

TOBACCO INDUSTRY: Manipulating the Youth into a Lifelong Addiction



Global Center for
Good Governance
in Tobacco Control

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Tobacco companies hook the vulnerable youth into starting a lifelong addiction through flavors and targeted marketing.

The tobacco industry publicizes its so-called contributions to society to mask long-term health and socio-economic harms while keeping children in tobacco farms, and lobbying against policies that protect children.

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The tobacco industry costs the global economy USD 1.4 trillion annually[1] and kills 8 million people.[2] Over 37 million teenagers aged 13-15 use some form of tobacco.[3,4,5] Investment analysts estimate that the industry creates at least 5 times more societal costs than benefits.[6] Anti-fraud agencies have found evidence of tobacco companies' complicity in smuggling[7] and bribery[8], resulting in billions in lost revenue. Environmentalists have pointed out that cigarette butts are the most widely littered object in the oceans.[9] Human rights experts concluded that the tobacco industry must stop producing and marketing tobacco because it is "deeply harmful to human health" and irreconcilable with human rights.[10]

I. HOOKING THE YOUTH WITH FLAVORS

Tobacco companies develop a range of flavored products, from cigarettes to novel and emerging tobacco and non-tobacco products (NENTPs) such as heated tobacco products (HTPs), electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) and electronic non-nicotine delivery systems (ENNDS). Many of the products falling under this category are collectively, and colloquially known as e-cigarettes.[11] (see Box 1). E-cigarettes are heavily marketed towards youth through the use of flavoring and promotional strategies.[12] Flavors such as fruit, candy, and mint, mask the harsh taste of tobacco and can make them more appealing to the youth (See Box 3). [13,14]

II. TARGETING THE YOUTH

The tobacco industry views the youth and young adults as its future loyal customers. Tobacco use starts during adolescence and about 90% of cigarette smokers first try smoking by age 18.[15,16] All evidence points to the fact that tobacco industry's marketing activities "recruit new users during their youth" (See Box 3).[17]

III. MARKETING TO THE YOUTH

The tobacco industry's marketing activities have led young people to initiate smoking and vaping, prevent users from quitting, and increase tobacco use.[18] These include playful product[19] and package design (See Box 5)[20], brand and corporate marketing (See Box 10)[21], point of sale[22],[23] and events marketing for a young crowd (See Box 8 and 14)[24], pricing strategies to keep products affordable to teens (See Box 12)[25], embedded marketing including product placement in movies targeted to kids,[26] digital marketing in platforms accessible by teens (See Box 9 and 11)[27], sports and culture sponsorships (See Box 13)[28], and so-called socially responsible activities that affect youth smoking behavior.[29]

Tobacco advertising appeals to the youth because it reflects aspirations such as “independence, liberation, attractiveness, adventurousness, sophistication, glamour, athleticism, social acceptability and inclusion, sexual attractiveness, thinness, popularity, rebelliousness, and being ‘cool’ ” (See Box 3).[30,31]

IV. CAUSING LIFELONG ADDICTION

The tobacco industry retains a key ingredient in their products, nicotine, which is as addictive than as cocaine or heroin.[32,33,34] Nicotine tricks the nerve cells into sending a message to release more dopamine which is passed on to give a feeling of “high.” The young brain creates more receptors to handle the anticipated nicotine, which leads teens to needing more nicotine to get the same high. Because the brain continues to develop until about age 25, the young brain can get addicted more easily than adults (See Box 2). In addition, nicotine addiction leads to an increased risk of addiction to other substances, [35] drugs,[36,37] and alcohol.[38] ENDS products may serve as a gateway to conventional smoking among young people or the renormalization of smoking in society.[2,39]

V. CAUSING PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS AND COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT

Transnational tobacco companies have invested research in manipulating the effect of nicotine on the brain.[40] Nicotine affects parts of the brain responsible for learning and memory and, in the adolescent brain, the effect can become permanent. [41] Nicotine can also impair decision-making ability in the long term and worsen anxiety,[42] irritability, [43] impulsivity,[44] depression, and other mental health disorders.[45]

