

Swipe to Inhale: Exploring the Influence of Social Media on Intention to Use Cigarettes and E-cigarettes among Nicotine Naïve Youth

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Introduction: Online content that promotes tobacco and e-cigarette products has increased. Previous research has linked youth exposure and engagement with such content to behavioral changes, but few studies have explored the source and types of tobacco and e-cigarette content and their impact on nicotine naïve youth's intention to use these products. This study examined the association between the type and source of content posted on social media and the intention to use tobacco or e-cigarettes using the Population Assessment Tobacco and Health (PATH) study.

Method: The PATH Study is a national, longitudinal cohort study of US youth aged 12-17. This analysis draws data from Wave 6 (2021), focusing on 5011 youth who used social media in the past month. Multiple imputation chained equations were used to impute missing values and multivariable logistic regression was performed.

Results: In Wave 6, 88.7% of youth used social media in the past month, with 61.4% in this group encountered tobacco or e-cigarette content. Exposure to such content significantly predicts future e-cigarette use (OR=2.24, 95% CI:1.86-2.70) and cigarette use (OR=1.68, 95% CI:1.32-2.14). Daily exposure compared to no exposure to tobacco-related content also increases the risk of future use (OR=2.27, 95% CI:1.68, 3.07). In terms of the content viewed, only posts of people talking about tobacco or e-cigarettes were associated with future use, particularly when the content was posted by celebrities and influencers (OR=2.00, 95% CI:1.39,2.86).

Discussions and Conclusions: This study demonstrates a link between youth exposure to tobacco or e-cigarette content on social media and their intentions to use these products and the impact of daily or near-daily exposure content shared by celebrities and social media influencer in shaping intentions among nicotine naïve youth. These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to mitigate the effects of social media influencers on youth.

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