

Outsmarting regulation: how tobacco websites and social media targeting young people

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to describe the content of tobacco company websites and social media then evaluates whether they have complied with the regulation or not. As addictive product cigarette has become one of the most regulated product in the world, including in Indonesia. While almost all countries in the world have a total ban on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship (TAPS) in all media; Indonesia only limits TAPS, not totally bans it. The methods in this research are observing five websites from the five biggest tobacco companies in Indonesia and their social media, between May-June 2019, focusing on outlook; content; updating frequency; and link to other media. The result shows that the tobacco industry's websites and social media are a form of indirect tobacco advertising. The five sites practicing brand stretching strategy. The sites and social media are targeting young people by focusing their content on activity, product, lifestyle, and profile of upper and middle-class young people with their typical language. By doing so, the companies normalize their brand into young people's life. The conclusion of the research shows tobacco industry promotion strategy through new media seems to outsmart the TAPS regulation, whereas, in practice, this promotion is conducting several violations on existing regulation in Indonesia.

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1. Introduction

As an addictive product, the cigarette has become one of the most regulated product in the world, including in Indonesia. Tobacco killed an estimated 100 million people during the twentieth century—and could kill one billion if nothing is done to restrain tobacco companies from pushing their products [1]. While a number of countries totally prohibit cigarette advertising, promotion, and sponsorship (known as TAPS Ban); Indonesia only imposes lax restrictions on advertising, promotion, and sponsorship of tobacco products. This non-strict regulation makes Indonesia famous as a relatively free country for cigarette marketing. Therefore, it is not surprising if Indonesia is called as a "tobacco industry's playground" [2].

In Southeast Asia, for example, Indonesia is the only country that does not have regulations that prohibit the whole tobacco product advertising, promotion, and sponsorship [3], and being the worst in the region in terms of cigarette advertising regulation [4]. Various studies have shown that the partial ban on advertisements, promotions, and sponsors is not effective in reducing tobacco consumption [5]. The data shows that a partial ban will lead to media substitution, therefore a total ban on all forms of cigarette promotion is needed to make the ban be successful [1].

Indonesia is also the only one in Asia that has not yet ratified the FCTC (Framework Convention on Tobacco Control). The FCTC is an international agreement on public health that is discussed and agreed by the World Health Organization (WHO) member countries. The FCTC has increased the implementation of measures across several policy domains, and these implementations have resulted in measurable impacts on tobacco consumption, prevalence, and other outcomes [6]. In 2015, 187 countries had ratified the FCTC [7]. One of the pillars in the FCTC is the TAPS Ban.

Indonesia has stated cigarette as an addictive substance in the Number 36 Health Act 2009. In 2012, Government Regulation No. 109/2012 concerning the Safeguard of Materials Containing Addictive Substances in the Form of Tobacco Products for Health was issued, which is a derivative of the Health Act. This regulation controls several things on tobacco product advertisements, including cigarette advertisements in media. However, these rules are only in the form of restrictions, not the prohibition of advertising and promotion of tobacco products.

Tobacco marketing with all strategies for advertising, promotion, and sponsorship of cigarettes mainly targets young people [8]; [9]. Nearly 90% of adult smokers start smoking when they are teenagers [1]. Young people are targeted to replace the old smokers, that is why young smokers are called replacement smokers [10]. Exposure to tobacco advertising and promotion increases the likelihood of smoking among young people [11]; [12]; [13]. WHO states that advertisements, promotions, and sponsors are the tobacco industry's frontline efforts to retain and increase its customers and "normalize" tobacco as similar to other consumer products [5]. Whereas, research shows that de-normalization of smoking results in lower smoking rates [14]. Although the tobacco industry itself denies that their marketing is targeted at young smokers, according to Lovato [15], tobacco advertising and promotion affect the attitudes of teenagers who don't smoke and make them more likely to try smoking.

