

Young Non-Smokers' Insights into Graphic Health Warnings on Cigarette Packaging: An Application of ZMET

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The US Food and Drug Administration has proposed that in addition to text-only warning labels, cigarette packages should be accompanied by explicit pictures of the potential harm that smoking can cause. The aim of this study is an understanding of college students' perceptions of the proposed graphic health warnings and the meanings that they associate with them. Using the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique, young non-smokers' insights into the proposed warnings on cigarette packaging were uncovered. The emerged concepts were combined thematically as social, health and policy-related themes. Implications and directions for future work are indicated.

INTRODUCTION

The Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act requires the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to include more prominent warning labels on cigarette packages in order to create public awareness about the health risks associated with smoking. In compliance, the FDA has proposed that in addition to text-only warning labels, explicit pictures of the potential harm that smoking can cause should accompany cigarette packages. The FDA would obligate larger, more prominent cigarette health warnings on all cigarette packaging and advertisements in the US beginning 2012. According to the FDA, this requirement would be a “significant advancement in communicating the dangers of smoking”. The figure portrays a sample of a proposed Graphic Health Warnings (GHW) posted to the FDA website.

FIGURE 1
SAMPLE OF A PROPOSED GHW



One of the purposes of these warnings is to discourage younger generations from smoking: “Empower youth to say no to tobacco.” However, what are youth perceptions of the proposed GHW? Above all, what are the college students’ perceptions of GHW? What are the thoughts and feelings of

young non-smokers toward this policy? Understanding the unique perceptions of the younger generations may assist to accomplish the purpose of discouraging young adults to smoke.

The practice of including GHW is not new. Several countries adopted this practice many years ago. Among them, Australia, Brazil, Canada, India, Mexico, New Zealand, Singapore and some European countries have implemented some type of graphic warnings on cigarette packages. Accordingly, few research studies have explored the consumer reactions to these warnings in these countries. Despite previous research efforts addressing responses to warning labels, scant research has explored the American non-smokers perception of cigarette label warning. Table 1 summarizes research addressing the effectiveness of GHW on quitting and/or smoking prevention.

TABLE 1
SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON GHW

Authors/Date	Country	Sampling size	Method
Azagba & Sharaf 2013	Canada	6,402 young adults	Survey
Berg et al. 2011	US	2,600 young adults	Online survey
Gallopel-Morvan et al. 2011	France	50 Adults	Focus group
Hammond et al. 2007	Canada, US, UK, Australia	14,975 adult smokers	Quasi-experiment and telephone survey
Miller et al. 2011	Australia	587 smokers	Survey
Sabbane, Lowrey & Chebat 2009	Canada and US	298 young adult nonsmokers	Experiment
Schneider, Gadinger, & Fischer 2012	Germany	95 adult smokers	Experiment
Thrasher et al. 2007	Mexico	89 adult smokers	Experiment auction method
Thrasher et al. 2011	US	404 adult smokers	Experiment auction method

As indicated on the table, most research has been conducted overseas. In addition, the studies have been conducted with smoker samples. Moreover, only one study has managed qualitative data. Therefore, in order to overcome these gaps, the present study is twofold. (1) To uncover young adult, American non-smokers' insights on GHW; and (2) to adopt a projective, qualitative approach rather than a questionnaire or an experimental method as a means to provide broader coverage of the likely meanings associated with GHW effects.

ZALTMAN METAPHOR ELICITATION TECHNIQUE

Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET) is the first patented market research technique (U.S. Patent Number 5,436,830). This qualitative technique is projective in nature. Overall, the technique consists of two steps: elicitation and narratives. Both the elicitation process and subsequent narratives help the participants to express their thoughts and feelings regarding the phenomenon of interest. First, the technique draws metaphors from consumers by asking them to spend time thinking about how they would visually represent their experiences with a particular product, service or abstract idea. In order to accomplish this, participants are asked to make a collection of photographs and pictures from magazines and/or electronic sources that reflect their experience. ZMET also uses an in-depth, personal interview, which thereby enables researchers to explore and probe informants' thoughts and feelings more extensively. Followed by non-directing probing, the technique may reveal new insights about individuals'

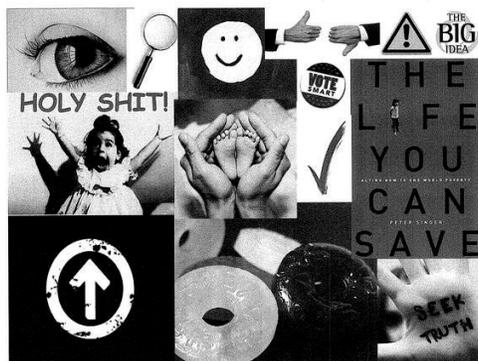
motives. Thus, differing to other projective techniques relying exclusively on imagery or narrative only, ZMET is unique in that it combines both imagery and subsequent narrative to interpret meanings.

Despite its potential, few academic studies have used this technique in the promotion arena. Coulter and Zaltman (1994) applied ZMET to understand how consumers think and communicate about brands. ZMET has also been applied to uncover consumer perceptions of advertising (Coulter et al. 2001). Interestingly, the metaphors attributed to advertising revealed that advertising has positive value, while also uncovering the negative perceptions of advertising.

METHOD

Data collection was conducted during Spring 2012, before the intended FDA deadline for GHW to be obligated. A total of 48 submissions were analyzed. The sample included 40% male; 60% female participants. All participants were undergraduate students attending a large Southwestern university. Participants disclosed they were non-smokers and unfamiliar with new label warning. A link to the FDA samples was provided to illustrate some of the new warning labels. Then, participants were asked to use magazines and/or digital imaging techniques to create a collage summarizing their thoughts and feelings regarding cigarette labels. In addition to the collage, a brief narrative explaining the picture meanings was also enclosed. Participants were asked to list for each one of the pictures, how the picture represents their thoughts, and what emotions came to mind when they chose the picture. The following figure contains a sample of a collage.

