

How Vaping Is Marketed to You

Ever wonder why so many teens pick up a vape in the first place? Companies want you to vape. They design the ads, packaging, and flavors to pull teens in. The worst part is? Most people don't even notice it happening. Vaping didn't blow up by accident. These companies studied what teens like in colors, flavors, and trends and turned it all into one big trap. Go look at a vape ad online or on social media. It's not some boring black-and-white message about quitting cigarettes. It's bright, flashy, and full of people who look like your classmates. Half the time, it doesn't even mention nicotine. That's not a coincidence; it's a strategy.

Many vapes, like Puff Bar and Elf Bar, come in flavors like "blue razz ice," "cotton candy," and "mango tango," names that sound more like snacks than nicotine products. These flavors are designed to mimic candy and soda, the kind of stuff teens already love. Now imagine you're 15, walking into a deli, and seeing those names on colorful vape packages. It doesn't feel like a drug. It feels like a treat. That's exactly the goal: to make vaping seem fun, harmless, and relatable. But behind those flavors is the same addictive nicotine found in cigarettes. More than 80 percent of youth who have ever used tobacco started with a flavored product (Truth Initiative, 2024). Even store signs, like the one at The Hood Spot Convenience, use bright colors and familiar images to attract teens, blending vape products in with candy, snacks, and other everyday items.

Figure 1



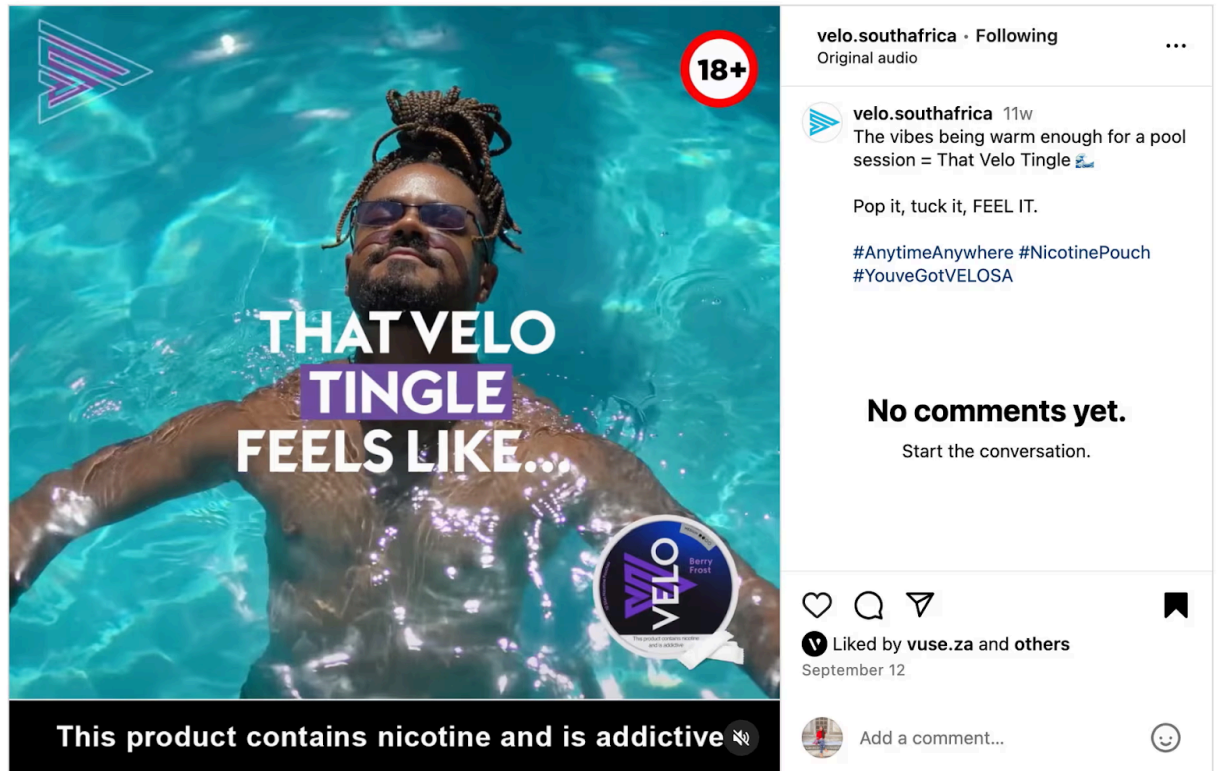
Note. *The Hood Spot Convenience* storefront in NYC. From Joy, S. (2025, April 23), *EV Grieve*.

<https://evgrieve.com/2025/04/signage-alert-hood-spot-convenience-on.html>

Vaping companies copied what Big Tobacco did back in the day. When cigarette ads got banned from TV and billboards, tobacco companies started putting their logos on hats, racing cars, and music festivals, all the things young people liked. It worked. So when vaping became a thing, the same playbook came back; it was just updated for TikTok and Instagram. You've probably seen a vape trick video appear on your "For You Page." Or maybe someone in your school posted a "cloud check" with their device. It may appear harmless at first, but these posts are carefully crafted forms of free advertising, designed to influence and normalize vaping among teens. The more it shows up on your feed, the more normal it starts to feel. Even if you don't vape. You start, well, everyone else is doing it, so what's the big deal? E-cigarette

companies use social media to reach youth through hashtags, influencers, and viral challenges, creating the perception that vaping is fun, social, and harmless.” Yale School of Medicine (2022)

Figure 2



Note: An Instagram post from Velo promotes nicotine pouches with bright visuals and a relaxed lifestyle appeal (Velo, South Africa, 2023).

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/dec/08/millions-of-young-people-exposed-to-vape-pods-online-charity-says>

This type of social media ad has been around for a while. That’s how it starts. And then there’s the packaging. Most vape products look more like candy bars, energy drinks, or USBs than actual nicotine devices. Some come in bright neon boxes with cartoons or fun fonts. It’s not just bad branding; it's dangerous on purpose. Vaping companies won’t put the truth in bold on the front. Social media platforms use algorithms that track what you like, share, and follow. Teens

who used social media more intensely—especially at the expense of sleep or responsibilities—were more likely to express interest in trying vaping (Digitale, 2020). But here's what they don't post in the ads or the influencer reels. They will not tell you how hard it is to quit once you're hooked. That doesn't sell. What sells is the hype, and that's what they're feeding you. But here's the truth: you're not the one in control when you fall for the hype. So next time you see a vape ad, a flashy post, or a cool-looking device in someone's backpack, ask yourself, who's winning if you start vaping? It's the companies making billions off your addiction.

References

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