Indonesia has alarming data on the prevalence of child and teen smokers [16]. Basic Health Research 2018 states that an increase in the prevalence of child smokers and adolescents aged 10-18 years from 7.2% (2013) to 9.1% (2018). Even in the last decade, there has been an increase in the number of novice smokers to 240%, from 9.6% (2007) to 23.1% (2018). This increase occurred in elementary and junior high school children aged 10-14 years. In the older age group (15-19 years), the increase reaches 140%.

According to the Indonesia Ministry of Health, the increased prevalence of child and adolescent smokers is partly due to the high exposure to cigarette advertisements in various media, including the internet [16]. The Ministry of Health in June 2019 requested blocking cigarette advertisements on the internet, but this blocking was not implemented [17]. The Ministry of Health refers to a study conducted by LSPR Stikom in 2018, which concluded that 3 out of 4 teenagers know about cigarette advertisements in online media. The research also states that cigarette advertisements are mostly found by teenagers when they access the internet; including YouTube, various sites, Instagram, and online games. The Ministry of Health emphasized that the high use of internet media by children and adolescents has been used by the cigarette industry to also advertise a lot in the internet media in recent years. Considering that 15% (22.5 million) out of 150 million active social media users in Indonesia are teenagers (13-17 years old) and 33% (49.5 million) aged 18-24 years old [18]; the concern is justified.

2. Theoretical Framework

According to WHO, tobacco products advertise in the form of direct tobacco advertising and indirect tobacco advertising [5]. Direct advertising is referred to as "only one component of the integrated set of marketing strategies that tobacco companies use to promote their products" [5] pg. 31. The form of indirect tobacco advertising is promotion and sponsorship, which the tobacco industry also often calls "event marketing" [19]; [20]. Forms of sponsorship can vary, and all of them are attractive activities for young people, such as motor racing [21]; rodeo [22], music [23]; social and cultural activism [24]; various activities such as sports, films, religious events, arts and culture [25]. This form of a marketing campaign is designed by the tobacco industry by showing young people actively enjoying life with tobacco [5].

One of indirect advertising is brand stretching. Brand stretching occurs when tobacco brand names, symbols, trademarks, logos, or trade symbols or other distinctive features (including

different color combinations) are associated with non-tobacco products or services in such a way that tobacco products and non-tobacco products or services tend to be linked [26]. Brand stretching is increasingly being carried out by the tobacco industry because more is opening the way to promote tobacco products, as an alternative due to the rules that prohibit cigarette advertising [1]. In addition to promoting tobacco products, the aim is to avoid the risk of litigation [27]. Brand stretching practices have been banned in 80 countries [5].

Tobacco companies can be said to carry out similar strategies to advertise and promote their products throughout the world. Strategies implemented in developing countries, for example, are implemented because they have used them successfully for more than 50 years in developed countries [28].

Policies and regulations are very important factors in terms of tobacco control because they relate to cigarette marketing. In countries with loose tobacco control regulations such as Indonesia, it is important to see how the tobacco industry carries out a promotion strategy on new media (the internet). On the internet where forming a network becomes essential [29], we can see how the tobacco industry is trying to form online communities among young people. Online communities are groups of individuals who interact around a common interest, where the interaction is mediated or supported by internet technology [30].

Various studies show that exposure to tobacco promotion via the internet can produce positive attitudes towards tobacco among adolescents [20], even making young people who have not used tobacco having intention to use tobacco products [31]. This is inseparable from the fact that the internet provides a variety of innovative ways for tobacco companies to maintain a beneficial association with smoking and certain brands in the minds of consumers [32]. The Internet is considered as an ideal forum for tobacco marketing because it is largely unregulated and there is no global regulatory body to control its content [33]. Online communication platforms and social media have become one of the few avenues for the tobacco industry to promote their products due to regulations that prohibit tobacco advertising in traditional media [34].

With the above background, this study focuses on tobacco company content and social media content. This research aims to illustrate how the promotional strategies are undertaken by tobacco companies to reach young people and then evaluate whether the content has complied with the rules about cigarette advertising or not.

