

Unmasking Industry Tactics and Marketing Strategies: Protecting Youth and Vulnerable Populations in South Africa

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ATIM
AFRICA CENTRE FOR TOBACCO
INDUSTRY MONITORING AND POLICY RESEARCH



National Council
Against Smoking NPC



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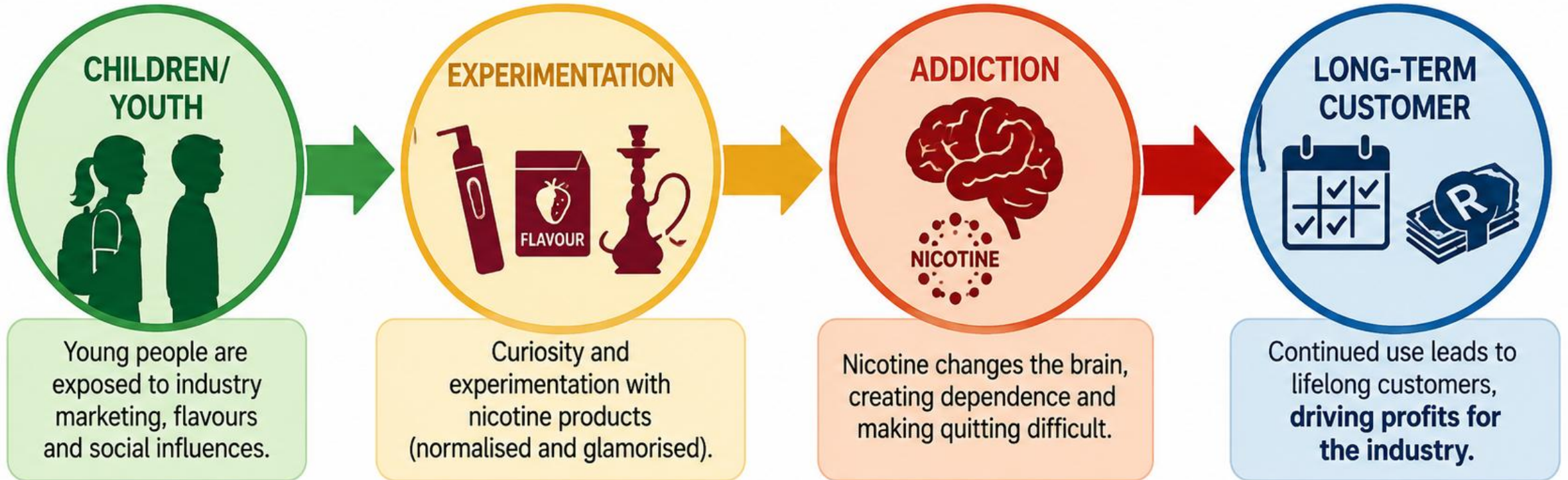
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THE TOBACCO & NICOTINE INDUSTRY PIPELINE

A Business Model Built on Addiction



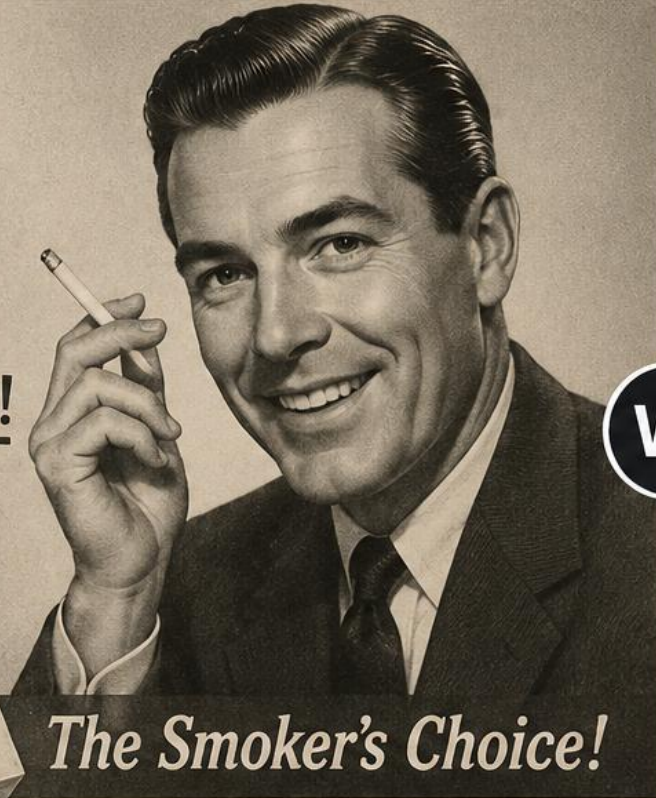
Their goal is simple: **RECRUIT** → **ADDICT** → **RETAIN**

