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Melissa Lynch

University of Wollongong, mjl65@uow.edu.au

Sandra C. Jones

University of Wollongong, sandraj@uow.edu.au

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Abstract

The sun protection practices of Australian adolescents are not only inadequate, but continue to decline. This is despite adequate knowledge levels, and numerous previous educational and mass media campaigns/interventions. A more comprehensive understanding of adolescent attitudes to sun protection, and potentially a social marketing intervention, is thus required. We conducted a series of focus groups to address sun protection product usage and attitudes, and identified a number of Brand Loyalty segmentation groups. This finding demonstrates that attitudes and behaviours amongst adolescents are not homogenous, but that there are specific groups with differing and unique perspectives, requiring tailored intervention strategies.

Disciplines

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Divide and Conquer: Adolescents, Sun Protection and Brand Loyalty Segmentation

Melissa Lynch and Sandra C. Jones

Centre for Health Initiatives, University of Wollongong

Abstract

The sun protection practices of Australian adolescents are not only inadequate, but continue to decline. This is despite adequate knowledge levels, and numerous previous educational and mass media campaigns/interventions. A more comprehensive understanding of adolescent attitudes to sun protection, and potentially a social marketing intervention, is thus required. We conducted a series of focus groups to address sun protection product usage and attitudes, and identified a number of Brand Loyalty segmentation groups. This finding demonstrates that attitudes and behaviours amongst adolescents are not homogenous, but that there are specific groups with differing and unique perspectives, requiring tailored intervention strategies.

Introduction

Australian adolescents consistently show low levels of adherence to general sun protection guidelines (Fritschi, et al., 1992; Summerville & Watt, 2003; Dobbinson et al., 2005); and in recent years a general decrease in specific sun protection practices, and an increase in burn rates, has also been noted (Dobbinson et al., 2005). This results in adolescents being 1.6 times more likely to sunburn than adults (Dobbinson et al., 2005). While this gap between adolescent and adult sun protection practices is perhaps inevitable as young people reject the 'protection focus' of their parents, these current behaviour trends are widening the already significant divide (Dobbinson et al., 2005). This is of great concern to researchers and practitioners as childhood and adolescence is when the majority of major skin damage occurs (NSW Health Department and The Cancer Council NSW, 2001). This is largely attributed to the skin of young children being more susceptible to sun damage (NSW Health Department & The Cancer Council NSW, 2001; World Health Organisation 2001) and the overall greater levels of time spent outdoors by children and adolescents in comparison to adults (Buller & Borland, 1999).

These inadequate levels of sun protection persist despite consistent efforts to increase knowledge and promote safe practices. Reviews of previous mass media and educational interventions indicate increases in skin cancer knowledge, however only minimal changes in behaviour (Lowe et al., 1999; Geller et al., 2002; Kristjansson et al., 2003). Hence this behaviour is not attributable to lack of knowledge or awareness, as adolescents are shown to know how and why they should protect themselves (Wetton, 1996). Rather, it is correctly attributed to attitudes and social norms developed via influences such as lifestyle (Mikati, 2005), culture (Heartbeat, 2003), body image, appearance & fashion (Sjoberg et al., 2004), media (Norman, 1998) and unrealistic optimism (Sjoberg et al., 2004). These competitors work to create an overwhelming desire for a tan and the notion that protecting oneself from the sun is 'uncool'. Consequently, attempts to promote positive sun protection which have thus far failed to develop comprehensive interventions to successfully target the psyche of Australian adolescents, have failed to redress these negative behaviours and attitudes. As yet, the principles of social marketing have not been effectively, or systematically, applied to adolescent sun protection in an attempt to curb their risky behaviours.

Social Marketing and Brand Loyalty Segmentation

Overall, the major benefit of social marketing is that it views behaviour as a product to be sold to an individual and aids in developing the best possible way to do so. It has a customer focus, hence addressing a specific target audience and the needs of the individual, and it relies on the concept of a voluntary and mutually beneficial exchange, so as to make the behaviour change easier and more appealing (Kotler, Roberto & Lee, 2002; Donovan & Henley, 2003). Of major interest to this research is that social marketing encourages the use of a customer focus, market research and consumer segmentation, all of which are essential when trying to target a specific negative behaviour. By taking a customer focus, social marketing aids in identifying, defining (thus segmenting) and pursuing specific target audiences. Segmentation allows us not only to identify general demographics characteristics (e.g. age and gender) but also define such things as level of readiness an individual has towards changing behaviours (e.g., stages of change model) and even the level of compliance (or in marketing terms, level of loyalty) that already exists within a segment. Overall, segmentation assists in defining which members of the total population are best served with intervention (i.e. who are the most accessible, and amenable to change) and how they should be reached (Kotler, Roberto & Lee, 2002).

