

Qualitative Research Case Study: Adolescent Tobacco-Control Focus Groups

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Sampling Method and Recruitment Procedures	3
Moderator's Guide	5
Results.....	9
Implications.....	19
Discussion Questions	21

Executive Summary

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) has contracted with a Seattle advertising agency to develop a tobacco-control advertising campaign, titled “No Stank You” (NSY). The campaign is directed toward the almost 900,000 young people who are 12-18 year of age and living in Washington State. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the campaign’s messages and provide the DOH with strategies to increase its effectiveness.

We conducted four focus groups: two in Spokane, Wash., and two in Seattle, Wash. Focus groups in each city were divided into two different age groups: 12-14-year-olds and 15-16-year-olds. Participants watched anti-tobacco ads and evaluated the format and messages, assessed ad effectiveness in holding attention, and their beliefs concerning the likelihood that the ads would prevent tobacco use. Finally, participants were asked to share their thoughts about what would make the ads more effective.

Through emergent theme analysis, our researchers were able to identify 8 major themes. These themes include; campaign exposure is high, advertisers are trying too hard, peer pressure and relationships are effective, authenticity matters, the ads are age inappropriate, unrealized potential resonates, teens just want the facts, and the use of fear works depending on viewer age. Each theme provides unique insight into the thoughts and opinions of the DOH’s target audience.

The theme that offers the most room for improvement is centered around age inappropriateness. Focus group participants who were 15-16-years-old reported they found the campaign to be targeted toward a younger demographic. They did not find the ads effective nor interesting. As this age group is at a higher risk of smoking it is important to create advertisements for them that are effective.

The emerging trends included in this report, along with the detailed transcripts of the focus groups, candidly tell the DOH exactly what their target audience likes and doesn't like when being communicated to. While it is unreasonable to expect the DOH to implement all the emerging trends into new creative, implementing a few suggestions and adjusting their promotion mix will result in a more meaningful campaign that will resonate with, and reach, their target audience.

Sampling Method and Recruitment Procedures

We have decided to conduct several focus groups to obtain candid feedback of our campaign message, creative execution, and effectiveness for the past year. It should be noted that the results of the focus groups are not an alternative to survey research, but instead are complimentary, to help provide the DOH with a comprehensive analysis of the NSY campaign. We have decided focus groups are suitable for our research for the following reasons. First, they are socially oriented and make it possible to uncover information about an issue that would not come out in individual interviews or surveys (pg. 149). Second, the overall cost of execution is small compared to conducting a survey with a large sample. Third, their flexibility allows us to host these groups in multiple locations and work with younger participants who may not fully understand survey questions.

The NSY campaign is targeted towards the almost 900,000 young people who are 12-18 years of age residing in Washington State. We have chosen to pursue a combination of quota and purposive, *or judgmental*, sampling methods. The quota method will allow us target participants based on age, sex, and educational level. Purposive sampling will allow us select participants that meet the special needs of this study, such as being at high-risk to smoking. Furthermore, homogeneity is key to maximizing disclosure among focus group participants (Elliot & Associates, pg. 3), therefore it is important that our target participants share similar social circles, backgrounds, and geographies. Specifically, our targeted sample will consist of middle and high school students, both male and female, ranging from 12-16 years old. This approach allows us to find participants who fit the target demographic of the NSY campaign and can be considered representative of the population.

Meaningful focus groups require 8-12 participants. Considering that we will be hosting 4, we need to recruit a minimum of 32 participants. To be prepared, and account for no-shows, we should aim to recruit at least 60 participants. Since we will be conducting our focus groups in two cities, Seattle and Spokane, it will necessary to recruit 30 participants in each market.