Replace those who quit or die – with new young users.

VINTAGE CIGARETTE ADVERT (1950s)

*For
Taste...
For
Pleasure...*

**For
CONFIDENCE!**



The Smoker's Choice!

Mild • Smooth • Always Satisfying

VS

MODERN VAPE PROMOTION (TODAY)

VAPE
your
WAY

♥ LIKE
💬 SHARE
▶ FOLLOW

- ☁ SMOOTH CLOUDS
- 🍏 AMAZING FLAVOURS
- 🔋 LONG LASTING BATTERY
- 👤 MADE TO FIT YOUR LIFE



THEN: SMOKE AND STATUS

- Cigarettes linked to success, confidence and glamour
- Traditional media: print, radio, billboards
- Limited health information
- Social acceptance and visibility

NOW: FLAVOUR, LIFESTYLE AND DIGITAL

- Bright colours, flavours and sleek designs
- Social media, influencers and digital marketing
- “Safer” and “modern” messaging
- Targets youth through lifestyle and identity

DIFFERENT LOOK. SAME GOAL. CREATE ADDICTION. GAIN CUSTOMERS. MAKE PROFIT.

Why Young People Are Especially Vulnerable

ADOLESCENT BRAINS ARE STILL UNDER CONSTRUCTION

This makes youth more vulnerable to nicotine addiction.

THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN DEVELOPS OVER TIME

CHILDHOOD

Under 12 years



Prefrontal cortex
(decision making,
planning, impulse control)
is still developing.

ADOLESCENCE

12–24 years

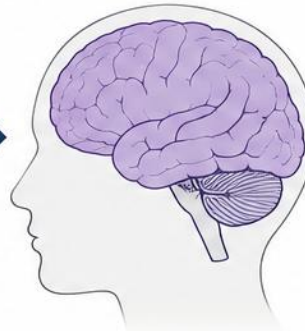


**Strong emotions and
reward-seeking.**

Prefrontal cortex is not
fully mature.

ADULTHOOD

25+ years



Prefrontal cortex
is mature.

Better self-control,
decision making and
risk assessment.

WHY ADOLESCENTS ARE MORE VULNERABLE TO NICOTINE



NICOTINE HACKS THE DEVELOPING BRAIN

It changes the way the brain builds circuits for attention, learning and self-control.



HEIGHTENED SENSITIVITY TO REWARD

Adolescents are more likely to seek novel and rewarding experiences.



WEAKER IMPULSE CONTROL

The still-developing prefrontal cortex makes it harder to resist impulses and take risks.



GREATER RISK OF ADDICTION

Early nicotine exposure increases the chance of long-term addiction and dependence.



LONG-TERM IMPACT

Nicotine can affect brain development, mental health and increase the risk of using other substances.



EARLY NICOTINE EXPOSURE CAN LEAD TO:

- Long-term addiction
- Poorer attention and learning
- Mood and anxiety problems
- Increased risk of using other drugs



PROTECT THEIR POTENTIAL. PREVENT NICOTINE EXPOSURE.

Every smoke-free and nicotine-free choice helps the adolescent brain grow stronger.



KEY TAKEAWAY

The adolescent brain is built for potential, not addiction.
Let's protect their future.

The earlier the exposure, the greater the risk. The later the start, the better the chance to protect.