The Brand Loyalty Segmentation framework is one that is often used in both commercial and social marketing and allows us to further analyse our target audience by identifying the awareness of and preference for a brand, or in this case a behaviour, and thus the potential market for that behaviour (Rossiter and Bellman, 2005). This segmentation is achieved by dividing the target market into five groups, defined by Rossiter and Percy (2005) as follows:

1. *Brand Loyals*: currently use the brand/behaviour almost exclusively.
2. *Favourable Brand Switchers*: have a moderate preference for the brand/behaviour.
3. *Other-Brand Switchers*: currently do not use the brand/behaviour, or do so minimally.
4. *Other-Brand Loyals*: strongly loyal to a competing brand/behaviour.
5. *New Category Users*: currently non users of either the brand/behaviour or a competitor, but have the potential to be either.

Using this brand loyalty model, we can further segment populations based on current sun protection behaviours. Johnson et al. (2007) have previously applied the Brand Loyalty Segmentation framework to general sun protection and the results are as follows:

1. *Brand Loyals*: always practice sun protective behaviours.
2. *Favourable Brand Switchers*: generally practice sun protective behaviours but don't when the price becomes too high (i.e. peer pressure, too uncomfortable, miss out on an opportunity for sport) or forget sun protection in certain situations (i.e. watching children at sport, gardening).
3. *Other-Brand Switchers*: don't practice sun protective behaviours because they see the price outweighing the benefits. (i.e. can't be bothered), or use an inferior "brand" (i.e. only use sunscreen).
4. *Other-Brand Loyals*: see the tanned skin "brand" of behaviour giving them more benefits than the sun protection "brand".
5. *New Category Users*: are simply unaware of the need for sun protection behaviours.

Dividing our population into these categories allows us to determine which target group has the most potential and/or greatest need for change. Furthermore, the framework helps us to determine the characteristics of each sub group and thus how, and to what extent, a behaviour needs to be and can potentially be altered. Previous interventions have targeted adolescents as a whole with little to no understanding of these more micro attitude and behaviour characteristics and how these differ within the adolescent cohort.

It was thus the intention of this research to develop a platform for tailoring future sun protection initiatives by segmenting adolescents using Brand Loyalty Segmentation; and, in doing so, to provide a detailed understanding of adolescent subgroups and their sun protection characteristics. More specifically, the research question was: Do Brand Loyalty Segments exist in adolescent sun protection.

Method

A total of 14 focus groups were conducted with NSW grade 9 and 10 adolescents that addressed issues concerning current sun protection product usage, preferences, perceived costs, barriers and potential future product developments. Focus groups were specifically selected due to their ability to stimulate group discussion and examine in-depth topics, and they are well known tools for gathering qualitative data concerned with understanding people's attitudes and behaviours towards specific issues (Kruger, 1994; Stringer, 2004). Additionally, the group interactions of focus groups allow researchers to gather large amounts of data in a short period of time by providing numerous simultaneous responses as participants interact with each other (Morgan, 1997; Sloan, 1998).

The focus groups were divided by gender both in an attempt to minimise social pressures and because previous research shows that sun protection practices differ between genders. (Summerville & Watt, 2003; Lowe, et al., 2000; Livingston, et al., 2001; Lower, et al., 1998). High schools were targeted due to the high volume and simplicity of access to potential participants; and, as this research defined adolescence in terms of grade at school rather than age, having students already grouped by grade made accessing the desired groups more feasible.

Ethics approval was sought and received from the University's Human Research Ethics Committee, the NSW Department of Education & Training, and the relevant Catholic Dioceses. Additionally, in line with DET and Dioceses guidelines, no child was allowed to participate unless their consent was obtained, along with the written consent of the parent/guardian.

Results

The dominant key behaviours identified in the focus groups were grouped and classified into the five categories of brand loyalty segmentation. These loyalty segments were renamed to characterise the dominant behaviours of each segment and are thus referred to respectively as The Vigilant Defenders, The Forgetful Attempters, The Risk Reducers, The Consciously Lazy, The Tan Seekers, and The Unaffected. Following an overview of each segment, Table 1 outlines the brand loyalty status of each group, as well as their attitude towards sun protection (positive, negative or neutral) and their current behaviour (again, positive, negative or neutral).

The Vigilant Defenders- *"I wear everything, sunscreen, hat, towel, rash shirt, invisible zinc for my face – it protects more but you can't see that you've got it on – zinc and sunnies"*

This group strives to protect themselves as much as they can. They report wearing multiple forms of sun protection when they are out in the sun (as opposed to just when they are at the beach/pool). They are generally attentive to sunscreen re-application and often put protection before appearance by wearing highly visible protective products such as hats and rash shirts. In a number of cases, group members are those with paler skin that burns easily or those who have been personally affected by skin cancer (such as through the diagnosis of family members), which in turn increases their own vigilance.

