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E-Cigarettes: Perceptions, Buying Interest and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

E-cigarettes have now begun to be positively accepted by the public, especially among adolescents and young adults, as an alternative that is considered safer than conventional cigarettes. This study explores the perception, purchase intention, and market opportunity of e-cigarettes in Cirebon City using a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with health experts, e-cigarette users, and vape businesses. Theory Planned Behavior (TPB) and Theory Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) were used to analyze factors influencing the adoption of e-cigarettes. The results showed that people's perceptions of e-cigarettes varied, influenced by health, social, and economic factors. Purchase intention is influenced by price, product variety, and the influence of the social environment. From a business perspective, e-cigarettes have vast market opportunities, but face regulatory challenges. This study provides insights for stakeholders in understanding the dynamics of the e-cigarette market as well as related policy implications.

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INTRODUCTION

E-cigarettes are increasingly popular in various circles, not only because they are considered safer, but also because of their ease of use. The various flavors and aromas offered are attractive, especially for teenagers and young adults. In addition, the modern and customizable design of the device makes e-cigarettes more attractive than conventional cigarettes (Siti Habibah Bramandia, 2019). This popularity is reinforced by the support of vaping communities that actively promote the latest products, both through in-person meetings and social media. Thus, e-cigarettes have become part of a certain lifestyle, not just a substitute for traditional cigarettes.

E-cigarettes are increasingly popular in various circles, not only because they are considered safer, but also because of their ease of use. The various flavors and aromas offered are attractive, especially for teenagers and young adults. In addition, the modern and customizable design of the device makes e-cigarettes more attractive than conventional cigarettes (Siti Habibah Bramandia, 2019). This popularity is reinforced by the support of vaping communities that actively promote the latest products, both through in-person meetings and social media. Thus, e-cigarettes have become part of a certain lifestyle, not just a substitute for traditional cigarettes.

The proliferation of e-cigarettes has opened up a vast market opportunity, especially among teenagers and young adults. Interest in this product is increasing thanks to attractive marketing strategies and the public's view that e-cigarettes are a healthier option than regular cigarettes. In the article Application of Digital Marketing in Supporting Marketing Activities,

(Fajarianto et al., 2021) states that "the application of digital-based marketing, such as the use of websites, can expand market reach and increase the effectiveness of product promotion." This strategy is an important factor in shaping people's perceptions of e-cigarettes.

This perception is formed by the information available, both from direct promotion and social media, which reinforces the idea that e-cigarettes can help reduce nicotine addiction or relieve stress. Based on research by (Ramdhani Nur Royyan, 2021) consumer buying interest in e-cigarettes is influenced by two main factors, namely practical benefits and emotional pleasure. Consumers show higher interest in products that offer health value as well as emotional satisfaction. This indicates that the greater the perceived utilitarian value, such as health benefits or emotional satisfaction obtained, the higher the consumer purchase interest.

While many consider e-cigarettes to be a better solution, perceptions regarding their effectiveness in the context of mental health still vary. Research suggests that e-cigarettes can provide a relaxing effect for individuals experiencing anxiety and stress, thus driving interest in purchasing these products. In this context, (Agus Supriyadi et al., 2018) emphasized that "smoking is an air pollution activity, and can harm others nearby," indicating the importance of regulation of cigarette use, including e-cigarettes.

The UK is one of the countries considering legalizing vaping as a medical drug, reflecting recognition of the potential health benefits of these products in helping smokers switch from conventional smoking (Yasinta Rahmawati, 2021). Next, Sweden has reached a significant milestone by becoming the first country in the world to be officially declared "smoke-free," with smoking rates below 5% thanks to proactive policies that support the use of nicotine alternatives such as snus and vapes. According to a recent report, "Sweden has paved a clear path to a smoke-free society while safeguarding public health." (Business Wire, 2024) This evidence-based approach to alternative product regulation is showing significant public health results.

In line with global developments, Indonesia has also begun to consider the Tobacco Harm Reduction (THR) approach as a strategy to mitigate the negative impacts of conventional cigarettes. According to the Lives Saved Report 2024 published by Global Health Consults, the THR method has the potential to be a more effective solution in reducing health risks due to tobacco consumption. The report estimates that if this method is widely implemented, more than 4.6 million lives could be saved by 2060.(Dany Garjito & Dinda Rachmawati, 2025). In addition, Dr. Arifandi, a health expert stated that "Vape can be a bridge for people who want to quit smoking because the sensation is similar to cigarettes." (Vapemagz, 2019)

However, despite claims regarding the health benefits of e-cigarettes, further research is needed to understand the long-term impact and validity of such claims. Some studies do point to the potential of vapes as smoking cessation aids. For example, Dr. Arifandi Sanjaya (02/12/2024) revealed that "80% of vape users successfully reduce or quit smoking within the first three months, and 50% are able to last up to one year." However, on the other hand, a study by (Dahal et al., 2020) showed that former smokers who switched to e-cigarettes experienced increased depressive symptoms compared to those who quit smoking without switching. Recent research has also revealed that "people with high mental distress are four times more likely to vape compared to those with lower mental distress." (Sierra Vista Hospital, 2024) This shows the complexity of the relationship between e-cigarette use and mental health, where vaping is often seen as a solution but can actually worsen the mental state of users.

