequality from the private to the public sphere (African Development Bank, 2020). The concentration of TI-sponsored CSR projects in rural areas where awareness of tobacco health harms is lacking presents a threat of increased tobacco use in those areas.

Recommendations

- **Adopt gender-responsive approaches:** Tobacco control policies should account for the unique ways the industry targets women and girls. These gender-sensitive policies must go beyond general regulations to include strategies that address gender-specific marketing, such as a restriction on marketing flavored products in colorful packaging and proximity marketing near schools and universities. Regulations should address the unique vulnerabilities of this demographic, particularly through information, education and communications campaigns focused on empowering women to make informed health choices. Because new and emerging tobacco products are intentionally designed to appeal to feminine sensibilities, policymakers must introduce regulations mandating the introduction of labels showcasing their harmful effects to curb harm-reduction communication tactics.
- **Strengthen and adopt proactive legal frameworks:** Countries should revise and update laws and regulations to restrict the promotion of new and emerging products. TAPS bans should be extended to address the aggressive marketing of these products, particularly on social media and other digital platforms where traditional tobacco advertising restrictions fall short. This includes closing loopholes that allow tobacco companies to exploit unregulated spaces, such as influencer promotions and digital giveaways, which are rapidly normalizing these products among women and youth. Countries should also adopt regulations that anticipate industry adaptations and reduce the need for frequent updates. Cooperation among member states and collaboration with international bodies like the WHO FCTC Secretariat will enhance the ability to anticipate changes, resulting in more resilient, long-term regulations.
- **Strengthen budget advocacy for TC resources:** Tobacco control programs are often under-resourced. Funding is necessary to ensure the strong enforcement of policies, strengthen awareness creation and enable multi-sectoral collaboration. Lean tobacco control budgets hinder these operations and embolden tobacco companies to introduce CSR initiatives that provide platforms to promote their products and undermine public health efforts. By intensifying budget advocacy efforts, civil society and other tobacco control advocates can help to secure local funding for tobacco control.
- **Strengthen cross-border and digital advertising controls:** Tobacco marketing no longer adheres to national boundaries, especially with the rise of digital media. Countries across SSA should collaborate to regulate cross-border TAPS, creating a unified front against tobacco advertising that crosses national



borders through digital platforms, streaming services and influencer-driven content. Regulatory bodies should exchange information and coordinate enforcement efforts to ensure that tobacco companies cannot exploit weak points in the system. Countries should regularly update and evaluate their tobacco advertising laws to keep up with changes in media and marketing in line with the COP 10 Specific guidelines on Article 13. This includes stricter controls on tobacco depictions in movies, social media and video games, with special attention to rural and underserved areas where awareness of tobacco harms is limited.

➤ Counter the industry's empowerment narrative:

Public health campaigns must reframe the industry's false narratives of empowerment to mean prioritizing health and real freedom. Feminist advocacy must promote ideals that de-center men and the wide range of risky masculinist behavior and performance. This includes messaging that challenges harmful narratives of autonomy tied to smoking. Campaigns should emphasize that tobacco use, far from being a symbol of freedom, exposes women to financial strain and health risks. This narrative shift is crucial to breaking the cultural association between smoking and empowerment, especially in contexts where the TI targets women under the guise of liberation. A behavioral change approach that frames men's risk-taking behavior as a detrimental pattern can serve to reduce smoking prevalence among men; this can produce a domino effect of curbing smoking among women. With a narrative that downplays smoking as a masculine indulgence, women are less likely to perceive smoking as aspirational. Alongside this, women's health-seeking inclinations and the feminine ideal of self-care should be emphasized.