Moreover, youth who smoke are at increased risk of developing mental disorders such as major depressive disorder, agoraphobia, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder,[46] while also worsening attention- deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).[47] The variety of ENDS flavors can influence pleasure perception and directly impact the central nervous system's reward system. Recent studies indicate that the chemicals in e-cigarettes, including heavy metals, glass fibers, and flavorings, may alter neuroinflammatory reactions throughout the body.[48]

VI. CAUSING OTHER ADVERSE HEALTH HARMS

The tobacco industry understands fully well the health harms caused by its products and in fact have been forced to reimburse governments for health costs in several countries.[49,50] Among the young, smoking causes faster heart rates,[51] shortness of breath, production of more phlegm,[52] skin issues such as psoriasis, dermatitis and early wrinkles, dental issues such as yellow-stained teeth and bad breath,[53] early signs of heart diseases and stroke, limitations on performance and endurance, increased risk of lung cancers, reduced lung function, and shorter lives over time.[54]

VII. LOBBYING AGAINST TOBACCO CONTROL POLICIES THAT PROTECT YOUTH

The tobacco industry lobbies against evidence-based life-saving tobacco control measures[55] such as ban on flavoring (See Box 4), packaging restrictions (See Box 5),[56] ban on all forms of advertising,[57] nicotine regulation, and increase in price through tax measures.[58]

Governments have committed to implement these measures which are embodied in the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC); however, the tobacco industry poses the single greatest barrier to these efforts.[59] It intends to gain a seat at the table, pre-empt or influence regulation, or secure incentives from the government by making contributions or offering partnerships to government offices or officials, offering weak draft legislation, seeking appointments for its officials or allies, bribing public officials, hiring former public officials, funding front groups and scientists to voice its interests and to cloud the debate.[60] Although the tobacco industry would purport to support legislation to restrict access to children, the interventions supported are typically ineffective one. [61]

VIII. MASKING THE DAMAGE TO GAIN THE TRUST OF A YOUNG MARKET

The belief that tobacco companies are benefiting society gives it the credibility and legitimacy it needs to sell to a young market. Hence, it uses political and corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, including Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) activities[62,63] including tobacco EPR[64,65], to rehabilitate its image in the area of environment, human rights, science, agriculture, public health, disaster management, and development.[66] These activities also detract from the obligation to make the tobacco industry accountable[67] for all the harms caused, such as through policies and suits to recoup healthcare costs and other damages.[68,69,70] Tobacco EPR such as recycling and substituting eco-friendly filters are seen to undermine marketing restrictions.[71]

IX. KEEPING CHILDREN IN TOBACCO FARMS

The tobacco industry casts an image of promoting sustainable tobacco farming while continuing to purchase leaves produced using child labor.[72] Child labor in tobacco thrusts children into a cycle of poverty by causing health harms and restricting access to education.[73] It is a well-known fact that the tobacco industry employs over 1.3 million children in tobacco farming and processing, who work in extremely hazardous conditions and suffer from diseases and poverty.[74]

Children suffer from green tobacco sickness, with symptoms like insomnia, dizziness, headaches, dehydration, fatigue, nausea, and vomiting due to nicotine absorption through the skin. This work deprives them of education, impeding their economic and social progress. They face high risks of cancer, tuberculosis, infertility, psychological issues, immune system dysfunction, and neurological damage from exposure to chemicals like pesticides and herbicides. Additionally, they suffer from malnutrition, infectious diseases, and long-term musculoskeletal damage due to poor nutrition, inadequate sanitation, and strenuous manual labor. [75]

Instead of promoting a globally mandated shift towards alternative livelihood in accordance with the WHO FCTC, the tobacco industry seeks to justify tobacco growing and encourages tobacco dependence through contract farming.[76]

X. USING THE SAME TACTICS TO SELL NEW ADDICTIVE PRODUCTS

The largest tobacco transnationals are behind some of the most popular brands of novel and emerging nicotine products including e-cigarettes and HTPs; [77] and the backing of these transnationals have spurred global expansion.[78] Decades of tactics in marketing cigarettes to manipulate the youth are currently being repeated on new products in different countries (See Box 6 and 7).[79] The tobacco industry has invested heavily in social media marketing, which has a young audience. For example, BAT launched a USD 1 billion marketing campaign that focuses on social media, pop stars, concerts and sports and cultural events, that can potentially encourage young people to initiate tobacco use.[80]

