

PEER REVIEW HISTORY

BMJ Open publishes all reviews undertaken for accepted manuscripts. Reviewers are asked to complete a checklist review form ([see an example](#)) and are provided with free text boxes to elaborate on their assessment. These free text comments are reproduced below.

This paper was submitted to the BMJ but declined for publication following peer review. The authors addressed the reviewers' comments and submitted the revised paper to BMJ Open where it was re-reviewed and accepted.

ARTICLE DETAILS

TITLE (PROVISIONAL)	An Observational Study of Retail Availability and In-Store Marketing of E-Cigarettes in London: Potential to Undermine Recent Tobacco Control Gains?
AUTHORS	Hsu, Robert; Myers, Allison; Ribisl, Kurt; Marteau, Theresa

VERSION 1 - REVIEW

REVIEWER	Simon Chapman University of Sydney
REVIEW RETURNED	29-Aug-2013

GENERAL COMMENTS	<p>This paper provides useful information on the prevalence of eCig sales in an English sample of retail outlets. The authors compare their findings to a previous study and the growth rate is obvious. My main concerns about the paper are these:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. no justification is given for why the physical size of stores, even measured to the point of employing a laser measuring device, was included as a variable. The results showed no association between store size and eCig displays, but I wondered throughout why the researchers bothered to consider this. They should either explain it or drop all that detail. 2. the researchers missed a big opportunity to look at which brands of eCigs were being sold and the price ranges found. If any of them were brands marketed by tobacco companies as opposed to eCig minnows, that could have provided useful information about whether tobacco companies might be using eCig advertising to reinforce cigarette smoking & dual use, for example. Similarly, price range information would have been useful and novel – far more than store size. 3. The finding that eCigs were on sale in more deprived neighbourhoods needs comment. Smoking prevalence is much higher in low SES groups, so this finding is hardly surprising: you try to sell them where your most important potential customers live and shop (just like you don't see too many agricultural supply shops in cities). <p>Two small comments: Line 34: "ground-truthed" is not an expression I've ever come across before and one I hope I don't see again ☺ You can make this point clearly without using that infelicitous term Line 20: Just after where you explain that most eCig users report that they use them to try and quit or cut down cigarettes, it would be important to also note that the only longitudinal study so far</p>
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	published on whether eCig users quit cigarettes more than non-eCig using cigarette smokers, found no differences in the rate of cessation. In other words, there is so far no strong evidence to support the frequent anecdotal claims of quitting, but evidence to support dual use.
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- The manuscript received two reviews at The BMJ but the other reviewer have declined to make the reviews public. Please contact BMJ Open editorial office for any further information.

VERSION 1 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

Reviewer 1: Simon Chapman

This paper provides useful information on the prevalence of eCig sales in an English sample of retail outlets. The authors compare their findings to a previous study and the growth rate is obvious.

My main concerns about the paper are these:

1. No justification is given for why the physical size of stores, even measured to the point of employing a laser measuring device, was included as a variable. The results showed no association between store size and eCig displays, but I wondered throughout why the researchers bothered to consider this. They should either explain it or drop all that detail.

[Regulation regarding display of tobacco products in England varies by size of store, with tobacco display currently banned only in larger stores. E-cigarettes, which are not considered tobacco products in the U.K., could be an attractive product to sell for larger stores since their display and marketing is not restricted. We have added a section explaining the importance of store size in the measures section.](#)

2. The researchers missed a big opportunity to look at which brands of eCigs were being sold and the price ranges found. If any of them were brands marketed by tobacco companies as opposed to eCig minnows, that could have provided useful information about whether tobacco companies might be using eCig advertising to reinforce cigarette smoking & dual use, for example. Similarly, price range information would have been useful and novel – far more than store size.

[We have added this point into the beginning of the first paragraph under implications and conclusions as a suggestion for future research.](#)

3. The finding that eCigs were on sale in more deprived neighbourhoods needs comment. Smoking prevalence is much higher in low SES groups, so this finding is hardly surprising: you try to sell them where your most important potential customers live and shop (just like you don't see too many agricultural supply shops in cities).

[We have commented on the potential for high e-cigarette availability to worsen the smoking disparity between non-deprived and deprived areas in the first paragraph under implications and conclusions.](#)

Two small comments:

Line 34: “ground-truthed” is not an expression I've ever come across before and one I hope I don't see again 😊 You can make this point clearly without using that infelicitous term

[We have eliminated this term.](#)

Line 20: Just after where you explain that most eCig users report that they use them to try and quit or cut down cigarettes, it would be important to also note that the only longitudinal study so far published on whether eCig users quit cigarettes more than non-eCig using cigarette smokers, found no differences in the rate of cessation. In other words, there is so far no strong evidence to support the frequent anecdotal claims of quitting, but evidence to support dual use.

[We have added this comment into the introduction.](#)