



“It's not what you'd term normal smoking”

A qualitative exploration of HTP language and user identity

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# Funding and disclosures

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- KE is the recipient of Fellowship funding from the UK Society for the Study of Addiction (SSA)
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# Background

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# Heated Tobacco Products (HTPs)

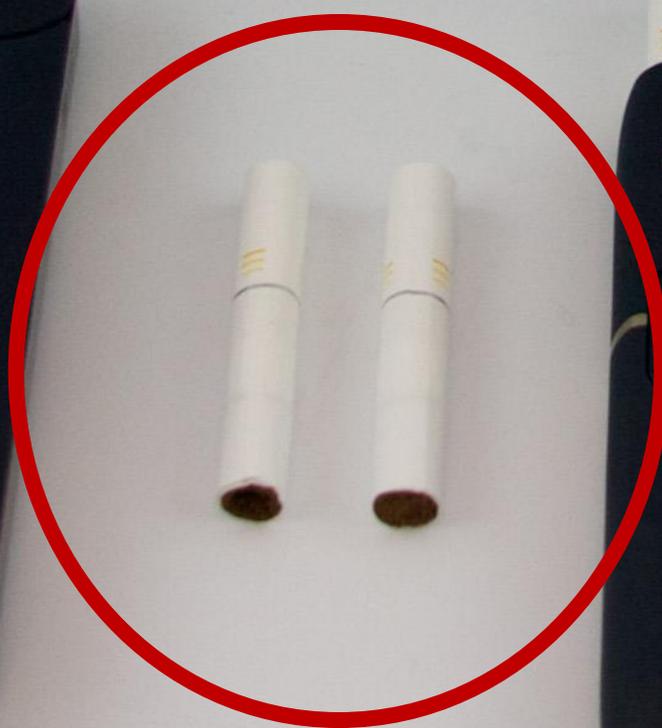
- Typically heat tobacco to generate aerosol
- Purported to be less harmful than smoking
- IQOS marketed since 2016 in UK
  - Current use low (<1%)
  - Largely among people who currently/formerly smoke

ACTION ON SMOKING AND HEALTH SURVEY, 2021



# HTP terminology is unclear

- ‘Heat-not-burn’
- ‘Tobacco vapour products’
- ‘Heated tobacco systems’
- ‘Tobacco heating products’



HEETS

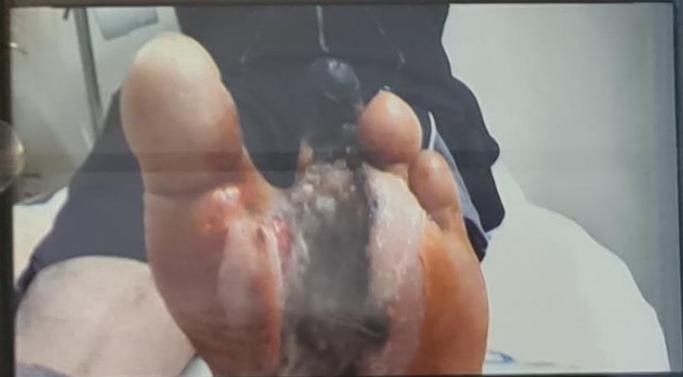
TURQUOISE SELECTION

For use with  
HeatControl Technology

**This tobacco product damages  
your health and is addictive**

**Smoking clogs  
your arteries**

Get help to stop smoking at [www.nhs.uk/quit](http://www.nhs.uk/quit)



**Marlboro  
Red**

20 Cigarettes



# ELFBAR T600 Disposable Vape - 20mg

Be the first to review this product

£5.99

IN STOCK



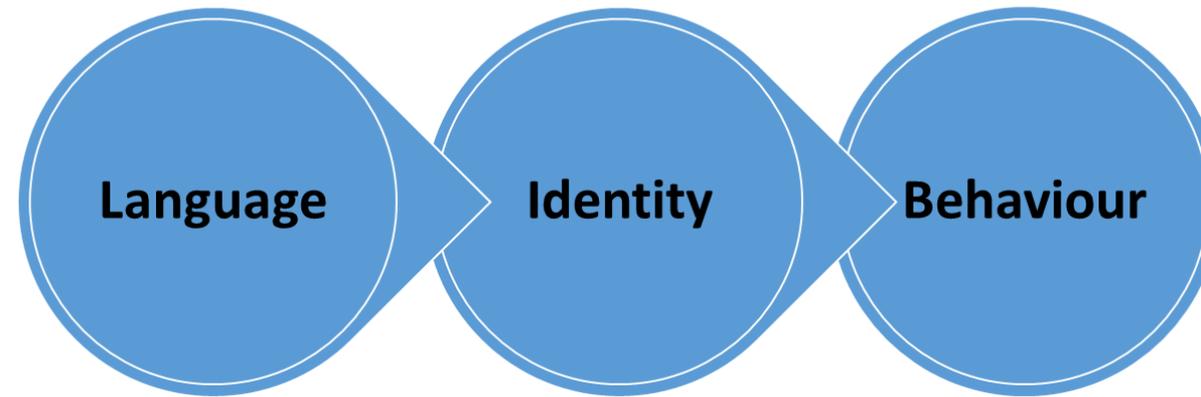
Earn **29** points when you buy this product! Login to collect your points..