This integration of health aspects and emotional value suggests that interest in buying e-cigarettes is not only due to replacing conventional cigarettes, but also due to a personal desire to fulfill specific psychological needs. Therefore, this study aims to explore more deeply how

the public perception of e-cigarettes as a medical drug will impact the level of public buying interest so that it can form a niche market in Indonesia.

An e-cigarette (vape) is a device designed to vaporize a nicotine solution without going through the process of burning tobacco, so it is often considered a safer alternative compared to conventional cigarettes (Siregar et al., 2024).Consumer perceptions of e-cigarettes are very important because they reflect how they understand and assess these products based on available information, personal experience, and social influences (Aulia Rachman, 2021). With the increasing popularity of e-cigarettes among teenagers, the market opportunity for this product is expanding. According to Kotler (2008), market opportunities are areas of buyer needs in which companies can operate profitably. Therefore, an effective marketing communication strategy is crucial in building purchase interest and influencing consumer perceptions of the product.

There are several previous studies that are used as references in this study, including those contained in the article (Ramdhani Nur Royyan, 2021) which discusses the effect of hedonic value and utilitarian value on buying interest in e-cigarettes with the Hedonic Value and Utilitarian Value theoretical approach. This theory explains that buying interest is influenced by the utilitarian value (practical function) and hedonic value (emotional satisfaction) of the product, using quantitative methods and multiple linear regression analysis on 120 respondents. The results showed that both values had a significant effect on buying interest in e-cigarettes;

In addition, research conducted by (Abdullah et al., 2021) entitled "Comparison of Dependence Levels Between Conventional Cigarette Users and E-cigarette Users" discusses dependence on cigarettes with an analytical observational method and a cross-sectional theoretical approach through an online questionnaire survey. The survey involved 48 respondents from various age groups from adolescents to young adults, with the results showing significant differences in dependence levels between users of both types of cigarettes.

Another study by (Timur & Nurhadiyanto, 2024) reviewed the use of e-cigarettes among adolescents in the perspective of Differential Association Theory, discussing legal and policy implications related to smoking trends among adolescents. The literature study method shows that changes in perceptions of e-cigarettes as an alternative to tobacco have increased their popularity.

The next research belongs to (Agus Sriyanto & Ayala Putra Pangestu, 2022). In his research, he discusses the "Impact of Conventional Cigarette and E-cigarette Consumption on Health, State Revenue" using the Health Economics theory approach to analyze the impact of e-cigarette prevalence on the risk of stroke and state revenue from tobacco products tax. The results showed that conventional cigarette consumption had a significant effect on the risk of stroke, while e-cigarette consumption did not show a significant effect.

Finally, research conducted by (Satria et al., 2021), this study discusses the trend of using e-cigarettes (vape) as a lifestyle in Lhokseumawe City. Using qualitative methods with observation, interviews, and literature studies, the study found that vape is popular due to lifestyle influences, the assumption that it is safer than conventional cigarettes, and the visual appeal of the vapor. Vape is not only an alternative to smoking but also a symbol of social status among teenagers and their communities. Its use is driven more by consumption culture than health reasons, creating a social distinction between conventional smokers and vape users.

Meanwhile, the research conducted by the researcher focuses on exploring the experiences of e-cigarette users by emphasizing the perceptions and opportunities faced.