To accomplish this based on the needs of our sampling method, we will rely heavily on nominations. This means key individuals will nominate people who they think would be good participants based on their familiarity with the topic, ability to communicate their opinion respectfully, and willing to volunteer their time. We will solicit middle and high school guidance counselors for their recommendations. In the Spokane market, we intend to work with Sacajawea, Chase, and Garry middle schools and Mt. Spokane, John R. Rogers, and Shadle Park high schools. In Seattle, we intend to work with Jane Addams, David T. Denny, Nathan Eckstein middle schools and Rainier Beach, Garfield, and West Seattle high schools. If these options are not fruitful for nominations we will expand our outreach to additional schools.

Once viable participants are identified, we will conduct outreach to confirm interest and availability. Once we secure their verbal confirmation, we will provide them with details on the date and location of the focus groups. This will be in the form of a confirmation email and written letter. As our participants are also minors, we will obtain and document the permission of their parent or legal guardian before confirming them as a participant.

To help ensure participants show up, we will provide an incentive. Each participant will receive a \$50 iTunes gift card at the completion of the focus group. We will also host the focus groups on a Saturday as to not interfere with their school schedules. Finally, we will host the groups in a setting they're familiar with, specifically the Northtown Mall in Spokane and Northgate Mall in Seattle.

Moderator's Guide

An Evaluation of No Stank You Campaign Television Advertisements

Focus Group Protocol

Research objectives:

This study aims to explore the thoughts, opinions, and reactions to recent “No Stank You” smoking prevention commercials. Furthermore, through a general discussion, we wish to learn more about your media consumption habits and preferences.

Procedure in detail:

Introduction and Ground Rules: I would like to thank you all for attending this afternoon. My name is [INSERT NAME] and I will be moderating our discussion today. The purpose of today's focus group is to discuss your thoughts, opinions, and reactions to the No Stank You anti-smoking commercials. Our discussion will take approximately 2.5-hours. In addition to group discussion, we will be administering a tobacco attitude questionnaire and will analyze anti-tobacco ads via our Perception Analyzer system.

Before we start, let's review some ground rules you'll need to know and follow throughout our discussion.

- First, speak one at a time.
- Please feel free to respond to what someone else says, but try to stay focused and allow others to speak.
- We'd like to hear your candid thoughts. That means truthful and straight forward. We expect many of you will have different opinions and that's ok. There are no right or wrong answers.
- Finally, do not feel that you need to answer every question, but we would like to hear from each of you during our discussion.

Recording Notification and Confidentiality: This discussion is being recorded so that we can remember and review your comments later. In case there is an issue with our recording

equipment, I have asked my colleague, [INSERT NAME], to take notes [MODERATOR GESTURE TO COLLEAGUE]. Please note that your identities or names will not be disclosed, so I hope you feel comfortable sharing with me.

Tobacco Attitude Questionnaire:

As I noted before – we’re looking forward to getting your feedback today. Let’s begin with taking a quick questionnaire. This is only four questions, so let’s spend five-minutes completing it. If we get done early, we’ll move on. [*Moderator distributes questionnaire and collects once all participants are done.*]

Perception Analyzer:

What we’ll do now is watch some of the NSY advertisements and have you rate them using our Perception Analyzer system. While viewing the ad, please think about whether you like it and if it grabs your attention. Turn the dial, left for ‘did not like it’, or right for ‘did like it’. Keep the dial in middle if you feel neutral. We’ll review the results during our discussion. Any questions? If not, let’s begin. [*Moderator play each ad – Xylophone, Dance Off, Blizonko, and Smoker Mouth. Allow participants to log answers during viewing.*]

Ice Breaker / Practice Questions:

Before we get started with our discussion, are there any questions for me? If not, let’s start our discussion with short introductions. Let’s go around the table and share your name, favorite class in school and the most memorable commercial you’ve seen.

Key Questions:

Thank you all for sharing! Next, we’ll watch the ads from earlier again and discuss them and the answers you provided.

General Campaign Questions:

Have any of you seen these ads before today? Show of hands.

- Probes:
 - Did you know it was a “No Stank You” ad?

