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When it's good to be a quitter: The development of youth orientated counter-marketing anti-tobacco resources

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Abstract

Counter marketing involves the use of commercial marketing techniques to engage young people about harmful health behaviours, and to highlight how the industries producing the products involved in these behaviours have manipulated and targeted them. This study used a counter marketing approach to target youth smokers and nonsmokers from lower SES groups in regional NSW to help change attitudes towards smoking, and contribute towards a reduction in smoking prevalence. Formative research was conducted with young smokers in a local community centre setting, which informed the development of tobacco counter marketing materials and youth engagement activities. Initial process evaluation was also conducted to generate insight on the effect of the counter-marketing program.

Keywords

anti, marketing, counter, orientated, youth, development, quitter, be, resources, good, tobacco, when

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Please Like Me – A Qualitative Evaluation of the Make Smoking History Facebook Page

Abstract

Comments on the Make Smoking History (MSH) Facebook page were qualitatively evaluated to find out who is interacting with the page and which posts generate the most interaction. The majority of people commenting on MSH posts are ex-smokers. Policy and legislation themed posts were more popular with males, who also made eight times as many comments on prohibition than females. Posts themed 'loved ones' were twice as popular with females than males. Most comments were made during business hours, which was also when most posts were uploaded. Males commented twice as often as females between 6am-9am, and females commented twice as much as males between 9pm-12am.

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When it's good to be a quitter: The development of youth orientated counter-marketing anti-tobacco resources.

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Abstract

Counter marketing involves the use of commercial marketing techniques to engage young people about harmful health behaviours, and to highlight how the industries producing the products involved in these behaviours have manipulated and targeted them. This study used a counter marketing approach to target youth smokers and non-smokers from lower SES groups in regional NSW to help change attitudes towards smoking, and contribute towards a reduction in smoking prevalence. Formative research was conducted with young smokers in a local community centre setting, which informed the development of tobacco counter marketing materials and youth engagement activities. Initial process evaluation was also conducted to generate insight on the effect of the counter-marketing program.

Introduction/Background

Most Australian adult smokers identified they started the behaviour as a teenager. Although smoking rates in Australia are declining, in 2011, an estimated 17 900 Australian school children progressed from experimental to established smoking behaviours with 16% of 17 year old males and 13% of 17 year olds females having smoked in the past week. It is clear now that earlier uptake is associated with heavier smoking patterns, higher probability of smoking related disease and being less likely to quit later in life (White and Bariola, 2012). The average age of initiation to smoking behaviour is 16 years of age in Australia and a child who starts two years prior to this is five times more likely to die of lung cancer than a person who started when they were 24 (Winstanley et al, 2005).

Numerous factors that increase the likelihood of young people initiating smoking have been identified. These include peer influence (Kobus, 2003), parents and siblings (Avenevoli and Merikangas, 2003), socioeconomic status (Siahpush and Borland, 1995) and positive depictions of smoking in the mainstream media (USNCI, 2008).

Despite Australia's world leading policy and strategic approach to smoking cessation, the majority of current resources such as smoking cessation services, and tobacco control campaigns primarily target adult smokers, i.e. the legal smoking population. Whilst these broader national approaches do have some impact on youth smoking initiation (Pierce, et al, 2012) and some recent campaigns have focussed on youth prevention (eg. Smarter Than Smoking campaign, <http://www.smarterthansmoking.org.au/>), there is still a strong need for cessation interventions specifically for young people in Australia. Currently in NSW, to register for the iCanQuit online program, those under the age of 18 must have parental consent to register,

representing a significant barrier for young people to engage with this service. Furthermore, while existing campaigns commonly identify the health risks associated with smoking, they do not utilise counter marketing tactics despite evidence showing it has been an effective approach in anti-tobacco campaigns such as truth® (Farrelly et al, 2005) and other social branding campaigns (Ling et al, 2014). Overall, there is a paucity of counter marketing in social marketing programs outside the US, and more generally a lack of development in the social marketing as demarketing literature (Dibb & Carrigan, 2011). The present study aimed to help address these gaps in the knowledge and practice base by exploring the utility of counter marketing in a youth oriented tobacco control program in regional Australia.

Theory/Framework

Counter marketing involves the use of commercial marketing techniques to engage young people about harmful health behaviours, and to highlight how the industries producing the products involved in these behaviours have influenced and manipulated them (Allen et al. 2009). Counter marketing has been predominantly used as a social marketing approach to demarketing tobacco, and has been shown to be an effective intervention approach to effect behaviour change among adolescents, as it appeals to their desires to be independent and rebellious against older authority/corporate figures (Stead et al. 2009). The truth® campaign in US highlighted the use of subterfuge and targeted marketing strategies at youths by the tobacco industry to encourage smoking, and featured fast paced, edgy advertising conveying information about tobacco industry tactics and the effects of smoking. The campaign messages are not disrespectful or dismissive of smokers, nor do they preach to youths about how they should behave. Rather, youths are encouraged to engage with the facts and to form their own opinions about smoking and the tobacco industry (Allen et al. 2009). Evaluation of the truth® campaign estimated that it was responsible for 22% of the nation-wide decline in youth smoking from 1999 to 2002 in the US (Farrelly et al. 2005). A separate cost-effectiveness study found it was economically efficient and saved between \$1.9 billion and \$5.4 billion in medical costs for society (Holtgrave et al. 2009).

