Social Marketing

to Influence Young Adults'

Tobacco Behaviour

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- Support moving evidence into action
- Strengthen program development and applied research efforts
- Build system capacity to support the Smoke-free Ontario Strategy renewal

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INTRODUCTION

Young adults have a high prevalence of smoking in Canada as compared to other age groups. In 2011, 21.5% of young adults age 20 to 24 and 23.7% of those aged 25 to 34 were current smokers, as compared to the national average of 17.3%.[1] In addition, this age group has distinct smoking patterns.[2,3] Generally young adult smokers are more likely to be regular smokers and consume more cigarettes per day than younger smokers, but they may also smoke less and be less addicted, more interested in quitting, and more likely to have recently tried quitting than older smokers.[3] The tobacco industry has long recognized young adults to be a target group for marketing their products, focusing on both initiating smoking and recapturing quitters.[4-6] Public health social marketing programs tend to focus prevention efforts on the younger adolescent age group and cessation efforts on older adult groups.[7] There is a need for more focused attention on young adults,[2,4,8] as "an important group to reach both to interrupt the late phases of smoking initiation, and to encourage and sustain early cessation."[6] (p.424) This backgrounder examines the evidence regarding social marketing to young adults for the prevention or cessation of smoking.

Social marketing is commonly defined as, "the adaptation of commercial marketing technologies to programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences to improve their personal welfare and that of the society of which they are a part."[9] (p.110) Key components of a social marketing program are gaining an understanding of the target audience and developing strategies to influence voluntary behaviour that are tailored to the audience using commercial marketing techniques such as consumer research, audience segmentation and targeting and the marketing mix of product, price, place and promotion.[9-11] This document examines the evidence for each of these components as they relate to young adults.

TARGET AUDIENCE

MARETING MIX

IMPLICATIONS

TARGET AUDIENCE AND AUDIENCE SEGMENTATION

Before developing a social marketing program it is important to conduct formative research to identify:

- the target audience's demographic, attitudinal, cultural and behavioural characteristics,
- whether this audience is homogeneous or segmented, and
- message and distribution channel preferences.[12]

Young adults are in a distinct stage of development that is a period of profound change when they are developing adult identities and lifestyles, making transitions into the workforce, and increasing responsibilities.[13] It is also a time when smoking patterns are being established. During this period of development, smoking status is associated with perceptions that they are impervious to harm from smoking (invulnerable) and could quit anytime (omnipotence).[14,15] Young adult smokers prefer to quit "cold turkey" and do not perceive a need for assistance or nicotine replacement therapy.[6,7,16,17] Traditional approaches to health education have limited effectiveness and are perceived as being told what to do.[13] Focus groups with blue collar young adult smokers age 20 to 30 that were conducted prior to the development of the smoking cessation mass media campaign found that this group:

> ...were not influenced by ads, felt they were taking risks but planned to quit soon, were embarrassed that they smoked, also respected smoking restrictions, and did not discriminate between message bearers except for the tobacco industry, which they thought was hypocritical.[18] (p.126)

Important to a social marketing approach is an examination of the target audience to see if it is homogeneous or heterogeneous and to determine if the audience should be

segmented to better target homogenous subgroups.[12] Andreasen argues that the best social marketing practices devise strategies that are specifically adapted/tailored to each segment.[9] Young adults not only differ from other age groups but also are not a homogeneous group in themselves. A number of relevant ways to segment the young adult audience with regard to tobacco behaviour change have been suggested in the literature usually on the basis of smoking status,[7,14,19,20] socioeconomic status,[18,21] gender[8,22] or personality type.[8]

Most commonly, smoking status is used to define segments in the young adult population, primarily those who are smoking and those who are not.[20] Some studies have identified finer gradations within smoking status based on stage in the quitting process[6,7,14] or young adult smoking trajectories over time, such as consistent nonsmokers, maturing-out smokers (those who quit as they matured), late-starting smokers, and early-starting continuous smokers.[19] Basically, these types of segmentation distinguish between young adults to be targeted for cessation and those to be targeted to prevent smoking initiation. Attention needs to be given to both for this age group.[4] Focus groups with young adults indicate that they perceive that prevention efforts are targeting a younger age group, while cessation efforts are targeting an older group of smokers, and they don't identify with either of these groups.[7] As one young adult participant in a focus group stated, "If the message doesn't speak to me, I don't hear it."[7 (p.112)]

Young adult segmentation by gender and personality types within genders with a focus on attitudes and lifestyles has been of particular interest to the tobacco industry in their development of effective brand images and promotions tailored to each market segment.[8]

Gaining an understanding of the factors underlying the behaviour to be changed (attitudes, beliefs, norms) and identifying important differences in market segments can help focus and tailor the message.[12] Understanding the young adult target audience and the segments within it is critical for the development of a social marketing mix that is relevant to their stage of development and lifestyle.