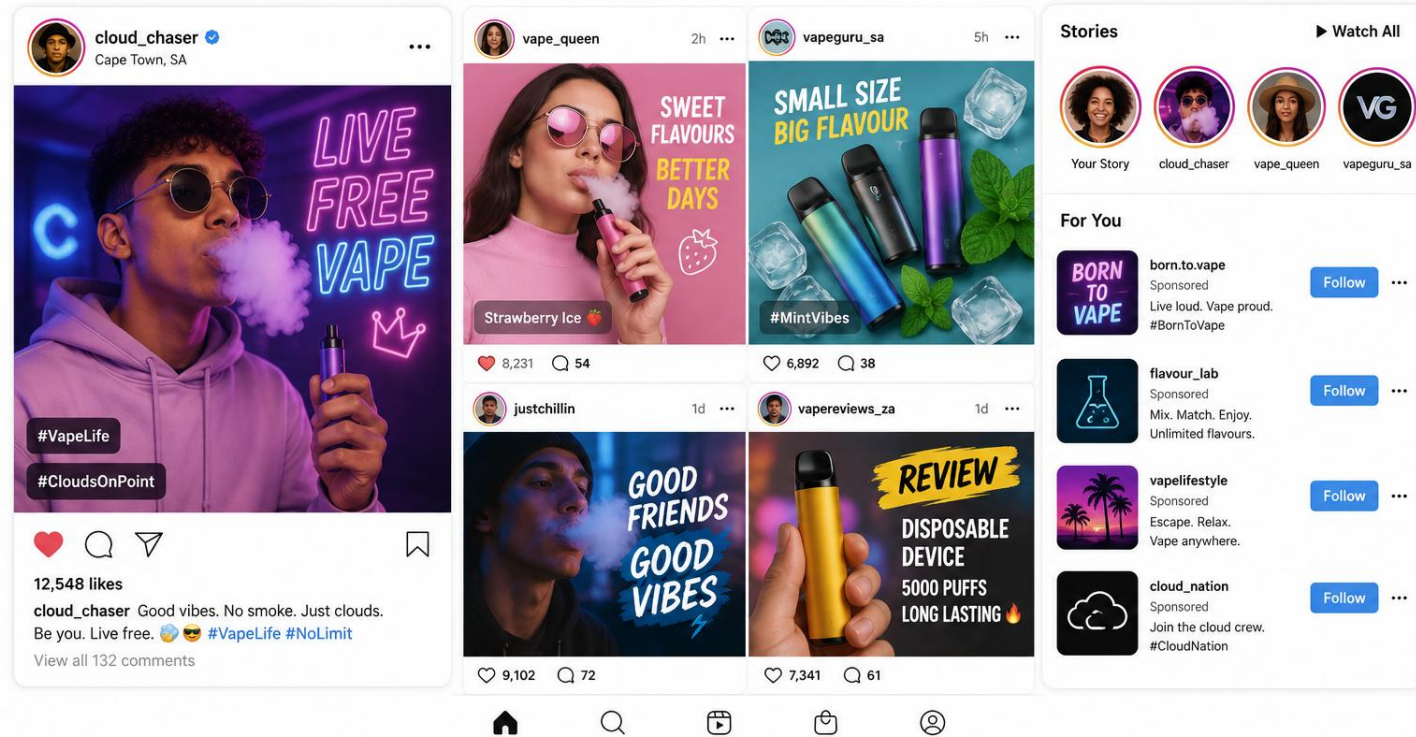
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The New Battlefield Is Digital

THE NEW BILLBOARD: SOCIAL MEDIA FEED

Vape marketing reaches youth where they scroll, stream and connect.



Social Media is the Industry's Most Powerful Marketing Tool

Common tactics:

- Influencer promotion
- Viral challenges
- Lifestyle imagery
- Music and gaming culture
- "User-generated" content
- Algorithmic targeting

Advertising now reaches youth privately, continuously, and globally.



SUBTLE. CONSTANT. TARGETED.

Designed to look like lifestyle content, not advertising.

THE GOAL: NORMALISE NICOTINE. GAIN NEW USERS.



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“Choice” or Manipulation?

NOT A CHOICE. A CONSTRUCT.

Industry marketing pulls the strings. Youth pay the price.