The Forgetful Attempters- *"Sometimes you forget and you're halfway through the day at the beach and you think crap, but it's too late to do anything"*

This group is conscious of the need to protect themselves from the sun, and in most cases make an attempt to do so. However, overexposure does inadvertently occur due to forgetfulness- such as forgetting to take protection when leaving the house, or forgetting to reapply sunscreen before it's too late. Many of these group members believe that if they were reminded to apply and/or reapply sunscreen they would actually increase their usage.

The Risk Reducers- *“If you are going to sunbake, you are better off using a low SPF than nothing at all”*

It appears that risk reduction/ harm minimisation is already being used by a number of the participants. For this group it is common practice that when they want to get a tan or to sun bake, they first apply sunscreen to minimise the burn factor of overexposure, despite intending on exposing their skin nonetheless. In many case, the adolescents believe that this is a more responsible way to tan and while they will wear sun protection, they will also actively attempt to obtain a tan. Thus this group consciously switches between sun protection and the competing behavior of tanning.

The Consciously Lazy- *“Couldn't be bothered”*

This group sees the time and effort costs of applying/wearing sun protection as outweighing the benefits provided by the sun protection. Therefore, despite having the knowledge of the need of sun protection, and access to it, they choose not to use it because they simply “couldn't be bothered”. However, it is important to note that this group is not necessarily intentionally exposing themselves to obtain a tan, and in many cases they are using sun protection. They are merely too lazy or complacent to use effective levels of sun protection on a regular basis.

The Tan Seekers- *“I just want to get a tan”*

This group are actively seeking a tan and purposely do not wear sun protection in order to do so. They display both intentional (sun baking) and unintentional (participating in outdoor activities while purposely not wearing sun protection) tanning practices, and often do not see the need for sun protection.

The Unaffected- *“If you have dark skin, you don't really need 30 +”*

This group consists of those participants who do not see the need for sun protection and have never had major concerns with sun burn or skin cancer. Generally the individuals in this group have darker skin and less experience with sun burn. Because these groups have yet to perceive any real need for the product category (sun protection) they are thus at present non users of sun protection, and they are also non tanners, but they have the potential to be either in the future.

Table 1: Adolescent's Brand Loyalty and Sun Protection

Group	BL Segment	Attitude	Behaviour
The Vigilant Defenders	Brand Loyal	Positive	Positive
The Forgetful Attempters	Favourable Brand Switchers	Positive	Generally Positive
The Risk Reducers	Favourable Brand Switchers AND Other Brand Switchers	Positive	Negative
The Consciously Lazy	Other-Brand Switchers	Negative	Generally Negative
The Tan Seekers	Other Brand Loyals	Negative	Negative
The Unaffected	New category Users	Neutral	Neutral

Discussion

Rather than assuming that all adolescent sun protection behaviours and attitudes are consistent, Brand Loyalty Segmentation enabled us to identify sub groups within the general adolescent

population. Six distinct groups were identified, each of which have very specific and identifiable behaviours, and thus would require differing intervention strategies to truly create worthwhile and effective interventions. For example; a *Risk Reducer* may be effectively targeted through an intervention that addresses appearance issues relating to skin exposure, which could specify that damage will occur to your skin when you tan, even if you choose to also wear low SPF sunscreen. An intervention for the *Consciously Lazy* may attempt to alleviate some of the perceived cost of applying/wearing sun protection, while the *Forgetful Attempter* may need constant and persistent reminders in their environment.

The existence and nature of such “brand loyalty” segments has not previously been documented in the sun protection literature and, in the main, intervention strategies have previously addressed adolescents as a whole rather than using behaviour segmentation such as this. Thus, this research serves not only to define previously unidentified segments in adolescent sun protection, but also pave the way for future segmentation initiatives in populations with hard to change behaviours.

While these segment descriptions are beneficial in developing a greater understanding of complex adolescent behaviours, when developing effective social marketing campaigns/ interventions it also necessary to quantify the size of these market segments. The next stage of this research will consist of a large scale survey with NSW grade 9 and 10 high school students to categorise participants into one of the six adolescent brand loyalty segments. This will enable us to establish the validity, size and characteristics of these groups and thus determine which groups are the most substantial in size, accessible, in need of an intervention and ready for action (Kotler, Roberto & Lee, 2002). Furthermore, identifying – and conducting further research with – these groups enables us to not only tailor message(s) to directly address the behaviours of a particular segment, but also to determine how and where a target segment could and should be reached.

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