How do you think it portrayed smokers? Negatively, neutrally, or positively?

- Probes:
 - If you were a smoker, would you be offended by the ad?
 - If you were a smoker, would you feel like you’re being attacked?

Ad Specific Questions:

Okay, now we’re going to play back each one and discuss each.

Moderator: Play each of the advertisements and ask the same questions for each:

- What meaning did this ad have for you?
- What was the meaning of this ad?
- What is the health message?
- Did you like it?
- Did it keep your attention?
- Is it memorable?

General Discussion:

Now let’s discuss the things you mentioned earlier more generally.

- What did you think of the format of the ads?
- What would make the ads more age appropriate?
- What would make the ads more memorable?
- How much TV do you watch on a school day?
- What about the internet? How many of you use it?
 - Do you see the ads on there?
 - How many spend more time online than watching TV?
- Do the ads make you think about not smoking?
- Why do think young people choose to smoke? What impacts your decision?

Conclusion:

Thank you all for sharing your opinions today. We appreciate your time and participation. Don’t forget to pick up your iTunes gift card before you leave.

Question Justification:

The questions asked follow a logical progression designed to make the participants feel comfortable, provide feedback about the entire NSY campaign, provide feedback about specific television spots, and share information about their media consumption habits. The designer of these questions purposely used open-ended questions. This approach to questioning encourages participants to provide meaningful answers based on their thoughts, opinions, and feelings. As Austin and Pinkelton suggest, the moderator's guide includes a combination of uncued and cued questions. Uncued questions allow the participants to introduce new ideas and perspectives. The cued questions, or probes, allow the moderator to dig a bit deeper into the participant's responses.

Results

The participants of our four focus groups provided a wealth of insight into the effectiveness of the NSY television ads, message comprehension and retention, media usage, and suggestions to make the campaign better. The emerging trends are discussed below in no particular order.

Campaign Exposure is High: While the participants had a plethora of constructive criticism, the DOH should feel good that exposure to their target audience is high. Many participants shared that they have seen the creative before, been to the website, and seen t-shirts being worn by their peers.

M: So, just some general questions to kind of get us started. Have any of you seen any of those particular ads before? Show of hands if you've seen at least one of them. (Counts 7 hands out of the 9 participants.) So seven of you have actually seen those particular ads. 12-14-Year-Olds, Spokane, WA

M: So, how many of you have seen any of these ads before? (Counts 9 hands.) So nine of you. [note, this group had 11 participants] 12-14-Year-Olds, Seattle, WA

M: Have any of you seen any of these ads before? Were any of these ads familiar? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven...eight of you? (So 8 out of 11 in this group.) 15-16-Year-Olds, Spokane, WA

Trying Too Hard: Participant's responses indicated that the commercials reviewed were trying too hard to be funny or quirky and in-turn were less effective. In addition, there was a trend to dislike the campaign over all. As we'll explore later, respondents expressed that ads will be more effective if they are made to be more authentic. Worth noting, this generation is very media savvy and doesn't respond well to ads they find repetitive or preachy.

I just thought it was plain-out weird to be honest. I mean, you know, not many people at my school offer other people cigarettes, but if somebody did, I wouldn't bit their arm off. It

also doesn't give you any health reasons. They just kind of say, "What are you gonna do when someone offers you a smoke?" Boy, 12-14, Spokane (48)

Straight to the point. They're all jumping around and stuff. I mean, your teeth are gonna get yellow, they shouldn't show people jumping all over them and stuff. They're showing other things that aren't dealing with smoking. Boy, 12-14, Spokane (66)

It was just kind of boring. 'Cause they're just saying the same stuff, and I've already seen it. Boy, 12-14, Seattle (69)

Yeah. All tobacco ads pretty much have the same idea. It's just "if you do this, this will happen." Girl, 12-14, Seattle (59)