3. Method

This research uses observation on five websites of the five largest tobacco industry in Indonesia, namely www.LAzone.id (from the cigarette brand Djarum LA Light), www.MLDspot.com (Djarum Super MLD), www.blackxperience.com (Djarum Black), www.amild.id (Sampoerna A Mild), and www.umild.id (Sampoerna U Mild). Observations on these five sites were carried out in May - June 2019.

Observations are made by checking the content displayed on the website, namely (1) profile and overall overview; (2) the content displayed in each article, the topics raised, the intended community, and the variety of activities being/will be carried out, to the images in each website; and (3) the frequency of site movements, including the addition of articles and page updates. We also observed (4) the linkage between the website and social media owned by each website, as well as a map of the movements in each social media (*Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube*).

4. Results and Discussion

Of the five websites observed, cigarette advertisements appeared only on one site, namely [LAzone.id](http://www.LAzone.id). However, all sites have names, background designs, and layouts that clearly represent the cigarette product logo that is the mastermind behind related sites like in fig 1. The image of each page category also carries the identity and symbols of the cigarette products. This practice violates existing regulations because PP 109/2012 has banned the use of tobacco product logos and/or brands on non-tobacco products or goods and on an institution and/or individual activity. PP 109/2012 also prohibits the use of tobacco product trademarks and logos for sponsorship activities, including the brand image of tobacco products. From this it can be seen how brand identity continues to emerge through a combination of names, words, symbols, or designs (as the brand definition by Arens [32]).

The use of brands on this site also shows the importance of marketers recognizing the power and importance of branding, which creates aspirational attributes that increase tobacco products' attractiveness [35].

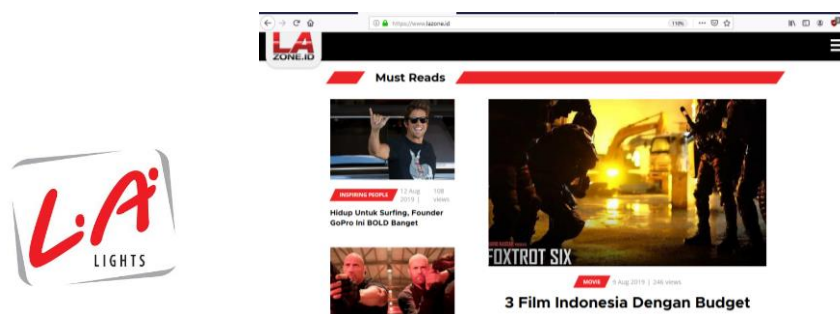


Fig. 1. Example similarity between brand logo (left) and website outlook (right)

The users' age classification warning ("only for 18+ users") is written on two websites, namely MLDSpot and LAzone. But the warning is inadequate because it only appears at the beginning and quickly disappears and appears in very small letters at the bottom end of the main page (end-scroll page). One site does not display a user's age classification warning at all, that is BlackXperience. Two sites strictly implement the age verification rules for site visitors by requesting verification via face reading and/or requesting to enter a KTP number, namely AMild and UMild. Three sites provide a warning verification not to register as a member for visitors who have not been 18 years or older, namely LAzone, Amild, and UMild. While BlackXperience and MLDSpot do not provide age restrictions to register as a member. The sites violate PP 109/20102 by not including an age warning and health warnings with marking/writing "18+".

The five websites focus on activities, products, lifestyles, and profiles of young people in the middle and upper classes. Specifically, the site presents typical themes of young people; such as automotive, music, sports, fashion, gadgets, hangout places, entertainment news, movies, food, traveling, technology, hobbies, and celebrity profiles, or profiles of young people/communities who are creative and achievers, quizzes, a collection of tips, and also competition like in fig 2. Typical youth programs raised on various sites add to the evidence of the many activities carried out by the tobacco industry that is of interest to young people (including [21]; [22]; [23]–[25]).

