

Joanna Cohen, PhD; Kevin Welding, PhD; Carmen Washington, MPH; Jennifer Brown, MPH; Ryan Kennedy, PhD; Katherine Clegg Smith, PhD

Background

- One way tobacco companies market and promote cigarettes is by using flavors:
 - by flavoring their products with additives
 - by communicating flavors through words, images and colors on the pack and stick
- Data on the nature and extent of cigarette flavors are limited
- We used a multi-country surveillance system to describe the types of cigarette flavors available in 14 low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)

Methods

- The Tobacco Pack Surveillance System (TPackSS) systematically collects unique cigarette packs sold in the LMICs with the highest numbers of tobacco users
- We implemented the TPackSS protocol in 14 countries in 2013 and nine countries between 2015-17
- In each country, one vendor in each of 12 low, middle, and high socioeconomic areas in three major cities (four in India in 2016, five in China) was sampled and unique packs were purchased
- 4,838 cigarette and kretek packs were double coded for flavor descriptors and imagery and packs from China are in the process of being coded
- Analyses were conducted using Stata

Flavor appeals



Mint image; mint/menthol descriptors

Fruit/citrus images & descriptors

Alcohol image; beverage descriptor

Flavor capsules



Capsule image & descriptors "ice xpress", "blast"

Five flavor capsules in one pack

Unconventional/non-characterizing flavors



"ruby burst"

"Ibiza Sunset"

Results

Flavor appeals

- 26% of packs advertised a flavor descriptor and 2.6% used flavor imagery
- We identified three key groupings of distinct flavors:
 - menthol or mint (6.4%)
 - fruit or citrus (3.5%)
 - alcohol and other beverages (1.1%)

Flavor capsules

- More tobacco companies and more brands had flavor capsules in 2015-17 vs. 2013
- Many flavor capsule packs communicated a fresh or cool (menthol-like) sensation (e.g., "ice xpress", "blast")
- One pack from China had five different flavor capsules

Unconventional/non-characterizing flavors

- Some flavor packs used terms that are not explicit about the flavor sensation (e.g., "ruby burst", "Ibiza sunset", "double burst")

Conclusions

- There has been a proliferation of the prevalence of cigarette brand variants with flavor capsules
- There is also a trend toward using flavor descriptors that are unconventional and non-characterizing
- These findings should be considered as jurisdictions draft policies to restrict flavored tobacco products

Acknowledgement: This work was supported with funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies' Bloomberg Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use (bloomberg.org)