MARKETING MIX

The term marketing mix is commonly used to describe the combination of product, price, place and promotion – the "four P's" of marketing.[9,10] Social marketing relies on an integrated mix of all four elements to achieve its goals.[10]

PRODUCT

In a social marketing context, product development refers to the identification of a desirable behaviour to be promoted that has benefits of value to the target audience in response to their concerns.[9,10] Changes in behaviour that are consistent with existing attitudes are more likely to succeed and creating new opinions is easier than changing existing ones.[23] The target audience also needs to perceive that the desired behaviour change is a manageable goal and the benefits to be gained are credible.[24] Simply stated, the product needs to be both easily obtained and satisfying.[9] For example, the approach taken to cessation must be relevant to young adults, appropriate to their developmental stage, and convenient to their lifestyle.[7]

PRICE

Price refers to the economic, social and psychological costs to the consumer that are required in exchange for the promised benefits of the behaviour change.[9,10] The rewards of the behaviour change must be large enough to overcome the barriers and costs,[24] and need to reflect the reality of young adult smokers.[14] For example, the benefits of quitting smoking have to outweigh young adults' perceptions that it is easier to continue their smoking lifestyle than to quit, and that as long as they are smoking they will always find people with something in common at social events.[13] The literature suggests that young adult smokers feel positive "gain-framed" messages that focus on short-term gains to health and wellness have more appeal than "loss-framed" messages that focus on longer-term health losses later in life.[7,13,18] Although gain-framed, the British Columbia 2005 mass media campaign significantly increased young adult awareness that smoking "is bad for me."[18] However, the outcome of this campaign as measured by changes in young adult smoking prevalence and cigarette consumption was inconclusive.[25]

PLACE

From a social marketing perspective, the concept of place includes where and when the consumer will be making the behaviour change and the extent to which there is a supportive environment to facilitate this change.[9,10,26] A supportive environment is one

that reinforces the rewards to be gained, typically involving developing supportive networks and modifying environments to provide positive feedback.[24] It has been argued that this aspect of the marketing mix distinguishes a social marketing approach from health communications or education.[11] Examples of supportive tobacco control policies that can make it easier for young adults to be smoke-free are increasing the cost of tobacco,[17,27] and restricting locations where young adults can smoke.[18,27] The challenge with creating a supportive environment to help young adults quit smoking is that they don't recognize a need for formal cessation support and rarely use cessation services or aids.[13,27] However when asked where they would look for help to quit, young adult males most commonly say family and friends.[27] This suggests that developing environments that enable support through social networking has potential for this age group.

PROMOTION

Promotion encompasses the way that the behaviour change is conveyed to the target audience and the communication strategies used. Although promotion is often the most visible aspect of social marketing, it needs to be part of an integrated marketing mix that addresses all four P's.[10] An effective strategy for promotion:

> ...involves a carefully designed set of activities intended to influence change and usually involves multiple elements: specific communication objectives for each target audience; guidelines for designing attention-getting and effective messages; and designation of appropriate communication channels. [10] (p.324)

MESSAGE CHARACTERISTICS

Most importantly, the action that the target audience is being asked to take as a result of the social marketing program needs to be a clear message that resonates with the individual.[12,24] Communication and persuasion theories can inform effective message construction and delivery.[12] In general, what is wanted is a message that has "a look and feel for the action that makes it accessible, inviting, distinctive and compelling" for the target audience.[24] (p.732) The promotion needs to draw their attention, be recalled, and stimulate mental processing of the message.[28] A number of studies have been conducted with young adults to examine the message characteristics that resonate or do not resonate with them.[7,13,14,18,20,29] A general finding is that specific message characteristics can resonate differently depending on the segment within the young adult audience, validating the need for audience segmentation.[14,18,20,28] For example, the tobacco industry has found that careful targeting of messages to specific market

segments can be used to promote smoking to each segment in different ways – as a way to rebel for one segment and a way to conform for another segment.[8]

The framing of a message in terms of gains or losses and the nature of the associated rewards that address the price component of the marketing mix have already been discussed as important message characteristics for young adults. Other message characteristics that have been examined are the style of the message (e.g. emotional activation, narrative or testimonial)[28,29] and the persuasive strategy or appeals that are used.

