Exposure to tobacco-related imagery and branding in media increases the likelihood of young people using tobacco and nicotine products. This is no secret to British American Tobacco (BAT) and Philip Morris International (PMI), both sponsors of Formula 1 teams. Tobacco company branding in F1 and related media normalizes these companies and their addictive products, and helps them reach more young people over more platforms than they could on their own.

**Philip Morris International**  
Largest international cigarette company in the world  
- Cigarettes shipped in 2022: 621 billion³  
- Total estimated sponsorship spending in F1: US $2.3 billion

**British American Tobacco**  
Second-largest international cigarette company in the world  
- Cigarettes shipped in 2022: 605 billion²  
- Total estimated sponsorship spending in F1: US $455 million

**Sponsoring F1 Teams**

PMI and BAT benefit from F1’s growing popularity. F1 has added more races to its calendar and is growing its global fan base, helping PMI and BAT reach more young people—including in countries with advertising restrictions.

This exposure doesn’t stop at the racetrack. BAT and PMI’s sponsorship dollars also buy access to new platforms that are more difficult to regulate using traditional advertising restrictions.

- Netflix
- Race coverage on TV
- Esports
- Social media
- F1.com and the F1 app
- Corporate social responsibility
Either BAT or PMI’s branding appeared in 33% of total minutes broadcast of Season 4 of “Formula 1: Drive to Survive,” whose viewers tend to be younger than F1 race-only viewers. Research shows a link between tobacco imagery shown in episodic streaming entertainment and increased risk of vaping.4

An increased social media presence has helped F1 gain new, younger fans with whom sponsors can interact. In 2021, McLaren, sponsored by BAT, had the most Instagram followers of any F1 team. Ferrari had the third-most. In 2021, BAT and PMI ran numerous social media campaigns related to F1.

Research shows a link between tobacco imagery shown in episodic streaming entertainment and increased risk of vaping.4

The official F1 video game does not show tobacco-related brands on digital representation of the cars. However, in 2021, BAT launched a celebrity esports (video game) series sponsored by Velo, its nicotine pouch brand, that circumvented these restrictions. Esports also attract a young audience, with 38% of fans being under age 24.5

Tobacco company branding is also seen on F1’s website, which had 113 million visitors in 2021, and on the F1 TV app. The app is available in over 80 countries, including those with ad restrictions. Offering coverage of every Grands Prix since 1981, it potentially exposes millions to current and historic tobacco company branding.

Tobacco company brands are promoted through corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, such as “Driven by Change,” an initiative created by McLaren and Vuse, BAT’s e-cigarette brand. Tobacco companies enjoy even more exposure when the media covers their CSR activities.

F1 sponsorship helps cigarette companies reach people through all of these platforms—helping these companies recruit new customers.

Tobacco advertising restrictions protect the people the tobacco industry is trying to target, especially young people. These restrictions must be updated to fully cover all platforms where people are being exposed to tobacco-related branding.

Policymakers must strengthen and fully enforce TAPS bans across all digital spaces to truly protect young people and prevent cross-border marketing.

Sources:
1 https://truthinitiative.org/tobacco-starring-role
3 https://philipmorrisoninternational.gcs-web.com/static-files/7a02f222-30b1-4d2c-92e7-92af146e7195
4 https://truthinitiative.org/tobacco-starring-role

About STOP (Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products)
STOP is a global tobacco industry watchdog whose mission is to expose the tobacco industry tactics that undermine public health. Comprised of a network of academic and public health organizations, STOP researches and monitors the tobacco industry, shares intelligence to counter its tactics, and exposes its misdeeds to a global audience. STOP is funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies as part of the Bloomberg Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use. For more information, visit exposetobacco.org.