I would think maybe get some more facts in there, and more comparison between a smoker and a non-smoker. And have it make sense, not have it all weird like the Blizonko one. Boy, 12-14, Seattle (84)

I thought there was like, too much movement in the entire thing. That made me sick to watch it. People were like moving around so much. Girl, 15-16, Spokane (90)

It wasn't very clear. It kind of made, uh, the constant moving and the sound and constantly trampled over the phrase again, and again, and again. You have no idea exactly what they were saying. Boy, 15-16, Spokane (90)

Uh, basically the yellow teeth is the only thing that came across. Nothing else came across clear. Boy, 15-16, Spokane (90).

It was like they tried too many lights and everything. Showing up all at once, that you can barely keep your eyes on it, without looking back. Boy, 15-16, Spokane (93)

It's very distracting. And not easy to keep people's attention on it 'cause so many things are happening at once. Boy, 15-16, Spokane (94)

I think if something catches your attention and keeps your attention, it doesn't mean it's going to keep the underlying message. Like if you read a book, you really like the book, but you don't understand why the author wrote it. Boy, 15-16, Spokane(95).

It could barely get the message across. Girl, 15-16, Spokane (99)

Well, it was really clear about what will happen to you, but it never really, showed you that it was about cigarettes. There was only like one picture of cigarettes or never really mentioned a lot about smoking, just people smoking, Boy, 15-16, Spokane (102)

Peer Pressure and Relationships: People have long known about the power of peer pressure to try smoking, but may not have considered using it to prevent smoking. Many of the

participants, mostly older, indicated that instead of focusing on the long-term health effects of smoking, such as yellow teeth or hairy-tongue, advertisers should instead focus on the impact it has on relationships. This ranges from letting down teammates for not being able to perform at the best of their abilities to unrequited love by a potential partner. The disappointment and guilt created is in theory enough to prevent older teens from trying smoking.

Yeah, because when they're hanging out with friends or talking to you, and then their friend's like "Ew, your breath stinks." And then give them like a piece of gum but be like, "Ew, your breath still stinks" Boy, 12-14, Seattle (86)

[When asked about consequences other than sports] Relationships, maybe? Like not wanting to be with someone who smokes. Boy, 15-16 Spokane. (106)

I mean one time like a year ago I saw a really cute guy skateboarding by, and then he pulled out a cigarette. And I was like, "Oh sick." (Disappointed tone). Girl, 15-16, Spokane. (107)

Okay I think just geared toward relationships would be really affective. 'Cause the majority of high school students want to be like really, fulfilling relationships and stuff like that. But, I don't know very many people who like, prefer people who smoke, or date people who smoke. 'Cause most people are like, "That's really disgusting." Girl, 15-16, Spokane (107)

I kind of do agree that the relationship aspect is a lot more important. Just like any peer opinion in general is more important than like, sports. 'Cause I know a lot of people who are like, "Sports"? Like they don't care. But like, peer opinion, and like what's that going to do to you, like immediate effects, is a lot more important than that. Girl, 15-16, Spokane (108)

I think that more reality will help. And the relationship concept would be good 'cause I have a lot of friends who are wrestlers, and they chew to cut water weight. And their girlfriends won't kiss them during wrestling season 'cause they think it's just disgusting. Girl, 15-16, Spokane (108)

I think that's more effective because high school is like a big, social thing. Girl, 15-16, Spokane (108)

[Describing putting everything into one commercial] No, like a kid at home, and like getting into trouble with his parents. And then going to school and his friends ignoring him, and then not being able to make the team, not having a girlfriend, like you know, just walking through life and smoking affecting everything. Girl, 15-16, Spokane (110)

Yeah. Your friends might not wanna hang out with you if you're gonna be like smoking. Boy, 15-16, Seattle (131)

Yeah. Kiss a smoker is like licking an ashtray. Girl, 15-16, Seattle (139)

Authenticity: Participants indicated that the existing creative was inauthentic which reduced audience engagement. To be more effective, the NSY campaign should show real people, real situations, and real consequences. This would require a departure from the current animated and playful/silly tone of the commercials.