The tobacco industry's promotion of novel and emerging tobacco products as 'harm reduction' has been challenged by the Global Youth Movement (GYV). GYV advocates for a ban on these products and demands that the tobacco industry be held financially accountable for the harms caused to both the current and future generations.[81,82]

Across the world, governments have recognized that there is a fundamental conflict of interest between tobacco control and public health.^[i] In 2015, the international community of nations committed to attain the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs); and these goals include strengthening implementation of the WHO FCTC which obliges governments to protect public health policies from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry (WHO FCTC Article 5.3).^[ii]

Pursuant to this obligation, governments and public officials must limit interaction with the tobacco industry unless strictly necessary for regulation; avoid conflicts of interest; reject partnerships and contributions from the tobacco industry; require the tobacco industry to be accountable and transparent in its operations including requiring the submission of all forms of marketing, public relations, and lobbying information; denormalize and regulate so-called “socially responsible” activities of the tobacco industry; and not give in any preferential treatment, benefits, or incentives.^[iii]

These measures are intended to empower governments to resist industry influence and lobbying against policies that protect the youth from the tobacco industry’s manipulation.

i UN General Assembly (24 January 2012). Resolution adopted by the General Assembly – 66/2. Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/nmh/events/un_ncd_summit2011/political_declaration_en.pdf (accessed on 02 May 2020).

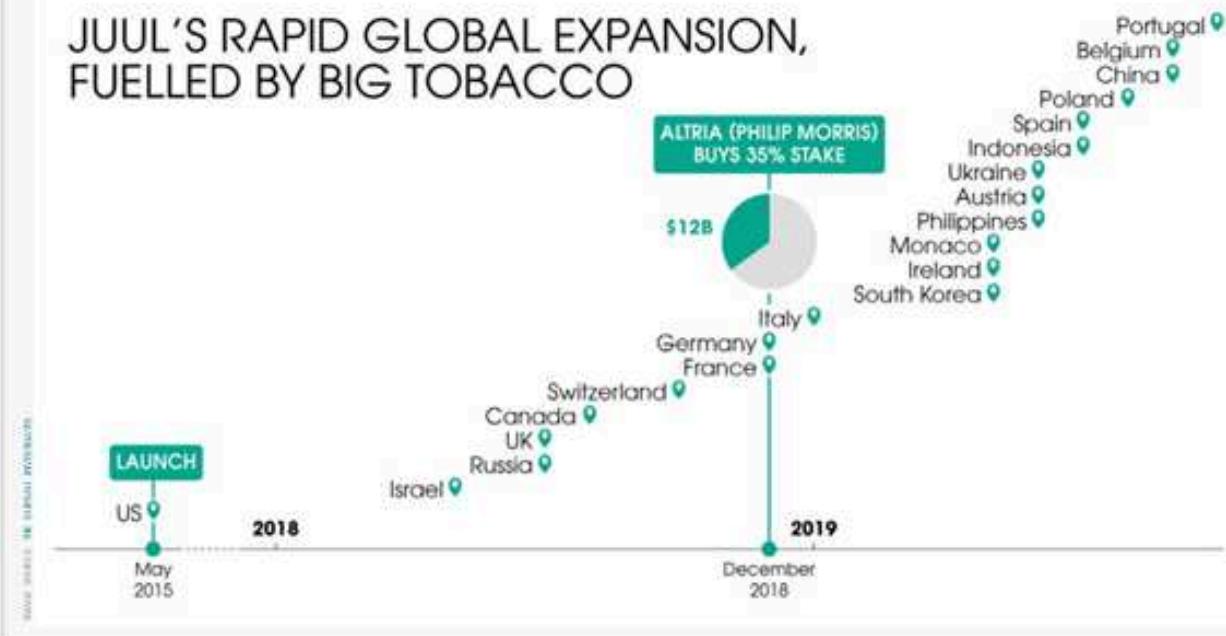
ii UNDP & WHO FCTC Secretariat (2017). The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and Accelerator for Sustainable Development. Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org/publications/who-framework-convention-tobacco-control-accelerator-sustainable-development> (access on 02 May 2020).

iii WHO (2013). Guidelines for implementation of Article 5.3 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Retrieved from <https://fctc.who.int/publications/m/item/guidelines-for-implementation-of-article-5.3> (accessed on 18 April 2020).