FIGURE 2
SAMPLE OF ZMET COLLAGE



For interpretation of the written data, narrative textual analyses (Patton 2002) were applied to discover the concepts that best enabled description of and insight into the perception of labels. This is, the concepts were examined on two levels: the more literal or descriptive and the meaning level. I looked for emerging patterns and themes as well as irregularities, splitting them into categories, sub-categories, linking them together when possible and creating meaningful categories of several codes that emerged at the open coding phase. In the following section, I describe emerged common themes and discuss the implications of these themes on GHW perceptions.

RESULTS

This section presents the major themes generated through both ZMET collages and narratives. Major themes include both positive and negative views. Results have been combined thematically as follows:

I. Social themes

1. Media portrays smoking as cool, cute or glamorous. Participants selected pictures of celebrities and politicians. Popular picks were President Obama lighting a cigarette and Charlie Sheen smoking. One participant noted: "My pictures focus on how smoking is glorified through fame."
2. Peer-pressure. Multiple participants selected a picture of "above the influence arrow". Some other indicated in the narrative the "over the influence" aspect as well.
3. Respect to smokers. A participant included a note saying "Your choice". Another one stated: "Even though I do have friends that smoke, I calmly respect their decision."

II. Health themes

1. Smoking disapproval. Pictures indicating disgusted faces and thumbs down. A participant noted: "I included the green sour face to show that my opinion of smoking is not at all cool or cute, but gross."
2. Pro-health and pro-life views. Participants also indicated their disapproval through selection of negative and shocking pictures. The collages included numerous pictures of pregnant women smoking, portrayals of how a fetus in the womb would react to smoking, and kids crying around smoke. Participants also opt for positive depictions. For instance, a respondent included a picture of a girl dancing representing the freedom that could be obtained from quitting. Another one selected a picture of LifeSavers candy, to express that many lives can be saved by this policy. "I'm a big believer," another participant stated.
3. Smoking is wasteful. Some participants view smoking as a waste of money, as indicated from pictures of money rolls as toilet paper and multiple forms of dollar signs.

III. Policy themes

1. Unnecessary policy. According to some participants, current smokers will not be affected by GHW. "People who smoke will continue and pictures will not affect them."
2. Controversy. Some pictures indicating controversy included pictures of extremely surprised women, a facing thumbs-up and thumbs-down, and multiple forms of exclamation marks. A response also reads: "Even though the policy opens your eyes to the truth, it is controversial (emphasis by respondent)."
3. Government intervention. Respondents communicated some anger or frustration, even they questioned freedom. Some selected a picture reading: "Big brother is watching you." Some question if government has "Gone too far?"
4. Uncertainty about the future of the regulation. Pictures of worried faces and question marks were included. A participant pointed out: "We are unsure about what will happen."

DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to uncover young non-smokers perceptions of the FDA's proposed GHW. By obtaining qualitative insights, I propose a unique perspective exploring undergraduate students' perceptions of GHW. Three main themes emerged: social, health and policy related insights.

For a considerable time, media has portrayed smokers as symbols of status, success and happiness, whereas the GHW attempts to portray smokers as symbols of failure and sadness. The social themes highlighted the portrayal of famous individuals as smokers, creating a potential conflict with the GHW objective. Younger generations also note the influence of peers. Particularly, for consumers with a connected self-schema, the decision of whether smoking or refraining from smoking may enhance the individual image by conforming to the expectations of the group. The findings also highlighted the respect to others' decisions. For consumers with a separated self-schema, on the other hand, the choice to smoke would be respected, as long as it will not disturb or affect others. Policy makers should consider the high potential impact of celebrities and groups on young consumers' decisions.

According to the pattern of results, health related themes were prevalent. In addition, opportunities for addressing people in favor of healthy lifestyles and subsequently, long life were uncovered. In opposition

to the described glamour indicated in the previous theme, some participants portrayed and described smoking as “gross”. Moreover, some price sensitive consumers may be moved by the idea that smoking represents a waste of money.

Policy makers should be cognizant of the polarity of the new generation insights. New generations seem to be more skeptical and uncertain about the effectiveness of this practice. While some participants indicated the indifference towards the practice, some acknowledge the controversy it may arise between consumer groups. Furthermore, some participants found not only the practice controversial but also the government intervention as invasive and irrelevant to current smokers.

From a method point of view, the use of a projective technique proved to be useful to gain insights such as opinions, emotions and intentions to behave. The dual (imagery and narrative) approach of ZMET has enhanced the opportunity for contrasting concepts to emerge and hence, future research may find this a useful approach to further explore this upcoming regulation. Nevertheless, the ZMET technique is grounded in nature, requiring confirmation of the validity and reliability of the findings. In addition, the inherent use of a small sample size for projective techniques may result in limited generalizability of the findings. Further work may use multiple samples in order to overcome the limitations just mentioned. Future qualitative studies could address a comparison of smoker vs. non-smoker insights. Similarly, a cross-cultural comparison of GHW perceptions could provide more generalizability of findings. Unexpectedly, Hansen, Winzeler and Topolinski (2010) concluded that mortality-salient text-only warnings might increase the smokers’ tendency to favor smoking under certain circumstances. Thus, a closer look to qualitative insights to different appeals (e.g. comparing social versus health-related appeals) used in GHW may be of significance to advertisers and policy makers alike.

With the FDA proposal, US consumers may be exposed to GHW on cigarette packages in the future. Overall, the results indicate that most non-smokers exhibited a degree of acceptance to the policy. However, not all participants were enthusiastic about embracing this policy.

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