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## ANTI SMOKING ADVERTISEMENT'S MESSAGE VALENCE: AN EVALUATION OF ITS EFFECTIVENESS TO COLLEGE STUDENT SMOKERS

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### Abstract

*The government and several non-government organizations (NGOs) are all in cooperation to reduce, or even eradicate smoking. In doing so, they have resorted to using emotionally-charged advertisements in the form of Public Service Appeals (PSA) that are either positively or negatively framed. Both approaches are thought to consolidate the stand-alone effects of advertising, more so when applied to anti-tobacco campaigns. This research evaluates the effects of those ads to college smokers and which message frame (positive or negative) will they respond better. Taken together, these results provide an important understanding of the effectiveness of anti-smoking campaigns to young adults with respect to its message valence.*

Keywords: Antismoking Advertisements, Message Valence, Public Service Appeals, Social Marketing:

### 1. Introduction

According to the World Health Organization, smoking causes nearly 6 million deaths worldwide each year. Thus, in the Philippines, the campaign for the cessation of smoking has been consolidated through various programs. More recently, there have been debates over the proposal of the government to increase taxes on tobacco products via the Sin Tax Bill. It is the government's initiative to discourage the demand for tobacco. Also, last year, the Metro Manila Development Authority launched a massive campaign to fine smokers caught smoking in public spaces.

The smoking among young adults here in the Philippines has incredibly swelled up the past decade. Particularly among college students, where the freedom from parental supervision may first be experienced, they are a high risk group extremely susceptible to peer and societal pressure (Wolburg, 2006). To prevent further widespread of smoking, government agencies (Department of Health, etc.) and NGOs launched massive anti smoking campaigns with emotional overtones.

The use of emotional persuasion is very rampant in advertising. In convincing people, entities opt to use emotionally-charged advertisements in order to elicit feelings such as warmth (positively valenced) or guilt (negatively valenced), which in turn can make consumers comply. This strategy, when applied in antismoking advertisements, has contradicting results.

Particularly in the tobacco industry, they are constantly bombarded by Public Service Appeals (PSA) created by the government, non-government organizations, and other stakeholders. These PSAs are released in different media such as TV, radio, print, and more virally, the internet.

In the Philippine setting though, the use of these types of advertisements in the form of video is extremely unorthodox. The anti-smoking advertisements being released in the country are in the usual medium of print. One example of this is the graphic warnings (images of damaged lungs of a smokers plastered on a cigarette box, etc). Therefore, this study is focused on the medium of print. Also, this study is very timely and relevant considering the current legislative efforts to reduce the demand for smoking.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of anti smoking advertisements' message valence/framing to college smokers of San Beda and, consequently, to know what message valence/framing of anti smoking advertisement will be best suitable for college student smokers.

### Conceptual Framework

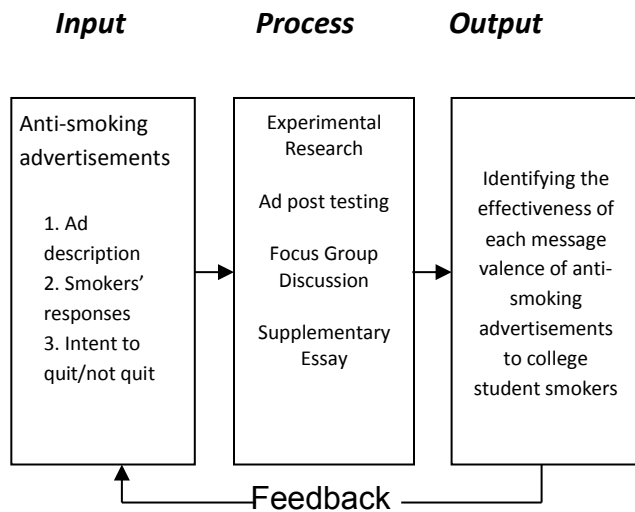


Figure 1.1

Figure 1.1 shows the three variables that will be examined to know the effectiveness of each message valence of anti-smoking advertisements to college student smokers. This figure shows the framework that the researchers must comply with to be able to attain genuine result. As indicated, this study is an experimental research. The process that the variable would be subject to is focus group discussion. The non-qualitative results of the Focus Group Discussion will

provide the researchers the most raw and honest insights about the subject of the study. An essay question will also be given at the end the Focus Group Discussion to provide supplementary data for the study.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) is used as a theoretical basis for strategies aimed at reducing or eliminating unhealthy behaviors such as smoking, drug use and alcohol abuse. According to the theory, when an individual faces a threat, several factors mediate the choice of a coping behavior. These includes: 1) the severity of the threat, 2) the probability the threat will occur, 3) the ability of a coping behavior to remove the threat, and 4) the ability to carry out the coping behavior. (Shanahan, 2008)