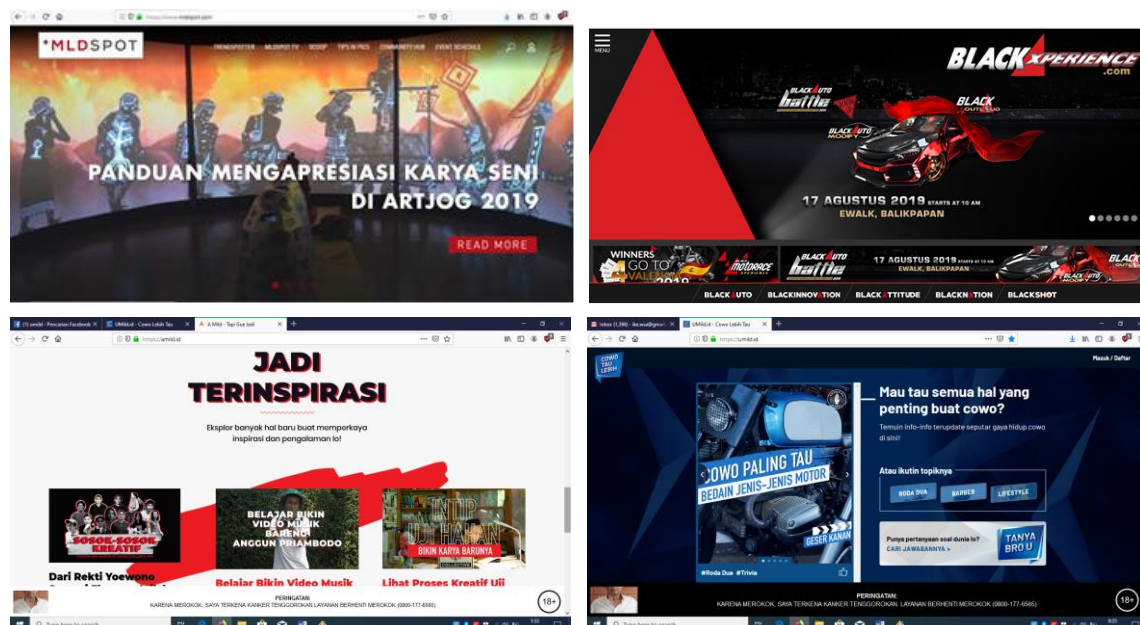


Fig. 2. Example of theme showed in the websites: art (Djarum MLD), Automotive (Djarum Black and Sampoerna U Mild), or creativity (Sampoerna A Mild)

From those observations you can see four things. First, the site is intended for young people. Second, it is seen that the tobacco industry is carrying out a brand stretching strategy. Various programs displayed on the site show new service products that use the same name, symbol, design as existing tobacco product brands (i.e. the definition of brand stretching as stated by Yadav [26]. Third, with various programs or activities built through the internet, the tobacco industry builds the youth community. This online communication consists of groups of individuals who interact around a common interest [30]. The common interest in questions is a variety of typical youth program raised on the site. Fourth, there is a violation against PP 109/2012, because in this regulation there is a prohibition on activities sponsored by tobacco products to be covered by the media. The Internet is a medium. By displaying programs or events sponsored by the tobacco industry in each of its sites, the tobacco industry clearly shows media coverage.

Three websites that were observed; namely MLDspot, LAzone, and BlackXperience; use social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Youtube) to introduce, expand information dissemination, and bring visitors to the sites. All three utilize and update their social media content quite frequently, following the updates made on the site. Only Amild and Umild are not linked to a social media network. On sites that use external links, content on the site becomes the source of content for their social media activities. So that most of the use of social media is to disseminate website content links to a wider and more diverse audience, depending on which type of social media like in fig 3.