The present study used a counter marketing approach to target youth smokers and non smokers from lower SES groups in regional NSW to help facilitate a reduction in smoking prevalence. Despite counter marketing being identified as a successful approach for targeting youth smoking in the US, to date there have been few attempts to implement a counter marketing program in Australia. Given that considerable efforts have been made to develop effective smoking control strategies to the general population in Australia to curb smoking rates, exploring the utility of a counter marketing strategy in youth is appropriate.

Method

The study was funded by a community engagement grant scheme, and involved collaboration between university researchers, a local neighbourhood community centre, and local youth, and drug and alcohol services in regional NSW. The project involved formative qualitative research with low SES youth aged 12-17 years old to investigate their attitudes and lived experiences in relation to smoking, and to explore their views on and responses to information regarding the tobacco industry targeting youth smokers. Insights from the formative research were used to inform the design and delivery of a pilot counter marketing tobacco campaign involving youth community workers and local drug and alcohol service practitioners. A qualitative program process evaluation was then conducted.

A series of large group consultations (n=22) were conducted with adolescents aged 12-17 years old who attended the local neighbourhood community centre. Participants were recruited using purposeful sampling by the community centre workers and consisted of both smokers and non-smokers. A large group activity was selected instead of focus groups as the adolescents at the centre were familiar with one another and after consulting with centre workers, this was deemed most appropriate. This provided a less formal setting, in which participants would be more comfortable to talk about their attitudes and experiences with smoking. The groups explored the topic of youth smoking, what value they placed on smoking and to identify potential campaign themes, messages, concepts and communication channels. Stimuli were used in the groups to encourage discussion, such as examples of anti-tobacco commercials and material from internal tobacco marketing

documents that highlighted manipulative tactics to engage youth. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the university ethics committee, and written or verbal informed consent was obtained from the participants and parents/guardians. The groups were digitally recorded and thematically analysed using QSR NVivo 9.

Based on the formative research, the project team identified appropriate channels of communication, developed a series of campaign messages, and created a range of materials including a Facebook page, a tobacco counter marketing booklet, and a community mural. The materials were pre-tested with adolescents at the community centre (n=6) during small group discussions and refined accordingly. The project team including a graphic designer worked closely with the young people attending the groups to ensure that campaign materials were appropriate and appealing to the target audience. One of the key features of this pilot intervention is that the young people co-created the program activities in line with existing studies that have taken a community asset building approach to social marketing programs (Stead et al. 2013). This approach ensured that the researchers/centre workers were not dictating the terms of the intervention and that the young people involved took ownership of the creative and strategy side of the project.

Results

The role of smoking in participant's lives

Participants in the formative research that smoked identified a number of reasons for doing so such as boredom, stress and social influence. Despite smoking, one participant believed his actions were harmful and could potentially influence his younger siblings so did not smoke around them.

'It's not really addictive, it's just a matter of whether or not you're bored enough to smoke or not.'

'If you look up to someone and they're doing it, you're going to do it. You want to be like them. Do everything like them. It's like what my brothers do to me. If they saw me smoking, they might start and that's why I don't smoke at home. You have to be a leader.'

"Doesn't really depend on where you live, it's what you see you know"

Most of the smokers knew what their triggers were and knew that they were addicted to cigarettes. They also believed they could give up smoking at any time and that it was simply a matter of willpower and that they were in control of their behaviour.

"When I have a cup of tea, after a meal, after sex, after a period of not having access to a cigarette, when I'm reading, watching TV, driving, there are lots".

"I just started doing it when I was drinking, just something to do. It just went on from there. I started smoking the next day after the party, when I was sober and I just became addicted to it"

"It's simple. If you chose to start smoking, you can choose to stop smoking. If you really don't want it, you don't have to have it"

We asked participants why they did not want to quit and found that some had tried (and failed) and others wanted to but there was some that were not interested in quitting.

"I do, I have tried twice this year unsuccessfully. I just bought 'The easy way to quit smoking'. I hope to have the time to read it within the next fortnight".

"I never said I didn't and I have to die of something".

Responses to tobacco control campaign TVs

During the groups we also showed participants a series of commercials and resources as stimulus to create discussion. Researchers showed two television commercials (TVCs) from the US and two from Australia. Researchers showed one US commercial from the truth® campaign entitled 'Tobacco Kills' (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_56BQmY_e8) and one US commercial from the quitting smoking timeline by QuitSmoking (<http://www.quitsmoking.com/content/quitting-smoking-timeline>). After viewing the truth® campaign advertisement, participants did not understand the concept that was presented in the TVC. They did not see the ad as relevant to them and did not understand that it was about smoking and how the tobacco industry is responsible for the deaths.

