

Tobacco On Our Screens & In Our Teens



Truth Initiative's sixth annual analysis of tobacco imagery in popular entertainment found increasingly pervasive smoking imagery in 2022's top 15 most popular streaming shows among 15 to 24 year-olds, binge-watched shows, and music videos, as well as youth-rated movies.

- The number of tobacco depictions in streaming shows increased by 110% since the previous year—exposing nearly 25 million young people to tobacco imagery.

- Tobacco incidents in binge-watched shows nearly quadrupled.

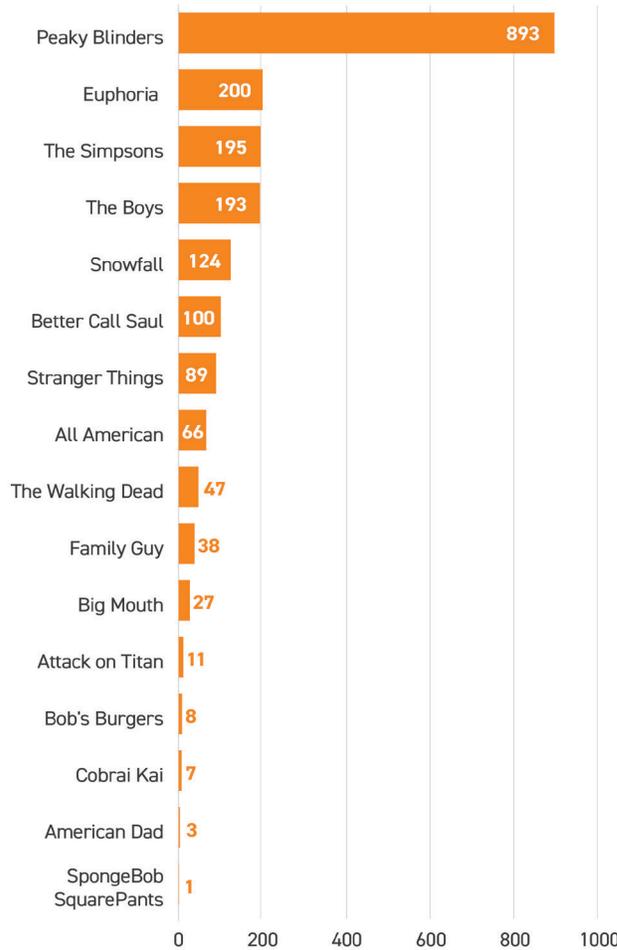
- Even PG-rated movies had an increase in tobacco depictions.

- More than a third of 15 to 24-year-olds surveyed by Truth Initiative reported exposure to tobacco imagery on YouTube.

- Twice as many music videos for chart-topping songs featured tobacco and were viewed almost 7 billion times on YouTube as of October 2023.

- A 2023 study of trends in nicotine strength among e-cigarette products found that the average concentration of nicotine in e-cigarettes has increased from 2.5% to 4.4% between 2017 and 2022.

Top 2022 binge-watched shows with tobacco incidents



Click or tap on button to download Truth Initiative report on smoking depictions in entertainment

Truth Initiative researchers also found that many young people continue to watch shows flagged in previous years as tobacco offenders. In 2022, more than half of young people reported watching popular previous tobacco-offenders like “SpongeBob SquarePants,” “Stranger Things,” “Family Guy,” “Squid Game,” and “The Simpsons.” Young people have vast libraries of popular streaming content rife with tobacco imagery available at their fingertips — a major concern given the tendency to binge-watch popular shows and links between exposure and tobacco use.



PEAKY BLINDERS



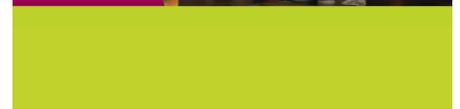
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Tobacco On Our Screens & In Our Teens



Tobacco exposure through YouTube and other social platforms

Social media is a popular way young people watch video content. About nine out of 10 U.S. teens say they use YouTube, the top social platform, according to a 2023 Pew Research Center survey.¹² A Truth Initiative study currently underway seeks to determine if teens and young adults are exposed to tobacco content on YouTube, TikTok, and Twitch—three of the most popular user-generated content platforms with young people today. The study finds that more than a third of respondents who used each of these platforms reported exposure to tobacco imagery.¹¹ Results from the study will be published in a peer-reviewed journal.