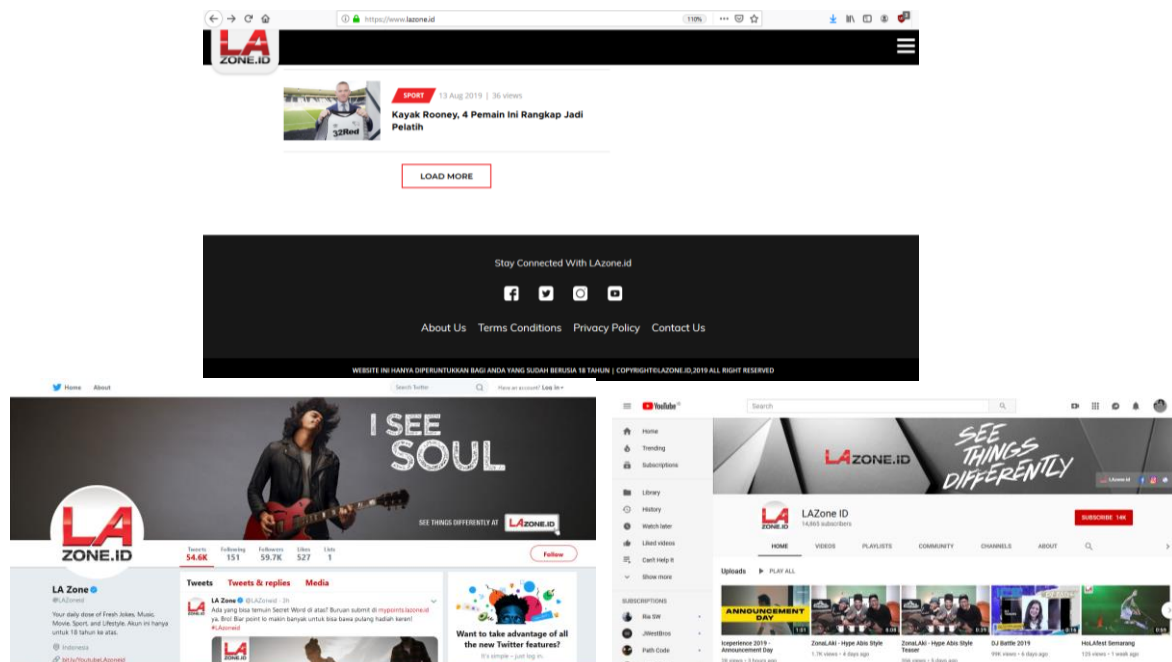


Fig. 3. Example link from website (above) to social media (Twitter [below-left] and Youtube [below-right])

The language used in social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram is different from the style of language used on websites that tend to be more formal. Social media content more often displays popular slang among young people. Amild and Umild have used the typical language of young people on their site. The use of hashtags as an index of posts is the mainstay of the five websites along with the social media links #blackXperience, #mldspot, #lazone, #amild, and #umild also useful for building brand identity. Its use is constant in the majority of content posts. Three of the five websites (except Amild and Umild) that are monitored are very active and communicative so that in one day there could be 10 new content. There is no pattern of posting time, there is no special days nor time for posting per category. The website and social media are speaking to young people by using their language and keeping them close by updating the content frequently.

The presentation of information on this site and social media shows innovative ways in which the tobacco industry works to maintain profitable associations with certain brands in the minds of consumers as mentioned by Greenhalgh, et.al. [20]. This depiction also shows the ideal of the internet as a medium for tobacco marketing as stated by Elkin, et al. [33].

5. Conclusion

The five cigarette industry sites do not use their websites to advertise cigarettes directly, but the site becomes an indirect tobacco advertising medium. The five websites practice brand stretching strategies. The site displays the name, background design, and layout that represents the cigarette product logo. Site content entirely displays images that carry the identity and symbols of cigarette products. The five sites are a medium that targets young people by focusing on activities, products, lifestyles, and profiles of young people in the middle and upper classes with the use of language typical of young people. The site is used as a basis for active external social media content links (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Youtube) to introduce and expand information dissemination in the form of promotions and sponsorship of tobacco products. By doing this strategy, it appears that the cigarette industry outsmarted the rules on cigarette advertising, whereas, in practice, the cigarette industry's website committed several violations based on regulations in force in Indonesia. For future studies, research should reveal more about the brand stretching strategy of the tobacco industry. Research on this subject would provide input for better regulatory revisions for tobacco control in Indonesia.

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