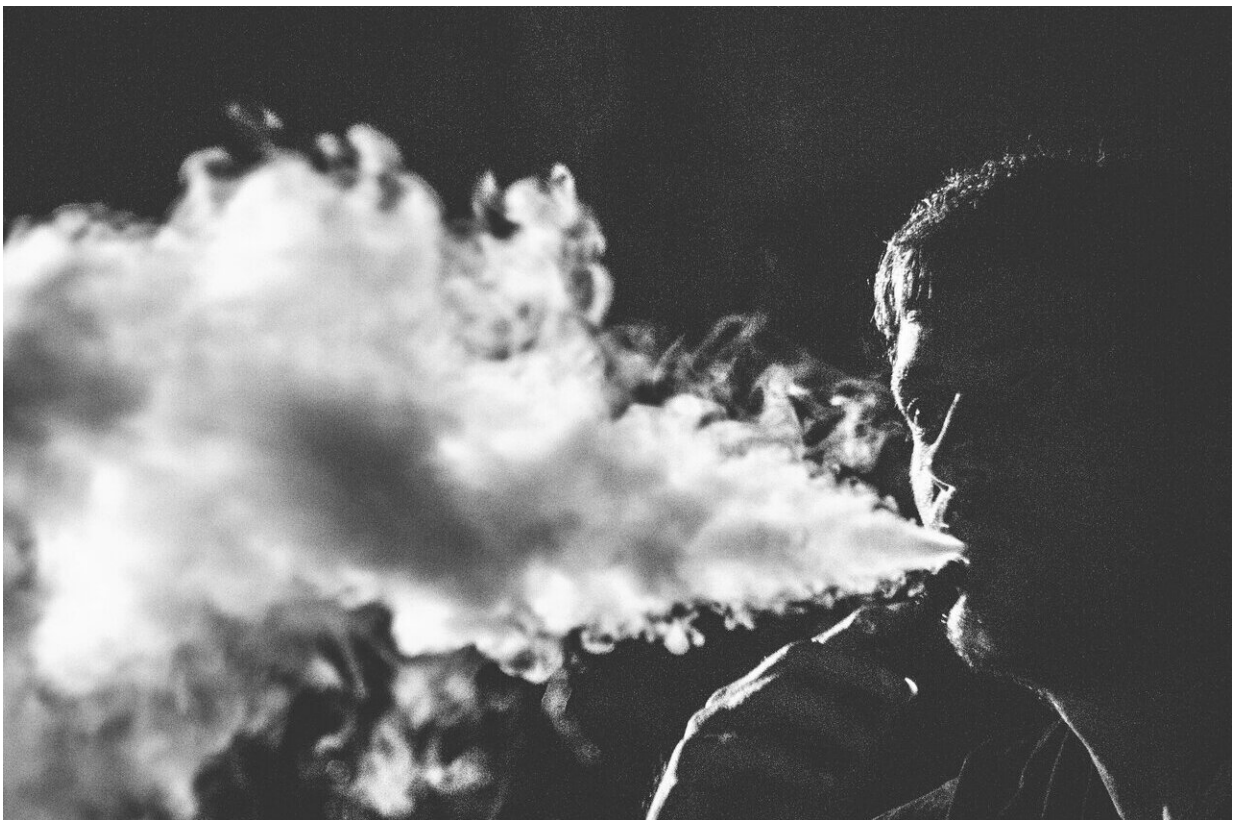


# Vape sellers are using popular music videos to promote e-cigarettes to young people – and it's working

April 7 2021, by Jon-Patrick Allem

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Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Research that my colleagues and I recently conducted demonstrates that electronic cigarette product placement in music videos is [associated with](#)

[vaping among minors](#).

The [Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement of 1998](#) prohibits product [placement](#) for cigarettes and chew tobacco in television, [music videos](#) and motion pictures, but those restrictions do not apply to [electronic cigarettes](#).

[My team](#) and I have been working the past three years to determine the overall extent of electronic cigarette product placement in [music](#) videos. We've also been working to determine if exposure to these videos is related to [electronic cigarette use](#) among [young adults](#).

In a recent study, we found that participants exposed to any electronic cigarette product placement or imagery in music videos were more likely to have used [an electronic cigarette](#) in the past month compared to participants with no exposure.

