Smokers’ Vs. Non-smokers’ Attitudes toward Tobacco Usage

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***Abstract -*** The purpose of the study was to collect attitudinal and behavioral data from a sample of college students from a Southern state university regarding tobacco usage. A non-probability sample of 508 college students was collected by handing out surveys in classes and in campus buildings. The questionnaire was designed by the students and the authors and included half of Pechmann and Shih’s (1999) smoking perceptions scale items. Users made up 36.6% of the sample. The average length of time reported using tobacco products was five years. Three out of Pechmann and Shih’s four factors were reproduced in this study for users; however, factor analysis failed to load properly for non-users. Limitations included the sample being drawn using a non-probability method and based on students at one university. Using only half of Pechmann and Shih’s scale items is also a limitation. Users appear to not be affected by anti-smoking campaign apply Pechmann and Shih’s scale items to measuring the perceptions of tobacco users and non-users in a college setting s whereas non-users have apparently been influenced by such campaigns.

***Keywords*** - Social marketing, Tobacco usage, College students, Attitudes, Public Health

***Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners*** - Two groups, males and users in general, were identified as having higher self-perceptions than expected. Social marketing campaigns designed to restructure these perceptions may be appropriate to use instead of pure anti-use campaigns. Applying Pechmann and Shih’s scale items to measuring the perceptions of tobacco users and non-users in a college setting may yield fruitful research.

**Introduction**

In 2008 a southern regional university’s counseling center and student services office received a grant from the Louisiana’s Tobacco-Free College Initiative program to establish a coalition for substance use culture change. As part of that grant, a marketing professor’s Promotional Strategy students prepared competitive promotional campaigns based on a survey of students’ attitudes toward tobacco usage. A portion of the data collected was analyzed for use by the students, given the tight timeline. Analyses of the entire data set were then conducted by the authors and the findings are reported in this paper.

**Literature Review**

Tobacco usage by children and young adults has been studied over the past 30 years by researchers and practitioners in the public health field and in the marketing field in the past 20 years. The latter studies have focused primarily on the impact of advertising on changing behavior patterns, primarily those of pre-college adolescents (see the work by Pechmann and her collaborators, including Pechmann and Ratneshwar, 1994; Pechmann and Shih, 1999; Pechmann and Reibling, 2000; Pechmann, 2002; and Zhao and Pechmann, 2007; also see Gallopel-Morvan et al., 2011). Most of the research has focused on cigarette smoking, though other types of tobacco usage (cigars, chewing, and smokeless) have come “under the microscope” within the last 10 to 15 years or so (see Goldberg, 2008; Ringold, 2008; and Taylor and Capella, 2008).

Adolescent smoking increased tremendously in the early and mid 1990s, but the trend has continued to decline since then, with 20% of 12th graders in 2009 being smokers. Perceived risk, social disapproval (resulting from antismoking ads in part), and price increases have contributed to this decline. Smokeless tobacco usage had been in decline into the mid-2000s, but increased in 2009 (Johnston et al., 2010, p. 7).

Self-reported smoking among college-aged students (primarily 18 to 24) increased in the late 1990s to approximately 28% (Wechsler et al., 1998, as cited in Khallad, 2010, p. 926), peaked at 30-31% in 1999, then fell off to a range of 19% to 22%, according to several sources (see Dube et al., 2010, Table 1; Green et al., 2007; Wolfson et al., 2009, p. 977). “Smokeless tobacco use was highest among persons aged 18-24 years and those with a high school education or less” (McClave et al., 2010). While tobacco usage typically begins before young adulthood, some research has shown that college-aged students are starting to use tobacco (primarily cigarettes) and increase their consumption of tobacco, leading to addiction (Green et al., 2007, p. 1427).

**Methodology**

The Promotional Strategy students obtained permission from building coordinators, university officials, and professors to set up tables in various campus buildings as well as distribute copies of the questionnaire in various classes around the university. The students also approached other students they knew in and around the metropolitan area (e.g., in restaurants, dorms, churches). They asked students to voluntarily participate in completing the survey. The research project was approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board before data collection began in September 2008. Each of the 27 students was asked to collect 20 surveys, yielding an initial target sample size of 540 currently-enrolled college students.

A three-page questionnaire was designed by the professor with input from the students. A qualifying question was used to identify currently-enrolled students. “The first question was used to identify smokers and non-smokers and thus direct the participant to the appropriate set of questions.” Smokers were asked to indicate which tobacco products were used (cigarettes, cigars, pipe, hookahs, and/or smokeless/chewing). They were then asked a series of questions regarding smoking behavior, followed by four Likert-type attitudinal rating scale questions. Non-smokers were asked a series of behavioral and attitudinal questions. Demographic questions included gender, age, major, class standing, athletics involvement, socializing, and ethnicity.

Both groups (smokers and non-smokers) were asked about their beliefs regarding the perception of smoking, based on a series of scale items (adjective pairs) pulled together from various sources and tested with factor analyses by Pechmann and Shih (1999, p. 5). The 22 items were initially found in the Marketing Scales Handbook (Bruner et al., 2005, pp. 581-84). The professor initially included all 22 items in the rough draft of the survey for each group; however, the class expressed concern about the length of the survey. Reluctantly, half of the items were selected judgmentally by the professor. Smokers were asked to respond to the 11 items that completed the statement, “Using tobacco products makes me feel:,” using the nine-point scale (1 to 9, where 9 = most favorable) recommended by Pechmann and Shih (1999, p. 5). Non-smokers were asked to respond to the 11 items that completed the statement, “How does a college student who used tobacco products look to you?” using the same nine-point scale.