BOX 1: TOBACCO TRANSNATIONALS BEHIND POPULAR BRANDS THAT HOOK KIDS

The same tobacco transnationals that have long been condemned for deceiving the public and luring kids into addiction are now behind the most popular brands of novel and emerging nicotine products including e-cigarettes and HTPs e.g. Philip Morris International (IQOS and Juul via Altria), British American Tobacco (Glo, ITC, Blu), Japan Tobacco International (Ploom). PMI or Philip Morris, through Altria, fuelled the global expansion of Juul, a brand which faced controversy for targeting kids in the US. As of June 2022, U.S. Food and Drug Administration has denied JUUL Labs Inc. authorization to market its products.⁶³

JUUL'S RAPID GLOBAL EXPANSION, FUELLED BY BIG TOBACCO



BOX 2: TOBACCO INDUSTRY STRATEGY TO GAIN LIFETIME CUSTOMERS

Tobacco companies expanded their range of products from cigarettes to emerging and novel products like HTPs and e-cigarettes, but retains highly addictive nicotine, to hook consumers for a lifetime.



Philip Morris: Marlboro and IQOS



BAT: Lucky Strike and Vype

BOX 3. TOBACCO INDUSTRY STRATEGY TO GAIN NEW CUSTOMERS

Cigarette and E-cigarette products of major tobacco transnationals come in flavors that attract the youth.



Marlboro, , cigarette brand, comes in a variety of appealing flavors.



JUUL, Altria's (Philip Morris) e-cigarette product, comes in various flavors: mango, crème , fruit medley, cucumber, etc.



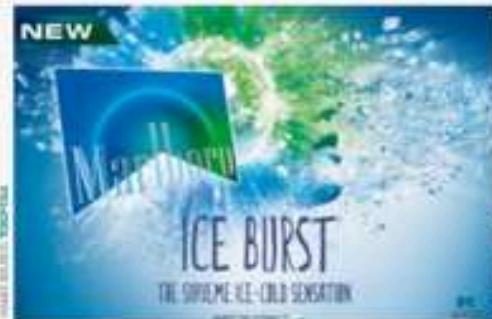
Blu, Imperial Brand's e-cigarette product, comes in various flavors: vanilla, menthol, blueberry, etc.

BOX 4. TOBACCO INDUSTRY'S DOUBLE STANDARD ON FLAVORED PRODUCTS

Banning flavors in tobacco products protects the youth from initiation. Protecting the rights of children includes promoting their right to health. The tobacco industry claims that it cares for kids but applies a double standard: It does not sell flavored products in some countries but continues to do so in others.



Juul: mint, Virginia tobacco, crème brûlée, mango, etc. Used to be available in the US but is currently banned because flavors attracted a generation of teen vapers.



Marlboro: Watermelon and Mint. Currently banned in the EU and US but is currently available in Brazil, Indonesia, Japan and online.



BOX 5. TOBACCO INDUSTRY'S DOUBLE STANDARD ON PACKAGING

Tobacco companies are prohibited from making tobacco packages attractive. Many countries have adopted graphic warnings covering over 60% of the packages or require plain or standardized packaging. This is not the case for countries where tobacco industry lobbying is the strongest.



Implemented or about to implement plain packaging

Attractive packaging (Philippines)

BOX E: TOBACCO INDUSTRY MARKETING: TOBACCO VS. NEW PRODUCTS

Civil society reports show that in 2017, PMI announced that it has changed its ways, and even funded Foundation for a Smoke-Free World (FSFW) and launched an ~~UNsmoke~~ campaign to promote IQOS. However, to promote its new product, PMI adopted a marketing style that is similar to that of Marlboro.

