The Medium or the Message: What Effects Youth’s Responses to Anti-Tobacco Messages
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Abstract
As the use of social media becomes more widespread among youth in our society (Purcell, 2011), public health officials have looked to new media to promote messages of healthy behaviors. Recent work emphasizes the importance of the internet as a medium when communicating with youth (DeZengolita, 2007). However, whether it is the medium or the message that elicits a response from audiences has long been debated (Barry & Fulmar, 2004). Our group was interested in finding whether the medium (a certain social networking site) or the message (based in different appeals) would persuade youth to make healthy decisions.

Focusing on anti-tobacco messages, this study examines whether the medium (Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube) or the message (fear, humor or bandwagon appeal) influences youth response. Using classroom groups consisting of youth ages 14-18, we presented one message of each appeal in the three different mediums and measured the students’ responses via survey. We then compared students’ attitudes toward the risk of smoking based on these categories: nonsusceptible never-smokers, susceptible never-smokers, experimenters, and established smokers (Escobar-Chavez and Anderson, 2008). Results provide additional guidance for public health campaigns trying to improve message effectiveness with youth.

Method
- Information was gathered from four 9th grade health classes and one 11th-12th grade Wellness class
- Sample included 38 males and 46 females
- Researchers went into classroom setting and presented material
- Students had consent forms signed prior to class
- Video recordings and field notes were taken of the presentation and responses

Research Questions and Results
- RQ1: What social networking sites do youth most often use?
- RQ2: Which persuasive appeal is most likely to influence behavior change?
- RQ3: Is likelihood that a message would influence youth behavioral change related to:
  a.) Youth evaluation of emotional appeal?
  b.) Reported likelihood of sharing the message with friends?

Results: Pearson’s Correlation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Networking Site (&amp; Appeal)</th>
<th>Influence to Change Behavior</th>
<th>Intent to Share with Friends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook (humor)</td>
<td>ns r = .42, p &lt; .001</td>
<td>r = .75, p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook (bandwagon)</td>
<td>r = .66, p &lt; .001</td>
<td>r = .63, p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook (fear)</td>
<td>r = .36, p &lt; .001</td>
<td>r = .57, p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter (humor)</td>
<td>r = .30, p &lt; .01</td>
<td>r = .39, p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter (bandwagon)</td>
<td>r = .69, p &lt; .001</td>
<td>r = .63, p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube (humor)</td>
<td>r = .34, p &lt; .01</td>
<td>r = .53, p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube (Bandwagon)</td>
<td>r = .71, p &lt; .001</td>
<td>r = .70, p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube (fear)</td>
<td>r = .50, p &lt; .001</td>
<td>r = .60, p &lt; .001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion & Implications
- Facebook was the preferred social networking site for those surveyed; to reach this population, health campaigners should use this site
- All appeals EXCEPT Facebook humor showed significant results to influencing youth
- The bandwagon appeal appeared to show the highest levels of influence on youth; to reach this population, use bandwagon appeals

Suggestions from Students
- “Show the major health risks by using these products” -Anonymous
- “Short, simple, add some facts, and pictures” -Anonymous
- “Have more pictures, and make it less wordy. We need something to be able to relate to” -Anonymous
- “Make something creative that will stand out to kids will make them not want to smoke” -Anonymous
- “Tell real stories about real people” -Anonymous

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