Researchers also discuss the potential of e-cigarettes as an alternative to medical drugs and how public perceptions can influence purchase interest and marketing strategies. researchers use two main theories to analyze phenomena related to e-cigarette use. The first theory is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) developed by Ajzen (1985). TPB provides a framework for understanding how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence an individual's intention to purchase and use e-cigarettes. In this context, positive attitudes, social support, and perceived individual control are key factors in influencing purchase intention. The second theory used is the Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) Theory, introduced by Rogers (1962). This theory explains how innovations, such as e-cigarettes, are adopted by individuals and groups in society. Researchers explored the characteristics of e-cigarette innovations, such as relative advantage and complexity, and how social and cultural factors play a role in the adoption process. By integrating these two theories, this research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the factors that influence perceptions and purchase intention towards e-cigarettes. This approach is expected to make a significant contribution to the literature on consumer behavior in the context of innovative products.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach to explore in depth the perceptions, purchase interest, and opportunities for e-cigarettes among the community in Cirebon City. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with semi-structured interview guidelines, involving various informants, namely one Health Expert Doctor, two Teenage E-Cigarette Users, one Adult E-Cigarette User and one Cirebon Vape Ground Business Owner. Direct observation at the point of sale was conducted to obtain a richer context of consumer interaction with the product. This research also utilized literature studies from academic journals as supporting data to strengthen the analysis. Data analysis was conducted using thematic methods to identify patterns and themes that emerged from the qualitative data. To ensure data validity, this research applies source triangulation, namely by comparing information obtained from interviews with observational data and relevant literature, and conducting analysis referring to TPB theory and DOI theory The results of the study are expected to provide a deeper understanding of the factors that influence consumer purchase interest in e-cigarettes, and provide relevant recommendations for industry players.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on observations and research conducted in the Cirebon area through in-depth interviews with several informants, namely Dr. Arifandi Sanjaya (health expert doctor), Ramadhany Indra Pramudhita (adult e-cigarette user), Aliifa Nazlizasandi, Dinda Fadhila Yuniar (teenage e-cigarette user), and Gio (owner of Cirebon Vape Ground vapestore), the results of this study use Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Theory Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) as an analytical framework.

TPB theory, proposed by Ajzen (1991), focuses on the factors that influence an individual's intention to perform a behavior, while Theory Diffusion of Innovations (DOI), developed by Rogers (2003), explains how innovations spread in society. Based on the **Theory of Planned Behavior** (TPB) indicators, it can be described as follows :

Attitudes Attitudes reflect an individual's evaluation of a behavior, either in positive or negative terms. In this context, attitudes refer to an individual's view of e-cigarette use. A positive attitude towards this product may arise due to the perception that vapes are safer than

conventional cigarettes. This was reinforced by one e-cigarette user (adult) who stated, "I feel my breathing is better after switching to vape. Shortness of breath and coughing are less than when I was still smoking conventional cigarettes." (Rama, 27/12/2024). Attitude plays an important role in influencing a person's purchase intention. The more positive a person's assessment of e-cigarettes, the more likely they are to try or buy the product. This study found that positive attitudes, particularly among adolescents and young adults, often occurred directly with increased interest in purchasing e-cigarettes.

Subjective Norms are related to individual perceptions regarding the views of significant parties in their lives, such as family, peers, and social communities. In this study, an interview with an adolescent e-cigarette user revealed that support from peers had a significant influence on the decision to try e-cigarettes "I first tried vape because my friends also used it. They said it was better and more accepted by people than conventional cigarettes." (Dinda 12/12/2024). Subjective norms function as a driving factor that strengthens a person's purchase intention. If the social environment supports or views e-cigarettes positively, individuals tend to be more influenced to follow this consumption pattern. This study shows that subjective norms influence a person's interest in e-cigarettes. Social support, especially from peers, encourages individuals to try and buy this product.

Behavioral Control refers to the extent to which individuals feel they have the ability and control to adopt a particular behavior. In the context of e-cigarettes, if individuals feel ease of access and confidence in the control of their use, they will be more encouraged to buy or use them. Factors such as financial and distribution ease of access are of primary concern in this study. The owner of the vapestore highlighted that wide availability of products at affordable prices is an important element that influences consumers' decision to purchase e-cigarettes. He also stated “Although initially expensive, in the long run vape is more economical because I only need to buy liquid once a month, compared to conventional cigarettes which must be bought every day.” (Gio, 08/01/25). This research reveals that accessibility and competitive prices drive interest in buying e-cigarettes. Behavioral control factors, both from individual beliefs and a supportive environment, play a role in determining purchasing decisions.

Apart from using Planned Behavior Theory, researchers also use **Diffusion of Innovations (DOI)** Theory as a supporting theory, where the theory indicators include :

Innovation E-cigarettes can be considered an innovation in the world of tobacco-based products because they offer a perceived safer alternative to conventional cigarettes. Innovations that offer comparative advantages such as lower health risks tend to be more easily adopted. A health expert who became a key informant stated "Vape has nicotine levels that can be adjusted according to user preference, and only about 10% of the nicotine in the liquid is absorbed by the body. This makes the health risks lower than conventional cigarettes." (Arifandi, 02/12/2024). This research shows that advantages such as reduced smoke odor and lower potential health hazards have encouraged many consumers to switch to e-cigarettes as an alternative solution.

Communication channels play a strategic role in disseminating information about an innovation. In the case of e-cigarettes, social media and vaping communities are highly effective channels in building positive perceptions of the product's benefits. Research reveals that promotion through digital platforms as well as reviews from other users have a significant impact on consumer buying interest, especially among teenagers who are familiar with the digital environment. The CVG business owner also stated, "In the past, my customers were mostly men. But now more and more women are also interested in vaping." (Gio, 08/01/2025). The changing demographics of vape users demonstrate the success of marketing

communications in expanding the product's audience. This research shows that communication channels, especially social media and vaping communities, play a crucial role in building positive perceptions of e-cigarettes. Digital promotions and user reviews proved effective in increasing purchase intention, especially among teenagers who are active in the digital environment.