"Strange, I didn't really get it how they all fainted in front of the building"

"I didn't see the big tobacco company in it"

Participants appeared to be more receptive to the quitting smoking timeline TVC. Participants enjoyed that you could see the instantaneous benefits of not smoking and also the cartoon format of the TVC. However, as the video was nearly four minutes in length, participants began to lose concentration after one minute and began to talk amongst themselves.

"That's a good ad because it shows people the rewards if you give up...it might give you some confidence and give people a chance"

"I thought it was good and persuading and can show how much you can change"

Feedback from the Australian TVC (Meet Mick-<http://smokingtakeslives.org.au/micks-story>) was mixed. The first showed a middle aged male called Mick who smoked all his life and was diagnosed with COPD. Participants were immediately turned off the screen with one commenting, "my mum smokes and whenever we see these ads, we just change the channel". Many of the participants had seen commercials similar to this before, and none of the participants appeared to like them and did not think they were meant for them.

"I think teenagers would just say, well I've just started to smoke so it doesn't really bother me"

"That's probably one of the worst ads I've seen"

This discussion appeared to identify that existing tobacco control television commercials are not very appealing to low SES youth, and that different messaging and campaign strategies in youth smoking programs would be required.

Views on tobacco industry strategy to engage youth

Following the TVC discussion, we asked participants why tobacco companies would market their products to young people. Most participants stated that they don't see TVCs promoting cigarettes, but did mention seeing smoking during TV shows and movies, although participants did not view this as advertising. Further to this, there was a discussion about internal documents from tobacco companies (Bero, 2003) that have shown they have deliberately targeted young people, used language that showed little respect for young people and perceive young people as their potential new customers to replace older ones who have died as a result of tobacco related diseases. We asked participants how this made them feel, and most smokers and non smokers had not thought about or seen this information before and felt manipulated. A few participants noted that companies are simply trying to sell their product and that this is legitimate business, but other participants stated that they felt these actions by the tobacco industry were deceptive.

"So why are they telling everyone to quit but still selling it (cigarettes)"

"They (tobacco industry) knew it was bad but sort of just tricked you to think it was ok"

Development of program materials and activities

We then asked participants what activities or resources would be interesting to them to deal with smoking and they were able to identify several options. Participants identified a number of different resources that they would be interested in contributing to. Suggestions included a Facebook page, a booklet, a community mural, and additional information and support sessions from trained support staff. In particular the booklet was identified as a potentially useful resource, provided it was appropriately designed.

In the discussions around what to include in a booklet, participants did not want anything too lengthy and something that was "just filled with boring information". In earlier discussions on why young people smoke, participants raised a lot of issues within the groups and smokers were able to reflect on their own reasons for smoking with some wondering if they could justify why they do it. Based on these findings, the project team incorporated the suggestions in to the implementation strategy. For example, a booklet was created with several elements and ideas from the groups such as a section on triggers and how to deal with them, a counter marketing section identifying the tactics used by the tobacco industry to target young people to initiate and continue smoking, a section that encourages readers to reflect on their own behaviour, and for smokers to think about their own smoking and reflect on if this was ok.

The booklet is not prescriptive and authoritative, rather it presents

relevant facts based on the formative research and asks them simple questions such as; why do you smoke and is this a good enough reason to do so? A Facebook page was set up using the neighbourhood community centre's profile, which provided information about the project, counter-marketing messages, and facts about youth smoking. To help promote engagement on social media, multiple competitions offering movie passes encouraging users to like and share information contained on the Facebook page were ran. Another aspect of the project was a collaboration between a local illustrator and youth to create an anti-smoking community mural that will be displayed publicly near the local train station where hundreds of community members and commuters will view the mural each day. The youth attending the centre were involved in the design making regarding the content and painting of the artwork.

Discussion/Conclusion

Using a counter-marketing framework, this pilot initiative aimed to target youth smokers and non-smokers from lower SES groups in regional NSW to help change attitudes towards smoking, and contribute towards a reduction in smoking prevalence. The study helped raise awareness among participants about tobacco industry tactics to target young people, and encouraged young smokers to reflect on their behaviours. The program activities also engaged young people in a co-creative process by directing the content of the information booklet, and being involved in the painting of the community mural. The project has identified the utility of counter-marketing strategies to target and raise awareness about youth smoking and potentially contribute towards access of smoking cessation and support services, as a pathway towards reducing smoking prevalence in low SES youths. Compared to the US where the tobacco industry is more active in public debate (Ling et al, 2002), this is not the case in Australia so it was not surprising that young people did not immediately connect with the truth campaign. Despite this, it was encouraging that counter-marketing strategies were still engaging with this group of young people. Furthermore, the active community engagement approach demonstrated the utility of community assets based approaches to social marketing. Further process and impact evaluation research of the present program, in addition to further large-scale development, implementation and evaluation of counter-marketing strategies in different locations, and regarding social marketing topic contexts (for example youth alcohol consumption) can help advance the knowledge base in this area. Such work would help identify the utility and applicability of counter-marketing strategies, further refine their conceptual and practical development, and demonstrate the relevance of social marketing as a demarketing approach.

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