Preventing Youth Obesity: Effective Means of Promotion

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Most obesity prevention campaigns in France use messages which focus on health consequences or benefits of adopting a specific behavior. Based on a literature review and on an exploratory study, our research shows that adolescents are especially susceptible to social risks: disapproval or rejection from the group and these social risks constitute the most important source of concern regarding obesity amongst adolescents. These conclusions indicate that obesity prevention campaigns using a message focused on social risks could be more effective than traditional preventive campaigns that put forth health related arguments.

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The evidences must be collected mainly through in-depth interviews and participant observations in two traditional organic farmers’ markets that periodically occur in the city of Porto Alegre (RS) and São Paulo (SP).

The theoretical and analytical framework is inspired mainly, but not exclusively, in the constructions concerning the idea of brand community (MUNIZ & O' GUINN, 2001). As such, the three constructs used by the authors to analyze the features of the brand communities will be investigated: (a) consciousness of a kind, defined as the feeling of intrinsic connection between the members and the collective sense of differentiation in relation to others that do not belong to the community; (b) existence of shared rituals and traditions, that maintain the shared culture, history, and the consciousness; (c) a sense of moral responsibility, that means that the members feel a sense of duty to the community and to its members.

Although the research is in the initial stage, the bibliographical revision and preliminary participant observations seem to indicate the existence of a sense of community in the organic farmers’ markets. It also can be observed that some consumers seem to make efforts in the direction of avoiding the use of plastic bags.

We believe that the knowledge of what means to the consumers to be part of this “community” can be very useful for the various actors interested in strengthening this important modality of organic food commercialization.

“Cigarette Product Descriptors Offering Potential Reassurance to Health Concerned Consumers”
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Tobacco firms have undergone particular scrutiny for the marketing of filtered and low-tar cigarette brands, in which product descriptors, such as “mild,” “light,” “ultra-light,” “slim,” “smooth,” and “natural” have commonly been used. More than 30 countries have now banned the use of “light” and “mild” as cigarette product descriptors (Hook 2006). The World Health Organization’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), the world’s first public health treaty, is legally binding for those countries that ratify it and stipulates in Article 11 that effective measures be taken, in accordance with each country’s legislation, to ensure that the packaging and labelling of tobacco products is not likely to “create an erroneous impression about its characteristics, health effects, hazards or emissions.”

For this paper, internal tobacco industry documents and promotions from advertising archives were reviewed to give insight about consumer research pertaining to the meaning of cigarette product descriptors. Consumer attitudes, opinions, and behavior have been routinely and extensively studied by tobacco firms and the market research firms and ad agencies it has hired; these studies and reports have been revealed through public litigation and public legislative hearings, and have provided researchers with an unparalleled look into the internal marketing strategies and consumer research of major corporations such as British American Tobacco (BAT), Philip Morris, RJ Reynolds, Brown & Williamson, and Lorillard (for a discussion on approaches to searching tobacco industry documents, see Malone and Balbach 2000; Carter 2005; Anderson, Dewhirst, and Ling 2006).

The internal corporate documents review reveals that promotional claims relating to “mild,” “light,” “slim,” “smooth,” and “natural” cigarettes are seemingly designed to offer reassurance to consumers concerned about the health risks of smoking. For example, according to BAT documentation, communication strategies “should be directed towards providing consumer reassurance [emphasis in original] about cigarettes and the smoking habit. This can be provided in different ways, e.g. by claimed low deliveries, by the perception of low deliveries and by the perception of ‘mildness’” (Short 1977, p.3). Internal documentation from BAT (1984, p.102690403) also shows that “it is useful to consider lights more as a third alternative to quitting and cutting down—a branded hybrid of smokers’ unsuccessful attempts to modify their habit on their own.”

Market research prepared for Philip Morris revealed that “smoking an ultra low tar cigarette seems to relieve some of the guilt of smoking and provide an excuse not to quit” (Goldstein/Krall Marketing Resources 1979, p.2040066754). Moreover, Philip Morris found that several consumers consider reduced circumference cigarettes (i.e., “slims”) to be a safer alternative relative to those brands with regular physical dimensions, based on the impression that less tobacco was being consumed rather than based on the actual tar and nicotine deliveries (Ryan 1987, p.2057762567). Meanwhile, “smoothness” is commonly meant to convey less irritation and less harshness to consumers, whereas “natural” is often used to describe menthol brands, thereby suggesting that no artificial flavors are added to the tobacco and that the taste is fresh (i.e., aftertaste improvement) and cool (i.e., irritation reduction, smooth).

Overall, these findings are discordant from a public health standpoint, given that smokers using “light” cigarettes have lower odds of smoking cessation and may use “light” cigarettes as an alternative to quitting (Tindle et al. 2006). Implications for package labelling, promotion, and policy are discussed.

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In most OECD countries, the issue of childhood and adolescent obesity implies a variety of health and social consequences which often continue into adulthood. Therefore, implementing effective prevention campaigns directed at this population is crucial to controlling the obesity epidemic. Many contemporary obesity prevention campaigns base their arguments on health risks or benefits linked to prevention behaviors. The conceptual foundations of these campaigns rely on traditional preventive health behavior models such as the Protection Motivation Theory (Rogers 1975) and the Health Belief Model (Rosenstock 1974). However, these models focus on health risks neglecting social risks and adolescents are sensitive to social norms and to the positive or negative consideration of their peers.

Previous research show that messages that put forth health related risks were not efficient: these arguments do not dissuade adolescents and can even create a positive image of cigarettes (Duffy and Burton 2000; Hastings and MacFadyen 2002; Pechmann et al. 2003; Schoenbachler and Whittler 1996). The adolescents' social susceptibility leads us to suppose that campaigns using social arguments could be more effective.

Arguments that focus on social issues seem to be more efficient in the short term because they address concerns that are important to the adolescents. Some scholars have demonstrated that this supposition works for anti-smoking campaigns (Ho 1998; Pechmann and...