The main problem of the study is to know the effectiveness of each message valence of anti-smoking advertisements to college student smokers. It specifically seeks to answer these following questions: 1) What are the general responses of college student smokers to anti-smoking advertisements? 2) What responses do positively and negatively framed anti-smoking ads elicit? 3) Which of the message valence is more effective for college student smokers? 4) What influences do anti-smoking message framing have upon college smokers' decision/intent to quit/not quit? The researchers assume that anti smoking advertisement, as it is, has an effect to college smokers in one way or another. By this, the researchers will have all the other dimensions of an anti-smoking advertisements held constant, except for its message valence. This will result into a more narrowed and, consequently, a more truthful result of the experiment.

This research will be significant to those responsible for developing anti-smoking advertisements, most of whom are social marketers from non-government organizations, because they will know the appropriate message frame to convey in the advertisement aimed at college student smokers. By that, they will have more success in the conversion rate of smokers to non-smokers. Also, this study will be beneficial to the government, the main promulgators of public health policies. Through this research, they can initiate public health announcements that are more effective to the target audience. Provided that a large population of college student smokers gave the intention to quit, the government will save money in health costs, which will benefit the country in general. Lastly, this study will definitely develop the skills of the researchers themselves in the field of marketing research. This will provide them the training ground for their future careers as the marketers of the next generation.

The main scope of this study will be the message valence/framing of the anti-smoking advertisement. Given that there are many dimensions that build an anti-smoking advertisement; this research will only focus on its message framing. The researchers will only focus on the college student smokers of San Beda College. Given that, this research pertains particularly to this population. Therefore, the results are valid only for this population and should not be extended to college students in general. In addition, the medium of antismoking advertisement that this research will test is only print. As with any research, this work is not free of limitations. The primary ones are the span of time and researchers' lack of expertise.

### 3. Literature Review

#### *Anti-Smoking Advertisements*

According to Wolburg (2006), young adults represent the youngest legal targets of tobacco industry marketing so they may need special counter marketing efforts.

Andreasen (1994), as cited by Wolburg (2006), also suggests that social marketing campaigns typically attempt to discourage harmful behavior or encourage positive behavior.

The campaign for the cessation of smoking in the youth has cost the Philippine government and other non-profit organizations a hefty amount of money. Despite all the efforts, no anti-tobacco campaign can umbrella the whole population of young adult smokers. In fact, according to Zhao and Pechman (2007), all anti-smoking advertisements may not be equally persuasive. Thus, a critical question facing tobacco control officials and their advertising agencies is how to create effective anti-smoking advertisements, particularly for young adult.

#### *Message Valence*

In a study by Taute, McQuitty, & Sautter (2011), emotional appeals and advertising can be distinguished by their valence as positive (e.g., warmth, friendship, or love as a reward for compliance) or negative (e.g., guilt, fear, or shame for non compliance). Both positively and negatively valenced messages are thought to strengthen response to advertising.

Valence refers to whether the message stresses the gains of performing the promoted behavior (positive framing) or the losses of not doing so (negative framing). For example, a message discouraging smoking could be framed positively as “Not Smoking Will Give You More Friends” or negatively as “Smoking Will Kill You” (Banks et al. 1995).

Another definition, as cited by Zhao and Pechman (2007), previous research on messages framing (Lee and Aacker 2004; Levin, Schneider, and Gaeth 1998; Rothman and Salovey 1997) has suggested that messages can be presented in either positive or negative frame (also known as gain versus loss frame in some streams of literature). A positive message frame emphasizes the positive (i.e., favorable) behavioral outcomes of complying with the message advocacy, whereas a negative message frame emphasizes the negative (i.e., unfavorable) behavioral outcomes of noncompliance.

A common anti-smoking campaign relies on fear-relief appeals, which encompass a threat-action format. That is, the message focus first on a threat stating a vulnerability to severe health risks (e.g. lung cancer) and then offer a solution in the form of a feasible behavior (don't smoke), with many researchers often presuming that this content could evoke a fear response that alone would endanger changes in behavior (Adams et al, 2011).

The major focus is on advertising appeals that create different levels of fear arousal and increase the effectiveness of anti-smoking and individual factors in mediating the effectiveness of such messages.