Strategies For the Entertainment Industry

■ Develop and publicize anti-smoking policies:

Studios can develop policies that restrict tobacco content in youth-rated films and shows similar to those in effect among members of the Motion Picture Association. Studios then need to hold themselves accountable by making these policies public.

■ Push anti-smoking messages and provide resources:

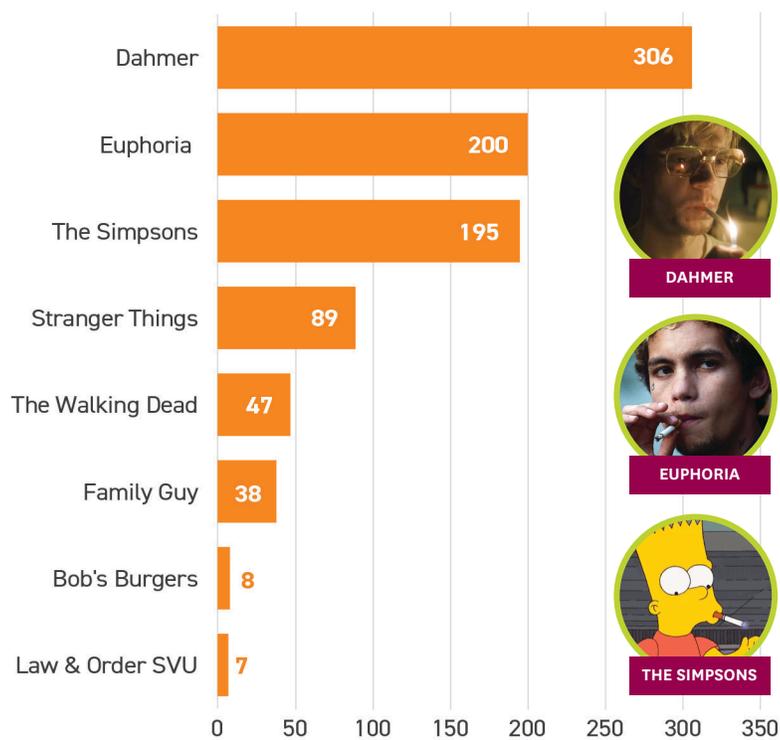
Anti-tobacco and anti-vaping ads have proven to be successful at reducing tobacco use. Much like with messages and resources that appear on title cards ahead of and after shows that depict eating disorders or mental health crises, these messages can be helpful when bracketed around youth-rated shows that contain tobacco imagery.

■ Empower artists not to portray tobacco:

Actors could include “no tobacco” in their contracts. Understanding that tobacco depictions can lead young people to a lifetime addiction, showrunners, directors, and producers can choose not to portray tobacco use. Much like SAG-AFTRA’s nudity riders in actors’ contracts, they could require a “tobacco rider” that outlines the parameters of tobacco use and includes appropriate warnings about the impact of tobacco imagery on young audiences.

■ **Modernize ratings systems and parental controls:** Movies and shows that portray tobacco use could be rated R and TV-MA. Streaming services can make ratings highly visible before the user has selected a program and parental controls need to be strengthened and streamlined.

Top 2022 shows with tobacco incidents



Note: The remaining top 15 shows, “Wednesday,” “Rick & Morty,” “Riverdale,” “Teen Titans Go,” “South Park,” “Looney Toons Cartoons,” and “The Flash,” contained zero tobacco incidents.

Smoking imagery in streaming shows leads to vaping nicotine

While a robust body of research has directly linked tobacco imagery in movies to increased smoking among young people, a groundbreaking Truth Initiative study published in *Preventive Medicine* was the first to establish a link between smoking imagery and e-cigarette use.² Youth and young adults with high exposure to popular streaming and TV shows containing tobacco images are three times more likely to start vaping compared to their peers with no exposure. Higher exposure and younger viewer age was also linked with increased likelihood of starting to use e-cigarettes.

Nearly all (99.3%) tobacco imagery in streaming shows examined in the 2020 study were combustible tobacco products like cigarettes and cigars. The story hasn’t changed in 2022: 98% of tobacco depictions in popular and binge-watched 2022 shows featured combustible cigarettes, cigars, and pipes. While most on-screen depictions feature cigarettes and smoking, the behavior it can fuel among young people is toward e-cigarettes. Young people may be imitating the behavior of smoking, but with the more popular product among their generation.