Message Style

The effectiveness of message styles also is contingent upon the young adult segment targeted. For example, young adults in general find testimonials to be less effective,[20,28] however there is evidence that some segments of this audience, particularly those most likely to quit and those with higher self-efficacy, find testimonial images on warning labels to be more effective than gruesome images.[20]

Persuasive Appeals

To persuade the audience to make a change, two basic types of appeals are used in marketing messages– message appeals and needs appeals.[23] Message appeals generally involve the message's internal and external evidence (credibility and quality), vividness or message sensational value, language, and emotional tone such as fear, disgust, sadness, anger, humor or happiness.[23,30] Needs appeals draw on an individual's needs such as "sex, affiliation, nurture, guidance, aggression, attention, autonomy, escape, safety, and curiosity".[23] (p.182)

Fear appeals are commonly used in tobacco control messages. These appeals take the form of physical or social threats designed to generate fear responses in the audience and action to change behaviour. For a fear appeal to be effective, the target audience needs to recognize the danger to them, believe they can reduce it by making the behavioural change, and feel capable of doing this. However, there is reason to believe that fear appeals work differently with young adult audiences and may not have the intended effect or the completely opposite effect.[14,31] Wolburg (2006)[14]

found a range of negative reactions amongst young adult college students to anti-smoking advertisements using fear appeals that pointed to their perceived ineffectiveness. However, both smokers and non-smokers thought that the ads may help a younger person not to start smoking. Wolburg concluded that "campaigns that impose restrictions on freedom or induce fear without also increasing self-efficacy are likely to be ineffective", send the wrong messages to young adults, and can strengthen the resolve to smoke.[14] (p.317)

The evidence concerning the relative merits of social threats (e.g. fear of social stigma due to bad breath) as compared to physical threats (e.g. health hazards of smoking) for this age group is conflicting and thus inconclusive.[18,6,32] Evidence that some segments of young adult smokers, such as casual smokers, are more sensitive to social pressures against smoking than others[6] may partly explain the lack of consensus in the literature, and reinforces the importance of audience segmentation.

Although making the threat more severe usually combats desensitization, for young adults it could backfire if it undermines the credibility of the message or triggers a reactive response such as avoidance.[31,32] Use of threats that the target group considers to be exaggerated or do not reflect their personal beliefs can lead to discrediting the communicator.[31] Believability and source credibility are important considerations in social marketing.[12,24,28] Young adults find that ex-smokers, particularly peers to be more credible sources of cessation advice.[13] Emotionally intense appeals can also be used to stimulate greater fear but may result in evoking other emotions that also trigger defensive reactions that interfere with processing the message.[33] For example, attempting to combat desensitization by adding disgust appeals on top of fear appeals, can be less effective with young adults than each type of appeal on its own.[33]

Alternatives to fear appeals for anti-smoking promotions are humour, irony, supportive message, empathy, positive role model, empowerment, and sexual appeals.[31] One suggestion is that a post-modernist non-fear approach characterized by "relativism, irony, surrealism, self-referentiality and hedonism" may appeal to young adults who have grown up with these advertising styles.[31] (p.978)

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Similarly challenging is finding effective ways to channel the message to young adult target audiences. Even the best message will not be effective if it does not reach the target audience.[12] To combat selective inattention and perception, social marketers usually look for "openings in people's life and the vehicles that best fit through those

openings."[24] [(p.731)] In selecting the channels, it is important to know the preferences of the target audience and which channels have the communication properties that are suited to the message.[12] Strategic implementation of these choices also involves a determination of the appropriate times, places and circumstances for the message.[24] It has been argued that the key question is "'When and where can the consumer receive it best?' and not 'When and where can we send it best?'"[24] [(p.731)] Many campaigns use a mix of channels to increase exposure and reinforce the message.[12] However this makes it difficult to determine the effectiveness of specific components.[12] With regard to the traditional mass media, there is some evidence that television is more effective than radio and both are more effective than posters to reach this age group.[34] When targeting young adults, the tobacco industry makes "an effort to create smoker-friendly social environments through promotional activities" to channel their messages.[34] [(p.1454)] In environments where many forms of tobacco promotion are limited, new forms of promotions are appearing using Web 2.0 and social networking technologies such as pro-smoking apps for smartphones.[35,36]

