When a ban really is not a ban: internet loopholes and Djarum flavoured cigarettes in the USA

INTRODUCTION
Bans on flavoured cigarettes have been enacted in the USA,1 the EU2 and elsewhere. However, little is known about industry and consumer counter reactions. Djarum, which controls 97% of flavoured cigarette sales in the USA, immediately released ‘cigars’ resembling their banned counterparts and continued to manufacturer flavoured cigarettes.3 This study describes: (A) online consumer interest4 in, and (B) promotion and availability of Djarum cigarettes, and their cigar replacements, before and after the USA banned flavoured cigarettes in 2009.

METHODS
Google searches originating in the USA including ‘Djarum’ in combination with ‘cigarette/s’ versus ‘Djarum’ in combination with ‘cigar/s’ (eg, ‘Djarum cigarette/s’ would be pooled in the cigarette trend) were monitored (google.com/trends), then regressed on time (eg, 2008–2014).

RESULTS
Djarum cigarette searches remained as high as the pre-FSPTCA ban (2008) through 2014, and were far more searched than their replacement cigar line (figure 1). For example, cigarette queries were 428% (95% CI 363 to 494) greater than cigar queries 0–6 months and 291% (95% CI 226 to 356) greater 54–60 months after the FSPTCA, with linear projections suggesting...
What this paper adds

What is already known on this subject?
Flavoured cigarettes have been banned in the USA since 2009.

What important gaps in knowledge exist on this topic?
Bans on flavoured cigarettes are being replicated in other countries, but little is known about consumer and industry counter reactions.

What this study adds?
Flavoured cigarettes are still widely sought out and available online years after the ban, indicating that improved enforcement or new measures are needed to eliminate demand and availability of flavoured cigarettes.

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Competing interests JWA and BMA share an equity stake in a consultancy, Directing Medicine LLC, that helps other investigators implement some of the ideas embodied in this work. Their organisation serves as technical advisors to the larger funded research project.

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