The **ELFBAR T600** has a unique filter-tip design and smoother airflow, and offers the easiest transition between cigarettes and vaping. With its familiar feel and comfortable inhale the T600 delivers up to 600 puffs for all-day vaping.

- Unique filter tip design with a familiar feel
- Smooth airflow and throat hit
- 20mg nic salts in 12 popular flavours
- 500 mAh battery for extended use

Flavour \*

# Why study HTP terminology?



WEST & BROWN, 2013, THEORY OF ADDICTION  
NOTLEY ET AL, 2018, DOI: 10.1080/14659891.2018

- Identity as ‘a smoker’ = greater risk of relapse
- Some people who smoke reject vaping because vaping does not fit their identity
  - Identity could hinder switching to a less harmful product

# Aims

1. Explore the language used to describe use of the leading HTP in the UK (IQOS)
2. Consider how language relates to user identity

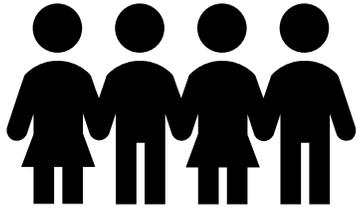


# Methods

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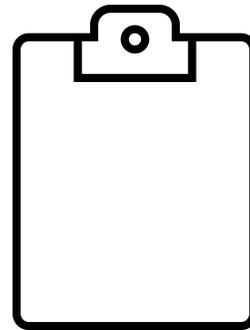


# Methods

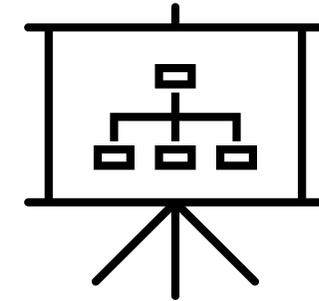


30 UK residents aged 18+  
who currently/formerly:

- used IQOS
- smoked



Interviewed 2018/2019  
about experience using  
IQOS and terminology



Iterative Categorisation

NEALE, 2016, DOI: [10.1111/ADD.13314](https://doi.org/10.1111/ADD.13314)

NEALE, 2020, DOI: [10.1111/ADD.15259](https://doi.org/10.1111/ADD.15259)

# Sample (n=30)

- 22 current IQOS users
  - 15 currently smoke, 7 formerly smoked
- 8 former IQOS users
  - 6 currently smoke, 2 formerly smoked
- Aged 18-59 years
- Most male (n=19), White (n=25), in managerial/professional occupations (n=18)
  - Unlike 'typical' people who smoke in the UK
- Majority tried vaping (n=28) but did not currently vape (n=26)
  - General unsatisfactory experiences with vaping

# Factors that influence smokers' and ex-smokers' use of IQOS: a qualitative study of IQOS users and ex-users in the UK

Charlotte N E Tompkins <sup>1</sup>, Annabel Burnley,<sup>1</sup> Ann McNeill <sup>1,2</sup>,  
Sara C Hitchman <sup>1</sup>



CANCER  
RESEARCH  
UK

Harm Reduction Journal

RESEARCH

Open Access

## *'I perceive it to be less harmful, I have no idea if it is or not:'* a qualitative exploration of the harm perceptions of IQOS among adult users



Katherine A. East<sup>1,2\*</sup> , Charlotte N. E. Tompkins<sup>1</sup>, Ann McNeill<sup>1,3</sup> and Sara C. Hitchman<sup>1</sup>

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DOI: 10.1111/add.16051

SHORT REPORT

ADDICTION

SSA

## **'It's not what you'd term normal smoking': a qualitative exploration of language used to describe heated tobacco product use and associated user identity**

Katherine A. East<sup>1</sup>  | Connor R. Miller<sup>2</sup> | Sara C. Hitchman<sup>1,3</sup> | Ann McNeill<sup>1</sup>  |  
Charlotte N. E. Tompkins<sup>1</sup> 



# Findings

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# Lack of suitable terminology

*'I'm not really sure what to call it ... IQOS is not the best term ... it's a bit hard to say... you certainly could never say IQOSing ... that's way too much of a tongue twister! ... HEETing sounds a bit weird.'* (Raj, age 43)

- Confusion, lack of suitable terminology
- Used the brand name 'IQOS' when referencing the device, but not to describe use
- 'Heat-not-burn' (or 'heating-not-burning') too long-winded
- 'Heating' inappropriate

# A 'new way' of smoking (1)

*Somebody asks me if I smoke, I say that yes, I smoke ...  
I describe it [IQOS] as smoking, because it's a tobacco  
product and it's similar to smoking. It also means less  
having to explain what it is! (Luca, age 24)*