References

1. Adelufosi AO (2014) Portrayal of smoking in Nigerian online videos: A medium for tobacco advertising and promotion? *Healthcare in Low-Resource Settings*. 2:1.
2. Agaku IT, Egbe CO, Ayo-Yusuf OA (2021) Geospatial spread of e-cigarette vape shops in South Africa and the relationship with tobacco product use among adults. *Health & Place* 68:102507.
3. Aguoye J (2024) Nigerian govt bans smoking, ritual killings in movies, music videos, skits. *Premium Times*.
4. Allem JP, Van Valkenburgh SP, Donaldson SI, Dormanesh A, Kelley TC (2022) E-cigarette imagery in Netflix scripted television and movies popular among young adults: A content analysis. *Addictive Behaviors Reports* 100444.
5. Barton H (1994) A tobacco marketing strategy meeting was held on 10th and 11th May 1994. *British American Tobacco Records*.
6. BAT (UK & Export) Limited (1990) Project flicker: Nigeria-qualitative report. *British American Tobacco Records* 1-23.
7. Ballew W, Marlon J, Leiserowitz A, Maibach E (2018) Gender differences in public understanding of climate change. *Yale Program on Climate Change Communication*.
8. Beia T, Kielmann K, Diaconu K (2021) Changing men or changing health systems? A scoping review of interventions, services and programmes targeting men's health in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Int J Equity Health* 20: 87.
9. British-American Tobacco Company Limited, Notikina O (1997) South Africa: Matrix data. *British American Tobacco Records*.
10. Corporate accountability and public participation Africa (2023) In furtherance of the quest for #smokefree Nollywood.
11. Egbe CO, Gwambe S, Londani M (2024) Prevalence of use and exposure of young adults to electronic cigarette and hookah advertisement and marketing in South Africa: A national university study report. *South African Medical Research Council, Pretoria, South Africa*.
12. ERC Statistics International Ltd. (n.d.) (1985) The international tobacco survey.
13. Gioenco DP (2016) Association between electronic cigarette marketing near schools and E-cigarette use among youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 59: 627-634.
14. Goff T (2019) On the nature of 20th and 21st century gendered marketing strategies and perceptions toward cigarette products in the United States and China.
15. Jackler RK, Ramamurthi D, Axelrod A, Jung JK, Louis-Ferdinand NG, et al. (2020) Global marketing of IQOS the Philip Morris campaign to popularize "heat not burn" tobacco. *SRITA White paper*.
16. Kaleta D, Usidame B, Polańska K (2011) Tobacco advertisements targeted on women: Creating an awareness among women. *Cent European Journal of Public Health* 19: 73-78.
17. Kinyanjui M (2023) BAT Kenya rolls out Sh10m rural women's development program.
18. Nyirakamana M (2016) Examine tobacco retailers around primary and secondary schools and assess the clientele with regard to sale to and by minors, the case of Nyarugenge district. *University of Rwanda, Unpublished Master's Thesis*.
19. Research & Marketing Services Limited. (1996) General consumer survey-Nigeria: RMS Job No 1454.
20. Potter BK, Pederson LL, Chan SH, Aubut JL, Koval JJ (2004) Does a relationship exist between body weight, concerns about weight and smoking among adolescents? An integration of the literature with an emphasis on gender. *Nicotine & Tobacco Research* 6: 397-425.
21. RJR, RJ Reynolds Tobacco, GJB (1993) RJ Reynolds tobacco: financial aspects. *British American Tobacco Records*.
22. Ross I (1992) United tobacco company-South Africa: Visit



- Report. British American Tobacco Records.
23. Tobacco Tactics (2020) British American tobacco in Africa: A history of double standards.
24. Tsiapakidou S, Mahmood T, Savona-Ventura C (2023) The potential impact of tobacco use on female fertility and pregnancy outcomes: An invited scientific review by EBCOG. In European Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology and Reproductive Biology.
25. Unknown (1981) Brown & Williamson Records; Master Settlement Agreement.
26. Unknown (1996) Consumer research-petrol sites South Africa. British American Tobacco Records.
27. Unknown (1997) Marketing strategy for British-American tobacco. British American Tobacco Records.
28. African Development Bank Group Gender Strategy 2021-2025.
29. Uwimana S, Okova S, Habtu M (2023) Factors influencing the health seeking behaviour of men in Gasabo district, Rwanda. Rwanda Journal of Medicine and Health Sciences 6:2.
30. Van-Dyk J, Team B (2019) A new smoke signal: Is big tobacco using influencers to illegally punt new products?