Um, I think it would be more effective if I actually saw it on a person rather than it being animated. It would affect me more. Girl, 12-14, Spokane (44)

Well, I didn't really like any of these commercials, so I'd probably change the channel. Just 'cause it's boring, it's totally...fake. Something that's more real and more believable and something that I'd actually want to look at. Girl, 12-14, Spokane (46)

That was my first thought when I like saw the first commercial. I kinda lost interest 'cause it's animated. And if it was real and it was someone's mouth, and you could see it getting yellow as a result, that would be more meaningful me I guess. Girl, 12-14, Spokane (52)

I think real people are better. Boy, 12-14, Spokane (60)

I would make them more real-life, more realistic. Girl, 12-14, Spokane (66)

I think they should have more real-life symptoms, not cartoony lungs. It kind of comes across better if there is a real picture of lungs or something. I liked the catchiness and the colors, different than most commercials. But, it just seems a little unrealistic. Boy, 12-14, Seattle (84)

More fact-based. More realistic. Girl, 12-14, Seattle (84)

I think real people will convey more of a message than stuffed animals or animated things. Girl, 12-14, Seattle (85)

Like, I mean, if you showed real people it'd maybe make you think like, "Yeah, that's kinda gross." Like a kid at a party. Like a cute guy smells a girl and he has yellow teeth and she's like "that's sick." Like a guy's not gonna wanna be like that, he wants to impress the girls. Like show real people in it. Girl, 15-16, Spokane (91)

Like the one where the guy has like 20 t-shirts on. And he takes 'em of. That one was like a more realistic one 'cause he's like a teenager in his room, walking around doing normal stuff. Girl, 15-16, Spokane (93)

Um, well, looking at those commercials, it really did not appeal, I don't think it would appeal to our age group. And if the people want to appeal to our age group, they need to do the things we talked about. Which is like more serious humor, and like relating. 'Cause I think that's a really important thing. If it doesn't relate, then it's not gonna stick with you. Girl, 15-16, Seattle (137)

I would say go with the realistic scenario. Something that you can apply to yourself. You know, nothing like dancing on teeth. Boy, 15-16, Seattle (138)

Age Inappropriateness: A recurring theme throughout the focus groups was that the ads missed the mark in terms of age appropriateness. 15-16-year-olds in both Seattle and Spokane felt that the ads were targeted toward much younger kids. While some 12-14-year-olds felt that the ads were appropriately targeted toward them, some thought the ads were too silly for their age group, specifically “Blizonko”.

[When asked if they remembered what Blizonko means] If I was five, I'd probably think it, but I'm 14, so. Boy, 12-14 Spokane (49)

I think it's more pointed toward younger people like teenagers and middle schoolers, 'cause I didn't see any older people in the commercials. Boy, 12-14, Seattle (79)

I think the commercials are geared toward our age, but my sister who's 4 finds them a lot more entertaining than I do. Boy, 12-14, Seattle (79)

Childish. Boy, 15-16, Spokane (89)

I kinda did too, it seems to be more childish than focusing on older groups. Boy, 15-16, Spokane (90)

I think that format would work more, at least better, if you put it on a 7-year-old's television series. Boy, 15-16, Spokane (95)

I would have to say, basically younger. 'Cause, the way it's put out. More like a video game situation. Young kids would see that and it'll catch their eyes on it, it's like when a new video game starts coming out. They'll catch their eyes on it and realize, “just don't smoke.” It's more set to younger kids. Boy, 15-16, Spokane (95-96)

Yeah, like maybe my 12-year-old brother or my 10-year-old sister. Girl, 15-16, Spokane (96)

M: Thirteen's sort of a cut-off point? Yeah. Boy, 15-16, Spokane (96)

