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Smokers see flavor capsule cigarettes as less harmful, more appealing

Cigarettes with flavor capsules in the filters are seen by smokers as less harmful and more appealing than regular cigarettes, causing them to increase in popularity according to research led by University of South Carolina professor Jim Thrasher.

Thrasher, an associate professor in the Arnold School of Public Health, has published some of the first research on one of the latest product innovations from the tobacco industry. Cigarettes with flavor capsules in the filter, which consumers can crush at any time to release a burst of flavor, are claiming significant market growth, according to industry reports.

The [study](#), published in Tobacco Control, collected information on more than 18,000 adult smokers' usage and perceptions of cigarettes with flavor capsules in the filter. Participants from Mexico (5,723 respondents), Australia (5,864 respondents) and the United States (6,865 respondents) completed online surveys between 2012 and 2014. The researchers found that the use of flavor capsules increased during this period, with preference for flavor capsule brands highest among young adults. The study also found that smokers who preferred flavor capsule cigarettes were more likely than other smokers to view their brand as stylish, better tasting and less harmful than other cigarettes.

The appeal of these tobacco products, particularly for youth, has groups such as the [Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids](#) concerned about flavor capsule cigarettes' heightened ability to facilitate addiction. "The use of additives and filter technology in cigarettes misleads consumers by making them believe they are less harmful products when compared to regular cigarettes," according to the campaign's website.

These concerns have led to a call-to-action from the authors and advocacy organizations for updated regulatory policies. "The use of flavor capsules in cigarette filters is a product innovation that has mostly escaped regulators but which is driving the growth of the tobacco market in many low- and middle-income countries; for example, flavor capsule cigarettes were first introduced into Mexico in 2011, and our data indicate

that 14 percent of Mexican smokers now smoke those brands, which is phenomenal growth,” Thrasher said

Thrasher has some ideas for future research as well. “We need to continue looking at how the tobacco industry is using product design strategies to attract youth smokers and prevent smoking cessation amongst established smokers,” Thrasher said.

Thrasher recommends that researchers assess how policies that standardize product design so that cigarettes are less different from one another may reduce the appeal of cigarettes and reduce consumer misperceptions that some combustible cigarette types are less harmful than others—when all combustible cigarettes are equally harmful.

“Strengthening the research evidence on how flavors promote and sustain addiction is also a critical research area, as countries are beginning to develop regulations that prohibit additives to tobacco products,” he says.