## **Music videos receive billions of views**

From the [early 1980s](#) to the early 2000s music videos were widespread on television and made up most of the content on [MTV and VH1](#). As these networks moved away from airing music videos and switched to airing reality television, music videos became less of a cultural phenomenon.

However, when YouTube was created in 2005 and [exploded in popularity in 2010](#), music videos made a comeback. Today music videos by major recording artists receive [billions of views](#). Pop stars' official music [video](#) accounts, like Justin Bieber's account, have some of the largest [subscription numbers](#) on YouTube.

Research has shown that [young people watch videos repeatedly and recommend them to their friends](#). Platforms like YouTube facilitate

video sharing and consecutive views in short periods of time.

Money spent on product placement in music videos totals [US\\$15 million to \\$20 million a year and is rising](#). Earlier studies found that product placement, or identifiable brand appearance, in music videos [was effective](#) in raising [brand awareness](#).

## **The extent of vaping product placement**

To see how prevalent this product placement is, my team first identified songs on the [Billboard Hot 100](#) list between June 16 and Sept. 22, 2018 which had 180 official music videos. We then coded for electronic cigarette product placement and imagery, visible brand names and number of views as of Oct, 25, 2018, among other categories.

We found that electronic cigarette product placement and imagery [appeared in seven music videos, which were viewed over a billion times](#). These videos provided billions of electronic cigarette impressions.

We identified two brands, KandyPens and Mig Vapor, in the study. For example, the video ["No Brainer" by DJ Khaled](#) contained several scenes of female models using KandyPens' products. Khaled used a KandyPens device and exhaled an aerosol cloud toward the camera.

## **Young adults in California are at risk for vaping**

Next, we recruited a representative sample of 1,280 young adults ages 18 to 24 who lived in California. We asked them to complete surveys that assessed their exposure to specific music videos and electronic cigarette use, among other variables.

Participants recalled an average of four music videos among the 20 videos listed. Our analysis revealed that participants who had viewed any

electronic cigarette product placement or imagery in music videos were more likely to have used an electronic cigarette in their lifetime compared to participants with no exposure. Participants who had viewed any electronic cigarette product placement or imagery in music videos were more likely to have used an electronic cigarette in the past month compared to participants with no exposure.

Participants with greater levels of exposure were more likely to have used an electronic cigarette in their lifetime compared to participants with lower levels of exposure. Participants with greater levels of exposure were also more likely to have used an electronic cigarette in the past month compared to participants with lower levels of exposure.

In other words, the more videos participants recalled watching, the more they were likely to report vaping.

vaping is weird .. you walk past a group of guys looking like gangsters but they smell like strawberry muffins

— ven0ph (@ven0ph) [April 4, 2021](#)

## **Minors at greatest risk**

Among those with any exposure, participants younger than 21 were more likely to have used an electronic cigarette in their lifetime compared to those 21 and older. This suggests that this [promotional strategy is most effective among those under the tobacco purchasing age](#) in the United States.

Electronic cigarette use among young adults is a [public health concern](#). Electronic cigarettes often contain nicotine. Nicotine is very [addictive and can harm brain development](#) that occurs until young adulthood. As such, identifying the potential marketing influences of electronic

cigarette use among young adults is a [research priority](#).

We believe that district attorneys and attorneys general should investigate electronic cigarette product placement in music videos due to their popularity among those under the legal tobacco purchasing age. Health campaigns should warn the public about these promotional practices.

Parents should discuss the harms of vaping with their children. Young people of all ages should think about the ways in which companies use popular media to influence their attitudes and behaviors. Positive vaping imagery, as seen in music videos, may impact their choices down the road.

That said, our research should be considered with several limitations in mind. Our findings may not generalize to young adults living outside of California. Our study could not determine what specific substances performers were vaping in the music videos. [Prior research](#) suggests that these substances include nicotine, CBD and THC, among others.

Our study did not determine a causal relationship between exposure to product placement or imagery in music videos and electronic cigarette use. However, this is an area of future research for our team.

Nonetheless, restricting electronic cigarette product placement in music videos may minimize marketing exposure among young adults in the future. Ultimately, such actions could reduce vaping among an age group that [the electronic cigarette industry regularly targets](#).

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