



Keck School of
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Categorizing IQOS-related Twitter Discussions

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• Josh Barker Presenting



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BACKGROUND

Heated tobacco product IQOS, released by Philip Morris International, entered the tobacco market in 2014 and is now available in over 55 countries including the United States. **No previous studies have examined how the product is presented on social media platforms.**

OBJECTIVES

This study categorized the types of social media conversations involving IQOS.

METHODS

A manual content analysis was performed on N=3,121 English tweets related to IQOS posted between January 1, 2020 and June 30, 2020. The codebook was developed from an iterative examination of 250 IQOS tweets by three researchers informed by previous research on social media depictions of vaping and combustible tobacco products. Two independent coders then coded the tweets after acceptable reliability (all categories > 87% agreement) was reached.



RESULTS

- Most tweets were either **online marketing for IQOS (N=1,265; 40.5%)** or **personal testimonials related to IQOS use (N=1,340; 42.9%)**.
- **Just under 8% of marketing tweets referenced health benefits of using IQOS** compared to other tobacco products.
- Nearly one in four personal testimonial tweets made harm reduction claims about IQOS either as an **avenue to quit using smoking/tobacco use (N=133)**, or in comparison to combustible cigarettes (N=80) or vaping products (N=14).
- Tobacco policy-related tweets were also detected (N=193),
 - split almost evenly between discussions of United States (N=190) and international (N=170) tobacco policies.
- **News media tweets (N=558) about IQOS primarily discussed either health claims about the device compared to combustible tobacco/vaping (N=144) or tobacco policy issues facing IQOS (N=193).**

We found evidence that English discussions about IQOS tended to focus on personal testimonials. A minority of marketing tweets made health claims about IQOS as a cessation tool or less harmful tobacco alternative. Future research should consider the presence of bots or spam accounts in the generation of personal testimonials about IQOS, which could serve to shape perceptions regarding the overall risks associated with the product.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Research reported in this publication was supported by the National Cancer Institute and the FDA Center for Tobacco Products (CTP) under Award Number U54CA180905. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the NIH or the Food and Drug Administration

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