- Understood IQOS use as *'smoking', 'going to smoke', 'puffing', 'dragging'*
- HEETS as *'cigarettes'*
- But not *'normal smoking'*
  - *'Smoking for the 21<sup>st</sup> century'*
  - Limits to which IQOS fully mimics the experience of smoking combustible cigarettes
- *'Vaping'* inappropriate

# A 'new way' of smoking (2)

*I can only compare it to smoking or vaping ... on that spectrum, it's nearer to smoking than vaping (Sanjay, age 43)*

- IQOS '*between*' smoking and vaping, '*halfway house*', '*hybrid*'
- Some similarities with vaping
  - Lack of combustion
  - '*Steam*'-like emissions
- But overall more similar to smoking; '*vaping*' less appropriate

# Impact on identity (1)

- Confusion over identity

*I don't know how to define myself anymore ... I use HEETS, but I don't burn cigarettes ... am I a smoker? I don't know. (Sean, age 52)*

*[A medical form] asked whether I smoked cigarettes. I didn't actually know how to categorise it ... it even gave an option for, 'do you vape' ... [I] left an additional comment describing that I'm having IQOS and it steams it as opposed to burning ... that was kind of the confusion when filling out the form. (Yusuf, age 25)*

# Impact on identity (2)

- But many eager to distinguish themselves from being '*a smoker*'
  - '*Dirty*', '*social taboo*'
- Using IQOS positively impacted personal image
  - More '*health conscious*', '*responsible*'
- Manipulated language to suit circumstances or created new identities
  - '*HEET user*', '*ex-smoker*', '*vaper*'

*IQOS is to them [children], it's a form of vaping, which is acceptable ... 'I'm going for an IQOS', that's what I might say to my wife ... to the children I might say, 'I'm going for a vape'. To me it's like it's a smoke ... there is a perception of smokers as bad these days ... it's not nearly so bad if it's seen to be a vape or a smoking alternative. (William, age 36)*



# Discussion

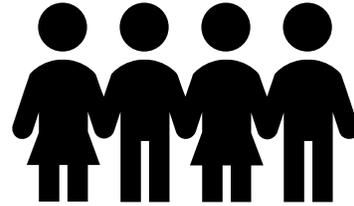
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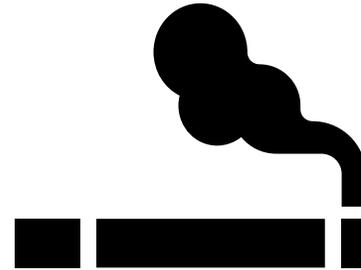
# Overview of findings



Ambiguity around  
verb terminology



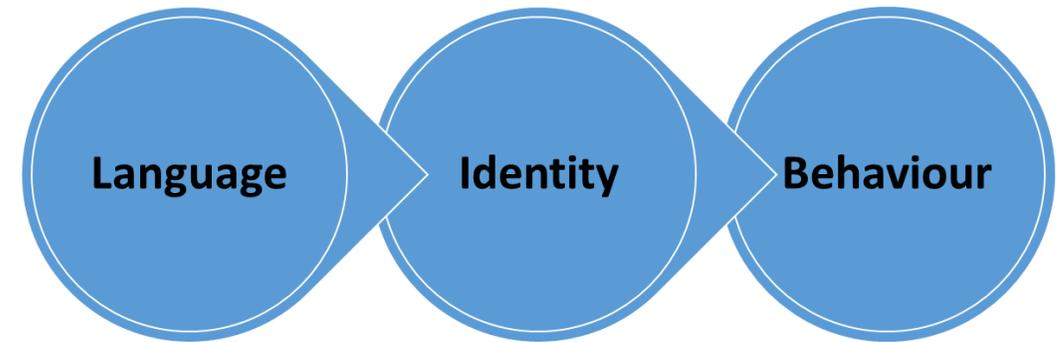
IQOS use articulated  
in relation to existing  
smoker identities



IQOS use = 'smoking'  
But not 'a smoker'

# Implications

- Shifting identity away from '*a smoker*' promising for smoking abstinence
- Clear terminology needed in surveys, healthcare
  - Addiction Ontology COX ET AL, 2022, DOI: 10.1111/ADD.16010
- 'Heat not-burn' could be avoided



WEST & BROWN, 2013, THEORY OF ADDICTION  
NOTLEY ET AL, 2018, DOI: 10.1080/14659891.2018

# Limitations and future work

- Generalisability
  - 30 participants from London
  - Sample unlike 'typical' people who smoke in the UK
- Language and identity among those with positive vaping experiences?
- Does IQOS user identity impact smoking abstinence?

## Take-home message

IQOS users are ambiguous about IQOS use terminology. They generally refer to IQOS use as 'smoking' but resist being labelled 'a smoker'.

### STUDY FUNDING

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SARA HITCHMAN  
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# Thank you.

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