#### *Responses*

The question on which message frame of anti-smoking advertisement (positive or negative) is more effective has been a constant subject of debate among various researchers. Studies of the subject had different conclusions which can confuse the readers. Wong and McMurry (2002) find that a negative anti-smoking message was more effective than a positive anti-smoking message at boosting college students' perceived self efficacy at quitting smoking; however, Schneider and

colleagues (2001) report that a positive anti-smoking message was more persuasive for college students than a negative anti-smoking message

In the case of anti-smoking advertising, studies indicate that message about disease-related consequences are simply not effective at dissuading adolescents from taking up smoking; such messages may even boomerang (Flynn, Worden, and Secker-Walker 1992; Hastings and MacFadyen 2002; Pechman et al. 2003). Furthermore, previous research has shown that anti-smoking messages about social consequences are effective (Flynn, Worden, and Secker-Walker 1992; Pechman et al. 2003).

In a contradicting research, Stout, Edwards, and King (1998) said that because the fear of injury or death can be more effective as a persuasion tool than social, fear appeals are often used by insurance companies, drug and alcohol awareness programs and cancer centers (Alsop 1998) and in PSAs (LaTour and Pitts 1989) to generate a negative emotional response that can then be ameliorated by the product being advertised.

There is some evidence that unconverted (e.g., smokers) discount fear-based messages when elaborating on the consequences, while the converted (e.g., non-smokers) are influenced by appeals that arouse high fear (Keller, 1999). Anecdotal evidence, garnered through focus group and in-depth interviews, suggests that non-smokers adopt more extreme views after exposure to anti-smoking messages and become motivated to engage smokers in cautionary discussions (Price et al., 1987; Aronson and Gonzales; 199; Fisher and Misovich, 1990)

When considering prior smoking experience, Angostinelli and Grube (2003) noted that smokers often process tobacco-related information in a biased, self protective direction.

#### *Synthesis*

Analyzing further the related literature gathered, the researchers found out that all antismoking advertisements have many dimensions.

It was also discussed that not all antismoking advertisements are created equal. Some are more effective than the others, while others are only effective on a particular segment of smokers. Some researchers even contradict each other.

To resolve this, the researchers chose to focus on the ad's message valence. From the study of pioneer authors about the subject, nearly all of them suggested that message valence is crucial and important in making your ad effective to the target audience.

For the young adults, specifically college student smokers, the scarcity of research on the effectiveness of message valence to this particular population has led the researchers to produce their own data on the topic.

Together with the data gathered through other researches and literature, this research will provide a more narrowed analysis that can lead to a more effective development of antismoking advertisements for college student smokers.

## **4. Methodology**

This section discusses the method of research employed, participants, data collection method, the research instrument used to gather data, gathering procedures, and techniques to be used in the analysis of data gathered.

The most accurate research design to use in this study is through experimental research. This is so because the topic of smoking is very sensitive and it will require a more in depth analysis to go deeper into the subject. According to Calderon et al (2011), experimental research is a highly controlled procedure in which manipulated treatments or actions from a factor or condition, called the dependent variable, to determine the effect of the former upon the latter, all other factors or variable being kept constant or equal so that any change in the dependent variable is attributed only to the experimental in independent variable.

In another definition by Good, experimental method of research is a method or procedure involving the control or manipulation of conditions for the purpose of studying the relative effects of various treatments applied to member of a sample, or of the same treatment applied to members of a sample, or of the same treatment applied to members of different samples.

Furthermore, the independent variable of the research would be the positively and negatively valenced anti-tobacco ads. The dependent variables would be the emotions that the ad will elicit such as intent to quit/not quit.

As the researchers are dealing with the effectiveness of positively and negatively valenced anti-tobacco ads to college student smokers, they will use Focus Group Discussion as their data collection method. This research method is a non-quantitative study of two or more consumer groups, each contains 6-8 participants assembled in a Focus Group Discussion room and a professional facilitator leads the discussion.

To effectively execute the planned experiment, the researchers will conduct a Focus Group Discussion with carefully screened and chosen participants. In doing so, there will be a Focus Group Discussion screening beforehand. The participants to be accepted will be given a pre-test in the form Problem Detection Analysis (PDA) Method. The PDA is a face to face interview made up of open ended questions, which usually takes place at the end portion of the screening step in recruiting FGD respondents.

To provide an unbiased and truthful qualitative data, the participants of this research would be the college student smokers of San Beda College. The researchers chose these respondents because they are reliable and the respondents' location is also convenient to the researchers' time and financial constraints.