MARLBORO

PRODUCTS

IQOS

Marlboro Silver,
Philip MorrisMarlboro Menthol,
Philip MorrisIQOS 3.0 MULTI,
Philip MorrisIQOS HEETS,
Philip Morris

2011-2015



Marlboro, Philip Morris (2011)

2016-2017

IQOS Party,
Southern/
Eastern
Europe
(2017)

PMI announced its "transformation" and established FSFW (2017)

IQOS, Philip Morris (2017)

2018-2019

Marlboro Penthouse
at DWPX - Marlboro
landmark,
Indonesia (2018)Chesterfield,
Philip Morris (2018)

IQOS, Philip Morris (2019)

UNSMOKE

PMI launched ~~UNsmoke~~ campaign (2019)

BOX 7. TOBACCO INDUSTRY MARKETING: SAME TACTICS, NEW PRODUCTS

Evidence shows how tobacco companies have targeted young women with its cigarette advertisements from the 1970s to 1990s. E-cigarette advertisements now look much like the cigarette advertisement of the past.



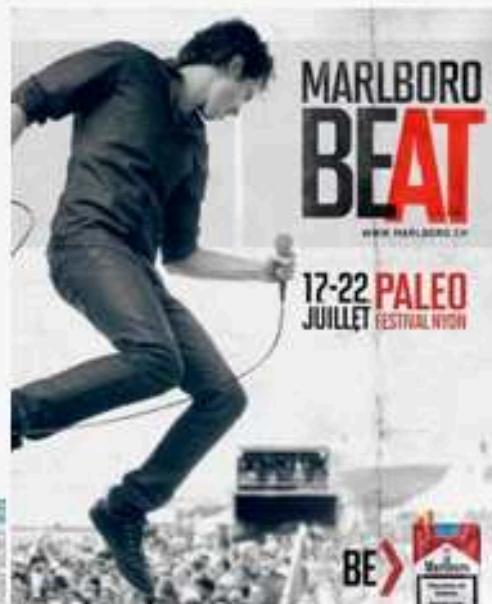
Virginia Slim,
1990, PMI
(USA, British
Virgin Islands,
Brazil, Germany)



Blu, 2017,
Imperial Brand
(USA, UK, France
and Italy)

BOX 8. EVENTS MARKETING BY TOBACCO COMPANIES FOR THE YOUTH

Philip Morris hosts and sponsors events, parties, concerts, and festivals with tobacco products paraphernalia that attract young users. Parties include alcohol, attractive women hosts, DJs, and live music suggesting trendiness and youthfulness. Organizers also entice attendees to post their experiences on social media.



Be Marlboro Concert (Marlboro Beat),
Paleo Festival, Switzerland (2018)



Be Marlboro Beach Events, Atlantic Coast of
Latin America (2012)



Be Marlboro Beach Events, Tunisia (2014)



IQOS Party, Southern/Eastern Europe (2017)



Marlboro Penthouse at DWPK-
Marlboro landmark, Indonesia (2018)

BOX 9. DIGITAL MARKETING BY TOBACCO COMPANIES FOR THE YOUTH

The tobacco industry uses influencers to promote cigarettes and HTPs as lifestyle products. Digital media, including social media platforms where these are posted, can easily be accessed by the young.



SAT's #AheadBR campaign—promoting brands Dunhill, Lucky Strike and Kent



IQOS, Philip Morris (2019)

BOX 10. BRAND MARKETING BY TOBACCO COMPANIES FOR THE YOUTH

Philip Morris launched Be Marlboro in 2011 to associate Marlboro with "freedom," "independence," and "confidence," among others. This was sharply criticized by public health groups for attracting youths. A few years after, in 2018, after announcing that it has transformed, PMI promoted its IQOS brand with the same brand marketing approach.



Marlboro, Philip Morris (2011)



IQOS, Philip Morris (2017)

BOX 11. YOUTH ACCESS TO TOBACCO PRODUCTS ONLINE

Cigarettes and e-cigarettes are made available for ordering online. Young consumers in different jurisdictions are able to override the age restrictions on websites.