In general, interpersonal communication has been found to provide more effective persuasion.[12] New social networking technologies that are popular with young adults such as the internet, cell phone texting and social media may have potential for reaching this age group.[12,37,38] The tobacco companies have been using the internet and social media such as Facebook, to market their products and promotional events for some time.[36,39] However, the new social networking technologies are not just another channel for social marketing, they foster a fundamentally different, more collaborative and dynamic communication model for social marketing in which consumers create content.[38] More research is required to determine the effectiveness of these new social marketing channels for young adults.

The literature has less to say about the relative advantages of different roll out strategies for young adults, such as long diffuse campaigns as compared to short intensive campaigns or campaigns with flights of short intense periods separated by breaks. However, there is evidence that young adults become desensitized to fear messages over time, become annoyed with them, and learn to tune them out,[14,31] suggesting that social marketing programs with short intense campaigns or flights of them may be effective with this group.

Overall, the best way to determine what messages, communication channels, and roll-out strategies work for young adults is to test them with the targeted group to get their reactions and solicit their input to the message development.[12,18] More formative research on the nature of young adult audiences and evaluations of marketing mixes that effectively bring about changes in tobacco behaviour are needed.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCIES

Perhaps the most important factor in developing a social marketing program targeting young adults is to understand the audience and how different segments may respond. Before implementing a social marketing program, and especially a program developed elsewhere, local public health agencies need to carefully study the local young adult audience to determine what if any segmentation is appropriate, which segment can best be targeted by the program, and what tailoring may be required to make the program locally relevant and resonate with the targeted audience.

Young adults need to perceive that the message and communication strategy speaks to them. There is some evidence that they prefer a positive framing of anti-smoking messages, with a focus on short-term benefits of not smoking. They don't respond well to fear appeals which can have unintended consequences – sometimes the opposite of what was intended.

Messages for young adults need to be credible and bolster self-efficacy in order to be effective. Empathetic peers who are ex-smokers may have more credibility for this age group. However, young adults are a heterogeneous group with different preferences, values and needs that can result in different responses to the same message and marketing mix. Testing message and channel options with the target audience of young adults is a critical step before implementing a social marketing program and can help reduce unintended results.

In addition, a social marketing program will be more effective if care is taken to create a local environment that is supportive, enables the behavioural change, and is convenient for the target audience. Strategies to accomplish this include the mobilization of the local community to limit the locations where young adults can smoke and to provide a variety of supports for quitting smoking. In sum, young adults need to feel that the change is possible and that they are capable of doing it and know what to do to make it work.

Better understanding of how to develop and implement effective social marketing programs that target young adults to prevent smoking initiation and to encourage early cessation is needed. Local public health agencies can help to generate evidence about what works for different young adult audiences by attending to the strategies outlined above and evaluating their social marketing program efforts.

Key considerations when developing a tobacco social marketing program for young adults:

- Know your target audience. Young adults are a diverse group with different preferences, values and needs that can result in different responses to the same message and marketing mix.
- Determine what if any segmentation is appropriate for the targeted local young adult audience, which segment can best be targeted by the program, and what tailoring may be required to make the program locally relevant and resonate with the target audience.
- Consider framing anti-smoking messages to focus on positive aspects. There is some evidence that young adults prefer messages that focus on short-term benefits of not smoking and that fear appeals can have the opposite effect of what was intended.
- Develop messages for young adults that are credible and bolster self-efficacy. Consider involving empathetic peers who are ex-smokers as they may have more credibility for this age group.
- Test the message and channel options with the target audience of young adults to ensure they resonate with the group and to help identify and reduce unintended results.
- Create a local environment that is supportive, enables the young adults to quit smoking, and is convenient for them. Strategies to accomplish this include mobilizing the local community to limit the locations where young adults can smoke and providing a variety of supports for quitting. Young adults need to feel that the

change is possible and that they are capable of doing it and know what to do to make it work.

- Evaluate your social marketing efforts. This will provide a better understanding of how to develop and implement effective social marketing programs that target young adults to prevent smoking initiation and to encourage early cessation.

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