Effectiveness of antismoking ads across the socioeconomic spectrum

Kate A. Giffin A.S, Gabriella M. Alvarez A.B., Keely A. Muscatell, Ph.D
Dept. of Psychology and Neuroscience, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Background

• Tobacco use is the greatest cause of preventable death and disease in the United States
• Health effects from smoking disproportionately affect low socioeconomic status (SES) communities
• National cigarette smoking rate in 2017 was 14%
• 26.0% of people with an annual household income under $35,000 used tobacco products in 2017
• Social psychology suggests that low-SES cultural norms are more interdependent (other-focused) while high-SES cultural norms are more independent (self-focused)
• Tailoring antismoking ads to these cultural norms may help improve their effectiveness among low SES populations, translating to greater public health outcomes
• We hypothesized that low SES people would perceive other focused ads as more effective than self focused ads

Research Questions:
1. Can antismoking ads be categorized as self or other focused?
2. Will the other focused ads be perceived as more effective than the self focused ads by low SES people?

Methods

• We assessed ads from the highly effective CDC: “Tips from Former Smokers” campaign using two online (MTurk) surveys
• Survey 1: categorizing ads as self focused versus other focused
  • Participants viewed each ad and rated how self-focused and how other-focused the ad was from 1–8
• Survey 2: Assessing the perceived effectiveness of the ads
  • Participants viewed each ad and rated the effectiveness on 6 measures (e.g. how memorable or convincing the ad was)
  • For each ad, the ratings were added up for a composite effectiveness score out of 30
  • Each survey also included questions about the participants:
    • Demographics and socioeconomic status
    • Smoking status

Results: Ad Effectiveness and SES

• There was a significant difference between ad effectiveness by ad type (self vs other)
  • There was a significant interaction between ad type and subjective SES
  • Lower SES people rated self-focused ads as more effective than other-focused ads
  • Higher SES people rated both ad types as almost equally effective

Results: Categorizing Ads

Other focused

The most effective “other” ad.
Self-focused rating = 3.66, other-focused rating = 6.73, average composite effectiveness = 24.08
• Out of 28 ads, 9 were classified as other (higher other-focused rating than self-focused rating)
• Overall, other ads were rated as less effective than self ads

Self focused

The most effective “self” ad.
Self-focused rating = 7.06, other-focused rating = 2.63, average composite effectiveness = 26.29

Results: How Smokers Rated Ads

• Self focused ads were more effective for both lower and higher SES current smokers

Conclusions and Future Directions

• Antismoking ads can be classified as self or other focused
• For all participants (smokers and non-smokers), self ads were rated more effective
  • One possible explanation: the self focused ads were more graphic, while the other focused ads were more story-driven
• Our hypothesis that other ads would be more effective for low SES people was not supported
• Research on health behavior change ads in other domains is warranted to test the theoretical framework
• Future research should explore other aspects of the ads to understand the relationship between ad effectiveness and SES

References