

ASHES, Vol. 20(12) - Young people's exposure to and engagement with nicotine and tobacco product content on social media

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Despite [declining rates of use](#) in recent decades, [nicotine and tobacco products \(NTPs\)](#) remain popular among adolescents and young adults. Positive portrayals of NTPs on social media might normalize and glamorize these products and [encourage young people](#) to use them. This week, ASHES reviews a [study by Erin A. Vogel and colleagues](#) that examined the characteristics of young people's exposure to and engagement with NTP content on social media.

What were the research questions?

(1) What are the characteristics of young people's exposure to and engagement with NTP content on social media? (2) Do these characteristics differ between current NTP users and current non-users?

What did the researchers do?

Using [Qualtrics Research Services](#), the researchers recruited 1,163 U.S. adolescents and young adults (aged 13-26) who used social media at least five times a week. Participants reported current NTP use and their exposure to social media content promoting and opposing NTPs. Specifically, participants reported frequency of exposure, source (e.g., influencers), format (e.g., videos/reels), and platform. Those who reported exposure were asked about their engagement with NTP content. The researchers calculated the [prevalence](#) of exposure to, and engagement with, NTP content and associated characteristics. They also compared how engagement and exposure differed for participants with and without current NTP use using [chi-square tests](#).

What did they find?

Most (72.7%) participants reported exposure to NTP content on social media. NTP content was both pro- and anti-NTP use, and most commonly came from

brands/companies and influencers in the form of posts with pictures and videos/reels (see Figure). One-third (34.6%) of those exposed to NTP content had also engaged with it (e.g., liking or sharing posts). TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube were the most prevalent social media channels for NTP content exposure and engagement. Participants who currently used NTPs reported more exposure to NTP content (from all sources and in all formats) than non-users (see Figure). Current users were also more likely to have engaged with and posted NTP content compared to current non-users.

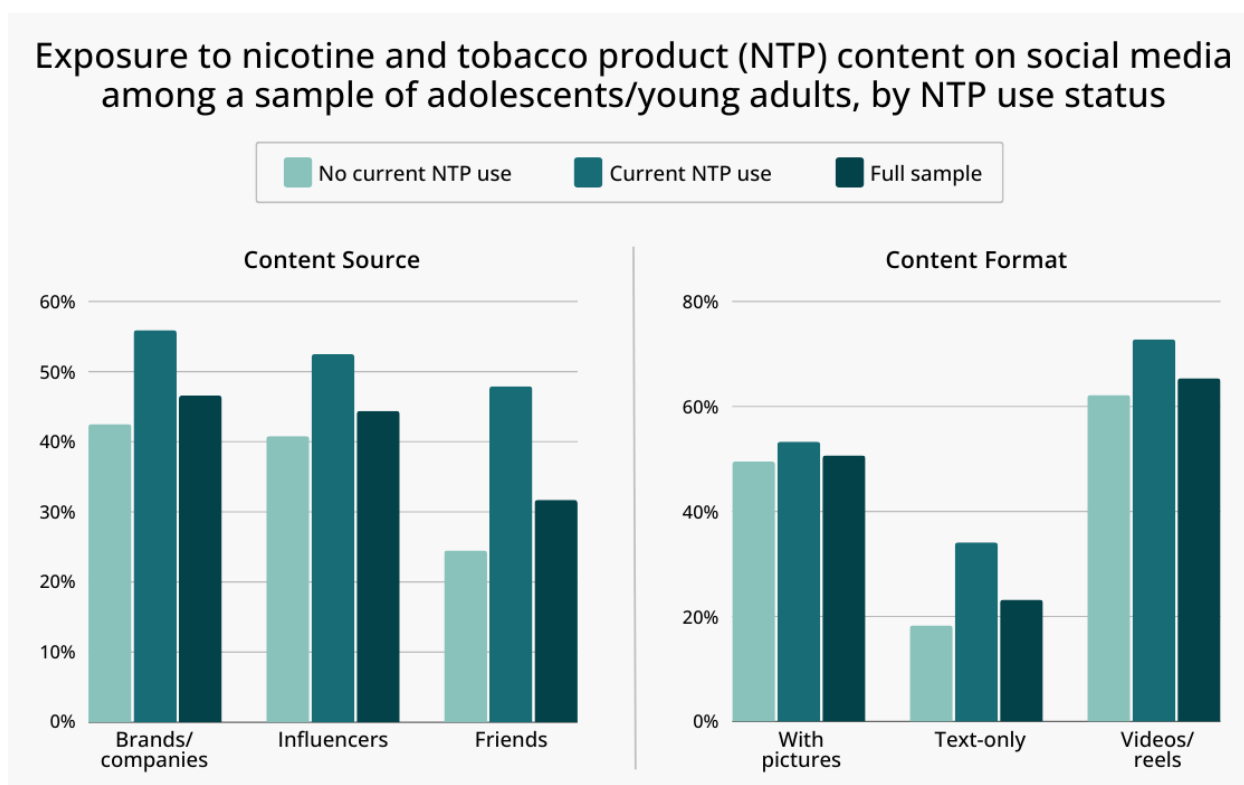


Figure. Characteristics of exposure to NTP content on social media (content source and content format) among a sample of adolescents and young adults. Prevalence of exposure is shown for the full sample, and by NTP use status (current NTP use and current non-use). All prevalence differences between current users and current non-users are [statistically significant](#) except exposure to content with pictures. Click image to enlarge.

Why do these findings matter?

Most major social media platforms [ban ads](#) for NTPs. However, these findings suggest that NTP-related content is still reaching young people on these platforms through influencer marketing and posts from peers. [Stricter and more comprehensive restrictions](#) on pro-NTP content on social media is needed. These findings also suggest that content opposing NTP use is reaching young people. Educational campaigns (e.g., [Truth Initiative](#)) should use strategies like

partnering with influencers, using videos/reels, and posting on a variety of social media platforms to engage younger audiences.

Every study has limitations. What are the limitations of this study?

The researchers [oversampled](#) for current NTP use and the data were not [weighted](#), meaning these findings may not be [generalizable](#) to a representative sample of adolescent and young adult social media users. This study used [self-reported](#) data, which may be subject to self-report biases such as [recall bias](#).

For more information:

[SmokeFreeTeen](#) and [SmokeFree](#) offer tools and tips for quitting and maintaining abstinence from tobacco use. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also provides [research and tips](#) about smoking and how to quit. For additional self-help tools, please visit the BASIS [Addiction Resources](#) page.

— Kira Landauer, MPH
