

Vital Strategies launches crowdsourcing tool to monitor tobacco marketing in India

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TERM platform exposes ads targeting youth, skirting of advertising, promotions and sponsorship restrictions



Vital Strategies has launched a digital crowdsourcing tool to monitor tobacco marketing in India. Each year, the tobacco industry spends millions of dollars on marketing to increase tobacco consumption, particularly among youth. With more than 267 million tobacco users in India, a new digital platform from the global health organisation Vital Strategies identifies tobacco marketing and provides data that strengthen efforts to protect kids and consumers through smart tobacco control policies. The Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement (TERM) provides a digital tool to regularly monitor and track tobacco marketing via online conversations, news, social media and media coverage.

As COVID-19 underscores the tobacco threat in India, TERM's unique monitoring and crowdsourcing features will enable governments and health authorities to identify the extent of tobacco marketing and take measured steps to respond to it. In May 2021, over 850 instances of tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorships (TAPS) online were reported. Despite the World Health Organization's recommended ban or restrictions on TAPS, and even though all forms are prohibited in India, tobacco marketing continues to be widespread, particularly via online channels, which are less regulated than traditional media such as radio and television.

Vaishakhi Mallik, Associate Director, South Asia, Vital Strategies said, "TERM empowers the public to help counter industry efforts and protect youth by calling out illicit or predatory marketing. For the first time, government agencies and civil society will get actionable insights of surrogate advertisements and other tobacco promotions, giving them a novel data source to track TAPS instances and hold the industry accountable."

TERM has two objectives—enabling the public to be aware of tobacco companies' marketing and promotional tactics while also reporting such instances through the ongoing Facebook campaign. The platform also equips governments with information that highlights the tobacco industry's marketing tactics that hamper tobacco control efforts as well as information to enforce TAPS compliance.

Dr Rana J Singh, Deputy Regional Director, International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease said, "We congratulate Vital Strategies for this first-of-its-kind resource to track online marketing instances of tobacco. The data from the TERM platform will allow the Union and many of our partners to examine which loopholes are being exploited and manipulated by the tobacco industry. This, in turn, will support our efforts to strengthen and enforce tobacco control measures, helping policy implementers with evidence-based proof of surrogate and indirect advertising. Such evidence lends credibility to tobacco control programs, which can then enable policy action, stakeholder involvement, and greater enforcement towards a tobacco-free India."