The respondents will be divided into three sets with 6 participants each. The researchers felt that this particular set of participants is the best and most qualified in line with our objectives to know the effectiveness of anti-tobacco ads to college student smokers of San Beda.

In the experiment proper, the focus group participants would be in a well-chosen venue, with the best possible facilitator to lead the discussion. Each set will be shown 2 advertisements: 1 for each valence (positive and negative) of anti-tobacco advertisement. The facilitator will then initiate the discussion on how they felt about the ads and which message valence has had the most influence on them.

The research instrument of this study would be the Focus Group Discussion guide. The Focus Group Discussion guide constitutes the data collection's agenda of topics to cover. It also serves as the basic contract between the ad makers and the Focus Group Discussion facilitator.

For this research, FGD guide would begin with a general topic, which is the participants' insight about smoking in general. It would then get down to their insights about their own smoking habits. Finally, the FGD guide will take up the subject of the antismoking advertisements shown earlier. After getting the main insights through the FGD, the participants will answer essay-type

questions to give the researchers supplementary data. The data gathered are now ready for analysis and interpretation.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter of the study presents the interpretation and analysis of the qualitative data gathered by the researchers through their focus group discussion. The data below shows the effectiveness of each message valence to college smokers.

### 5.1 *College Smoker's General Responses to Anti-Smoking Advertisement*

After the experiment proper (showing of the two differently framed anti-smoking ads), the Focus Group Discussion facilitator asked the participants what are their responses to the anti-smoking ads in general. The participants have mixed reactions. To a few, they thought of the ads as ineffective. They regarded it as “paulit-ulit” or repetitive. Some of them also said that the ads were annoying since they already know the consequences of smoking.

But to the majority of the participants, they felt that the ad was effective. It came as a surprise to the researchers that more than half of them were enthusiastic and enjoyed looking and judging the components of the advertisements. Numerous of them also said that had they seen the ads earlier in their smoking stage, they could have considered quitting early.

The data gathered implies that the college student smokers of San Beda College have an affirmative response to anti-smoking advertisements in general (its message valence not yet considered). This result has proven right the assumption of the researchers that an anti-smoking advertisement, as it is, has an effect in one way or another to college student smokers.

According to the research by Pechman & Reibling (2006), they indicated that college student smoker's reactions to anti-smoking advertisements may be moderated by their personality traits. That explains the different reactions by the ads shown.

### 5.2 *Responses to Positively Framed Anti-Smoking Advertisement*

Now activating the framing aspect of the anti-smoking advertisement, the researchers asked the participants their reaction and insights about the positively-framed ad. More than half of the participants said that through the particular advertisement, you can see the health improvements and other positive effects when you quit smoking. They have seen the potential benefits of quitting after they saw the advertisement. They said that this type of advertisement is something they have rarely (or never) seen before.

Also, the researchers have noted that the participants are more joyful when discussing the particular type of advertisement. It is because this advertisement emphasizes the good instead of the bad.

This data shows that a positively framed advertisement really elicits positive feelings and provides responses unique to the participants who have seen it. It also helped that the participants consider the advertisement as something new despite of it being commonly used in other counties.

This data consolidates the study of Scheneider and colleagues (2001). They reported that a positively framed anti-smoking message was more persuasive for college students than a negative anti-smoking message.

### 5.3 *Responses to Negatively Framed Anti-Smoking Advertisement*

To the surprise of the researchers, this particular type of advertisement elicited so many types of feelings from the participants. Majority of them were annoyed and even angered. Plenty of them were insulted by the advertisement. According to them, it was useless to attempt to communicate information that is already a common knowledge. They said that all of the smokers know the risks of the act too well but they do it anyway so no need for the advertisement that talks about that.

Many of the participants also said that negatively-framed advertisements were ineffective because it is too common and easy to disregard. They said that for them, fear is an ineffective motivator. It even has a counterproductive effect. They said that when they saw the ad, it made them want to smoke even more.

Basing on the data gathered, the participants may have experienced ad-fatigue due to the repetitive concept of negatively framed anti-smoking advertisement. In fact, according to Reardon et al (2006), most anti-smoking campaigns stress negative outcomes. In accordance to that, studies indicate that message about disease-related consequences (lung cancer, death, etc) are simply not effective at dissuading adolescents from taking up smoking; such messages may even boomerang (Flynn, Worden, and Secker-Walker 1992; Hastings and MacFadyen 2002; Pechman et al. 2003). Also, according to Smith & Stutts (2005), college smokers are less likely to accept the specific health risks associated with smoking. Therefore, long-term health fear appeal may have little or no effect on the attitudes and behaviour of young adult towards smoking.