Timeframe The process of innovation adoption is usually gradual and not uniform across the population. In the case of e-cigarettes, the public acceptance process takes time from the introduction stage to the eventual widespread adoption of the product. The research findings show that e-cigarette adoption increases over time, especially after individuals get positive information both from their social environment and through personal experience, but for e-cigarette business owners government regulations can slow down their adoption in the long run due to restrictions, from the results of the study the owner of CVG stated “Government regulations, such as excise tax increases and restrictions on vape shops in 2026, will be a big challenge for this business.” (Gio, 08/01/2025). The study found that e-cigarette adoption develops gradually, with individuals tending to adopt after receiving positive information from the social environment or personal experience. However, government regulations, such as excise tax increases and distribution restrictions, may slow market growth in the long run.

Social Systems refer to the structure of communities or social groups that influence individual behavioral decisions. Based on observations in the field, it shows that social group support, such as peers or the vaping community, has a significant impact on individual decisions, especially adolescents, to adopt e-cigarettes. This is reinforced by the opinion of another e-cigarette user teenager who stated "I started using vape because of environmental influences and social trends. For me, vape is not only a tool for smoking, but also part of a modern lifestyle that is more accepted by society than conventional cigarettes." (Aliifa, 12/12/2024). This suggests that support from the social environment, such as peers and the vaping community, plays an important role in an individual's decision to adopt e-cigarettes.

As based on the results of the above research, researchers can describe the formulation of the problem as follows:

Public perceptions of e-cigarettes vary, influenced by health, social, and regulatory factors. From a medical perspective, e-cigarettes are considered to have lower health risks than conventional cigarettes because nicotine levels can be regulated. Trends in changing perceptions also show that vapes are increasingly accepted as smoking cessation aids. In terms of users, the main reasons for switching to e-cigarettes include health, economic and lifestyle factors. Many consider vapes to be more economical in the long run, while social trends also play a role in the rise of vape use, especially among teenagers. From a business perspective, government regulations such as excise tax increases and distribution restrictions in 2026 pose challenges in product accessibility. Nonetheless, the demand for vape continues to increase along with the changing perception of society.

Interest in buying e-cigarettes is influenced by economic factors, product innovation, and social influence. From an economic perspective, although the initial investment for vape devices is quite large, users feel more efficient because they only need to buy liquid periodically, unlike conventional cigarettes which are consumed every day. Product variety, both in terms of device design and liquid flavor options, is the main attraction for consumers. In addition, social influence plays an important role, especially among teenagers, where vape use is often triggered by trends and friendship circles. Digital marketing strategies, especially through WhatsApp and

social media, are becoming a key tool in attracting customers. Restrictions on vape promotions on social media encourage businesses to shift marketing to direct communication platforms.

Business and Marketing Opportunities, vape use in Cirebon is expanding, not only among men but also women. This is driven by community discussions and positive reviews on social media. However, vape businesses face challenges such as stock availability, liquid price fluctuations, and increasingly stringent government regulations. People's positive attitude towards vape, evolving social norms, and product accessibility are the main factors that support the growth of this business. The Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) theory explains that the adoption of e-cigarettes is influenced by perceptions of their relative advantages over conventional cigarettes, as well as how these innovations spread in society. To maintain the growth of this industry, businesses need to continue to innovate in digital marketing strategies and consumer education regarding the benefits and risks of vape use. With increasing public acceptance, especially as a smoking cessation aid, business opportunities in this sector are still very open.

CONCLUSION

The results show that the TPB **(Attitude, Subjective Norms, Behavioral Control)** and DOI **(Innovation, Communication Channels, Timeframe and Social System)** indicators are relevant in explaining the phenomenon of e-cigarette use, but external factors such as government regulations and product price fluctuations also play a major role in influencing purchase interest and market growth, where government regulations actually become an obstacle in the **Timeframe** indicator in the DOI theory. Innovations that have been accepted by the public should be able to develop faster, but policies such as excise tax increases and distribution restrictions slow down the adoption process of e-cigarettes. Public perception of e-cigarettes is influenced by health, economic and social factors. E-cigarette purchase intention depends on price, product innovation, and community and social media influence. From a business point of view, the vape market has great potential, but is faced with increasingly stringent regulatory challenges, such as excise tax increases and advertising restrictions. Overall, the development of the e-cigarette market is strongly influenced by government policies as well as marketing strategies implemented by business players. To maintain the growth of this industry, innovation in digital marketing and better education for consumers regarding the benefits and risks of using e-cigarettes are needed.

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