Data collection was to be completed by the end of September 2008; however, some students procrastinated or had problems, so data collection was completed by the end of October. A goal of 540 completed surveys was the target; however, 508 completed questionnaires were actually turned in and form the data set for the findings reported in this paper.

**Findings**

A profile of the respondents is provided in Table 1. Over 60% of the respondents were non-smokers. There was a nice split in terms of gender with roughly 53% of the students being women. In terms of age, the average student was 21.62 years old, with both the mode and median being 21. A wide range of majors was reported, with most of them being business-related (accounting, finance, marketing, etc.). Given the wide range, a second demographic variable, major by college, was created. Almost half the respondents were from the college of business (45.1%) followed by the college of education (17.4%). Three in ten students were seniors and another 24.3% were juniors. Seven in ten respondents were not involved in athletics. Respondents were asked to indicate how often they went out to eat/drink/dance/etc.; over a third said “one or two nights a week” and 29.4% stated “once every two weeks.” Over three fourths of the respondents were Caucasian while almost 12% were African-American.

**Table 1: Respondent Profile**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Characteristic*** | ***Mode (n)*** | ***Mode (%)*** | ***N*** | ***Mean*** | ***S.D.*** |
| User of tobacco: No | 322 | 63.4 | 508 | n/a | n/a |
| Gender: Female | 264 | 52.8 | 500 | n/a | n/a |
| Age: 21 | 93 | 18.6 | 499 | 21.62 | 4.162 |
| Major: General Business | 65 | 13.1 | 495 | n/a | n/a |
| College: Business | 223 | 45.1 | 495 | n/a | n/a |
| Class standing: Senior | 154 | 30.9 | 498 | n/a | n/a |
| Athletics involvement: No | 347 | 70.1 | 495 | n/a | n/a |
| Socializing: 1-2 nights/week | 172 | 34.7 | 496 | n/a | n/a |
| Ethnicity: Caucasian | 384 | 77.3 | 497 | n/a | n/a |

Tobacco users’ responses to the questions that were asked of them are provided in Table 2. A total of 186 students were users of tobacco products; however, there were item omissions for the questions. Respondents reported smoking cigarettes and/or using smokeless/chewing tobacco the most. The most frequently self-reported cigarette usage was less than one pack a day, whereas smokeless users most often said they used three or more pinches a day. Students who responded said they had been using tobacco products an average of approximately five years; the median response was four years and the mode was two years. Almost four out of five users started before coming to college, and over 80% reported that at least one relative smokes. Over half (roughly 56%) had never tried to quit; of those who had, most had tried to quit one time in 24 hours (mean = four times, median = two). Almost three-fourths said they’d date a non-smoker.

**Discussion**

**Self-Perceptions and Awareness**

Users admitted to increased tobacco usage while drinking or encountering stressful situations (like studying for exams), despite being aware of the health risks. Self-perceptions were generally neutral regarding the Pechmann and Shih (1999) scale adjective pairs. Being aware of risks but reluctant to change seems to be supported by Hastings and Angus’ (2011) contention that industry social marketing/responsibility campaigns are not very effective in reducing usage of tobacco products (nor do government or third-party messages appear to be effective). On the other hand, anti-tobacco messages appear to have been more effective regardless of source (industry, government or third-party) on non-users, given their perceptions of users (see Table 4) and concerns about health risks and secondhand smoke .As a reviewer noted, how much of an ethical mandate do social marketers have to stand up and make changes.

***Two Groups Found***

Two groups appear to be candidates for social marketing promotional campaigns that involve restructuring perceptions instead of sending pure anti-usage messages.

The first group consists of males, who tended to be the heavy and longer-term users of tobacco products, especially chewing tobacco, and who see themselves as being popular and attractive. Messages somehow need to counter this popularity perception, emphasizing that one would be more popular (and/or attractive) if one were to quit using tobacco products. The second group consists of users in general, who have rarely tried to quit using, started using in high school or earlier, and were influenced by relatives who smoked.

They tended to eat out and thus drink more often while viewing themselves as confident and popular. They tended not to be involved in athletics, yet those users who were involved in athletics perceived themselves to be healthy (vitality), thinking, perhaps, that exercising offset tobacco usage effects. Again, campaigns should focus on breaking and restructuring these perceptions to emphasize that by drinking in moderation and not using tobacco, one truly is more confident and popular, and that by quitting tobacco as athletes really makes one healthier.

**Acknowledgements and/or Notes**

**References**

All references should follow APA style (6th edition) . All references in the text must be properly cited in the reference section. References within the text should include the author(s)’s last name(s) and year of publication separated by a comma immediately preceding the date, enclosed in parentheses. Example: (Brown and Peterson, 1993). If the author(s)’s name(s) are used within the text sentence, place the year of publication in parentheses. If a particular page or section is cited, it should be placed within parentheses. Example: (Brown and Peterson, 1993, p. 73) or Brown and Peterson (1993, p. 73). For multiple authorship articles use up to three names in the citation. With four or more authors, use the first author’s name and et al. Example: (Cravens et al., 1993) or Cravens et al. (1993). A listing of references in alphabetical order should appear at the end of the manuscript.

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**Figure 1: Getting What You Want**