Meanwhile, Wolburg (2006) suggests that messages that merely arouse fear should be avoided; however, fear appeals can be used effectively if they are accompanied by self-efficacy message, which can increase the belief that quitting is both desirable and possible.

### 5.4 *Which Framing is more Effective?*

After the Focus Group facilitator asked this question, it comes as no surprise that majority of the participants answered that positively framed anti-smoking advertisement is more effective to them. Almost all of them said that they are more inclined to be affected by advertisements which focus on the positive side rather than the negative. From the data, the researchers implied that college student smokers of San Beda College views positively framed advertising to be the better type of anti-smoking advertisement. Again, the researchers will point out the study by Scheneider and colleagues (2001) that a positively framed anti-smoking message was more persuasive for college students than a negative anti-smoking message.

Influence of Anti-Smoking Advertisement's Message Framing upon College Smokers' Decision/Intent to Quit/Not Quit When asked by the facilitator whether anti-smoking ad's message framing played a role in their decisions about quitting smoking, the participants are a bit hesitant. Majority of them said that the positively framed anti-smoking advertisement gave them



the most intent to quit, but it did not mean that they will quit abruptly or immediately. Moreover, the researchers noticed similarities over the participants' responses when asked this question. All of them said that the advertisements have an effect in reducing their frequency of smoking, but not totally eradicate the vice. Majority said that positively framed gave them that intent to reduce their smoking habits.

Some intended to continue smoking, while others planned to quit at a later time. This can be explained by a study by Wolburg (2006). The researcher said that college student smokers' denial, defensiveness, and rationalization get in the way of sincere contemplation of a healthier lifestyle.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the data gathered, it appeared that positively framed anti-smoking advertisement is more effective than the negative one. But the researchers also recognized the fact that the participants did not decide to quit smoking entirely and immediately, but rather just reduce their frequency of smoking or quit in the future time. In line with this, a study by Wolburg (2006) suggests that these kinds of reaction from college student smokers are normal. According to the research, smokers typically go through various stages before they successfully quit. Not only must they contemplate the behaviour and decide that it is in fact problematic but also they must decide upon a strategy, follow through with action, and maintain that change; otherwise, they will relapse.

## 7. Recommendations

Based on the data gathered by the researchers, the following are recommended:

*Practitioners of Anti-Smoking Advertisements and Government:* The findings of this study point to ways that one can proactively create and enhance the effectiveness of anti-smoking messages. With the result that a positively-framed anti-smoking advisement is more effective for college student smokers of San Beda College, the promulgators of the ad can maximize the persuasion capacity of it by crafting an ad in this valence/frame. Through that, there is more probability that their goals will be met. Moreover, it has been indicated in previous studies that the way anti-smoking advertisements are framed affects young adults' decision about smoking.

Furthermore, proper target audience should be identified in the implementation of anti-smoking advertisements. Because each individual or group of individuals have different orientation and use different strategies for goal attainment (Higgins 1997), anti-smoking campaigns should target college student smokers differently from other segments and should base it on current findings (in this case, the resulted positive framing). Advertisers should develop a different campaign to college smokers. Our study strengthens the idea that a greater targeting of anti-smoking messages is needed to better serve consumers. What works to prevent young teens from smoking does not necessarily work for college student smokers.

*Future Researchers:* Since this research is not free of limitations, there are still many untouched areas of this subject that can be studied. This opens avenues for further research. Since the scope of our research is only on the message framing of an anti-smoking advertisement, future researchers may study other characteristics of the ad (actors, timing, visual, etc.) and know

whether these have significant effects to their intention to quit. Another extension would be to compare a sample of smokers with non-smokers. Although the researchers only tested existing smokers, another equally worthy goal would be to determine whether non-smokers can be prevented from adopting the habit and what type of messages would be effective in doing so. Related to this, another potentially rich area of research may include the role of gender, age, and other fundamental human factors that may affect one's response to an antismoking advertisement. Another topic worthy of research would be to test other medium of anti-smoking advertisement. Since the researchers only focused on the printed form of anti-smoking advertisement, future researchers can test the effectiveness of an ad in different medium (video, radio, etc.). Lastly, other factors such as peer pressure, smoking status of parents, and prior beliefs, have been shown to influence young adults' smoking behaviour beyond smoking advertising. These factors are beyond the scope of this article, but are still important considerations when designing anti-smoking campaigns. Further research that examines an integrated anti-smoking campaign for such a range of issue would be appropriate.

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