Marlboro



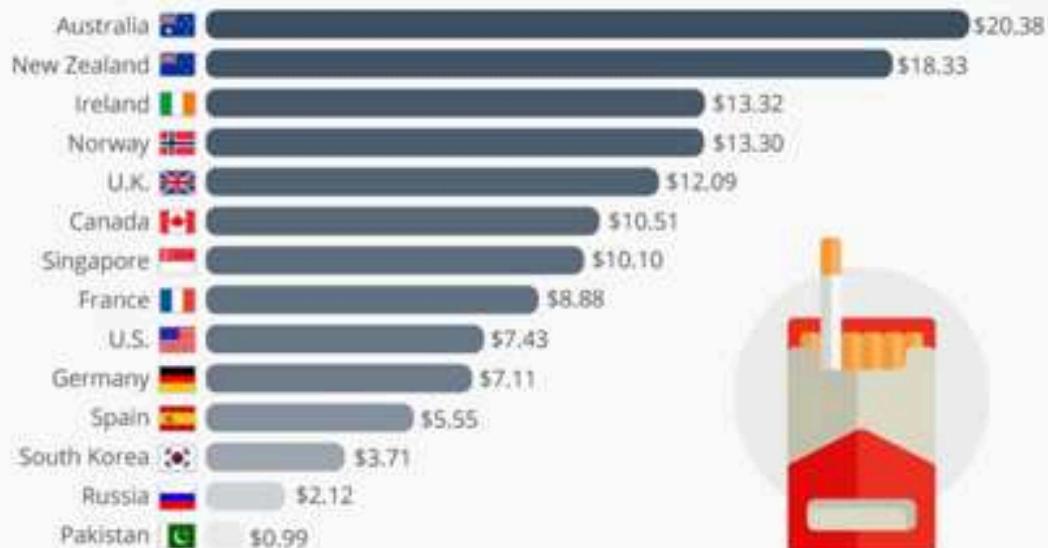
Juul

BOX 12. YOUTH ACCESS TO TOBACCO PRODUCTS THROUGH INDUSTRY PRICING STRATEGIES

Tobacco companies price their products low so that school-aged kids can afford to buy tobacco products with their lunch money.

The Price of a Pack of Cigarettes around the World

Selling price for a 20 pack of Marlboro cigarettes in selected countries (Aug 2019)



WALTER R. BOYNTON

Even in places where cigarettes are already cheap, tobacco companies adopt a pricing strategy of selling by sticks or in "kiddie packs."



"Kiddie Pack" of 10 cigarettes, Philippines

BOX 13. SPORTS SPONSORSHIP BY TOBACCO COMPANIES TO ATTRACT YOUTH

According to WHO, around 48 countries have adopted TAPS ban and 103 countries have a partial TAPS ban.² TAPS ban typically includes sports advertising in mass media such as television, radio, magazines, newspapers, and billboards, while also banning some forms of indirect advertising and promotion. Some countries specifically ban sponsoring of cultural or sporting activities, events, as well as promotion of corporate social responsibility. But the tobacco industry manages to undermine these bans through the global exposure of tobacco's Formula One and Championship Auto Racing Teams (CART) sponsorship. Typically watched by adolescents and young adults, these sporting events provide tobacco companies plenty of screen time to showcase their branding, attracting youth.²⁰



BAT's Velo nicotine pouches

BAT's Vape e-cigarettes

BOX 14. 2019 CONRAD CHALLENGE SPONSORED BY PMI FUNDED FOUNDATION FOR A SMOKE-FREE WORLD

CONRAD challenge is an annual competition for school-going children to present their innovative ideas on a wide range of topics, including aerospace, cyber technology, health, education and the environment. In 2019, the competition titled "Smoke Free World Challenge" was sponsored by PMI funded Foundation for a Smoke Free World (FSFW), where their branding and name were prominently displayed. In addition, some representatives of the Foundation were jury members who had the opportunity to interact closely with the participants. "Some of the schoolchildren The BMI talked to were appreciative of FSFW. "The employees of the foundation were very helpful. They gave us their business cards and mobile numbers and told us to stay in touch, maybe for internships in the future," said a student who took part as a finalist in this category. "They didn't tell us about any links to the tobacco industry," the student said."²¹



Updated fact sheet with information on novel and emerging tobacco and non-tobacco products (NENTPs), psychiatric disorders and cognitive impairments and other adverse health effects including the problems children face while working on tobacco farms. The mention of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) and EPR activities is now incorporated alongside Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts. A total of 23 new references were added to keep the material up to date on the evidence available.

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