THE TACTICS



AGGRESSIVE MARKETING

Eye-catching ads, sponsorships and influencer promotions



SOCIAL MEDIA & ALGORITHMS

Targeted content that normalises vaping



FLAVOURS & DESIGNS

Sweet flavours and sleek devices designed to appeal to youth



PEER INFLUENCE

Trends and social pressure make it seem “normal”



MISLEADING MESSAGES

“Safer”, “cleaner”, “just water vapour” – false and deceptive claims

THE INDUSTRY PULLS THE STRINGS

THE OUTCOME



NICOTINE ADDICTION

Changes the developing brain and creates dependence



IMPACTS ON HEALTH

Affects mood, learning, lung health and future well-being



TRAPS FOR THE FUTURE

Higher risk of cigarette smoking and other substance use



LIFETIME CUSTOMER

Long-term profits for the industry, paid for by young lives

REAL FREEDOM IS KNOWING THE TRUTH.
PROTECT YOUTH. END MANIPULATION.
REGULATE. EDUCATE. EMPOWER.



They target youth.
We protect their future.



Strong policies
stop predatory
marketing.



Informed communities
build a tobacco-free
generation.



Break the strings.
Break the cycle.

Why Strong Regulation Matters

Public Health Policies Work!

Evidence-based measures reduce:

- Youth initiation
- Exposure to marketing
- Nicotine addiction
- Smoking-related disease and death

EVIDENCE-BASED POLICIES THAT WORK

Comprehensive tobacco control measures save lives and protect future generations.

						
1. COMPREHENSIVE ADVERTISING BANS	2. SMOKE-FREE PUBLIC PLACES	3. PLAIN PACKAGING & HEALTH WARNINGS	4. REGULATION OF E-CIGARETTES & NICOTINE PRODUCTS	5. RESTRICTIONS ON FLAVOURS	6. TAXATION & AFFORDABILITY CONTROLS	7. PUBLIC EDUCATION & CESSATION SUPPORT
Protect people from tobacco industry marketing, sponsorships and promotions across all media, including digital.	Eliminate exposure to second-hand smoke and denormalise tobacco use in society.	Reduce the appeal of tobacco products and increase awareness of the health risks.	Ensure these products are subject to the same protections as conventional tobacco products.	Prevent the use of flavours that attract young people and encourage initiation of nicotine use.	Increase prices to reduce consumption, especially among young people and low-income groups.	Inform, empower and support individuals to quit and build tobacco-free communities.
						

STRONG POLICIES. HEALTHIER PEOPLE. TOBACCO-FREE FUTURE.

	 REDUCES DISEASE AND DEATH	 PROTECTS OUR CHILDREN AND YOUTH	 LOWERS HEALTH CARE COSTS	 BUILDS STRONGER HEALTHIER ECONOMIES	 SUPPORTS OUR COMMITMENTS TO A HEALTHY WORLD
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EVERY POLICY COUNTS. TOGETHER, THEY SAVE LIVES. #EndTobacco



A Message to Parliament and the Public

This Is Not About Being “Anti-Industry”

It Is About Being Pro-Health, Pro-Youth and Pro-Future

We must ask:

“Who benefits when addiction is normalised?”

A society that protects children from addiction:

- protects families,
- protects the economy,
- and protects future generations.



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Conclusion

The Industry Sells Addiction.

We Must Sell Hope, Truth and Protection.

Final Message:

- Do not be deceived by flavours, technology or branding.
- Nicotine addiction remains the business model.
- Young people deserve protection — not exploitation.

“If the product needs cartoon flavours, influencers and algorithms to survive...

perhaps the problem is not regulation.
Perhaps the problem is the product.”



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PROTECT — THE — NEXT GENERATION

STRONGER POLICIES. HEALTHIER YOUTH.
TOBACCO-FREE FUTURE.

THEIR FUTURE.
OUR RESPONSIBILITY.



END TOBACCO
ADDICTION



STOP
AGGRESSIVE MARKETING



SUPPORT HEALTHY
COMMUNITIES



EMPOWER YOUTH
WITH KNOWLEDGE



BUILD A HEALTHIER,
STRONGER NATION

TOGETHER,
WE CAN.

#EndTobacco

Thank you!



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