If you're starting to put it towards people who are all teenagers, you're really putting it towards people who are not quite kids. Given up on all that little kid stuff, but at the same time, we can't fully grow into adults making our own decisions. We're not adults, and we're not kids. So, everything that's easily identified as both child-oriented or adult-oriented, we have a mixture of that. Boy, 15-16, Spokane (96)

I have no idea. "Blizonko" is more childish than anything else. Like made up by a tree house club. Boy, 15-16, Spokane (98)

It sounds like an 8-year-old. Boy, 15-16, Seattle (114)

Most of these, I felt were geared more for younger people. Girl, 15-16, Seattle (114)

It seems to me that they're trying hard to get older kids, like our age. But they're really failing. They're trying too hard. Girl, 15-16, Seattle (118)

8th graders. 8th grade and younger. Boy, 15-16, Seattle (118)

Um, well, looking at those commercials, it really did not appeal, I don't think it would appeal to our age group. And if people want to appeal to our age group, they need to do the things that we talked about. Which is like more serious humor, and like relating. 'Cause I think that's a really important thing. If it doesn't relate, then it's not gonna stick with you. Girl, 15-16, Seattle (137)

I didn't like any of them either. I felt talked down to, which is probably something you should never do in a commercial. Girl, 15-16, Seattle (138)

Unrealized Potential: An interesting emerging theme was found around unrealized potential. What this means is that both age groups (mostly 15-16 year-olds) thought that anti-tobacco messaging that shows how smoking can limit your potential, in terms of athletic success and career opportunities, would be more effective than messaging communicating the health consequences.

Like I started playing basketball, and I mean it didn't help at all (slight chuckle). It made everything worse. A lot of stuff I wasn't able to do. Boy, 12-14, Spokane (43)

It would be more successful if they made it more real. Like if they took the lung capacity idea and made it like, some guy that plays football and starts smoking and then he doesn't make the team 'cause he like, can't run anymore. Like apply it to something that, like could actually happen to someone. Something like, all of a sudden you can't run, you're not as good as you used to be. Girl, 15-16, Spokane (105)

Well, you could also focus on careers. 'Cause I have a friend that wants to be a Marine, and you cannot smoke if you are a Marine, 'cause that will affect how you will be in combat. So, for people who don't do sports, focus it on relationships and careers. You can't smoke for 5 years and then go into the Marines. You won't last long. Boy, 15-16, Spokane (106)

Almost exactly what he said, but also again, like on careers. 'Cause some places won't even let you smoke, 'cause it's a danger for where you want to work at. Boy 15-16, Spokane (107)

I'm jumping back and forth. But if you take that, and you want to take this career, this is where you'll come close to get it. But if you don't, you will have a higher chance in showing results, and also saying what makes that happen. Boy, 15-16, Spokane (107)

I'd probably have to say with physical performance, 'cause I'm on the wrestling team, and I know that if anything, I try to keep my diet good, I try to keep in as good of physical shape as I can and place higher. Boy, 15-16, Spokane (109)

No, like a kid at home, and like getting into trouble with his parents. And then going to school and his friends ignoring him, and then not being able to make the team, not having a girlfriend, like you know, just walking through life and smoking affecting everything. Girl, 15-16, Spokane (110)

There's this person I know and he started smoking. And he's actually really good at drama and musicals. And he like, got suspended. And I feel like, they should do something about how it affects your talents. Girl, 15-16, Seattle (130)

Yeah, and then like, I know some people who are more good at football, but they weren't allowed to play 'cause they were caught smoking. Boy, 15-16, Seattle (131)

Yeah any group activity. You get friends from that activity. Like if the best swimmer on the swim team gets caught and you're gonna need him to be there, but if he gets caught he's not gonna be there. Boy, 15-16, Seattle (131)

Just the Facts: We've already discussed the desire for more authenticity in terms of seeing themselves in the anti-tobacco advertisements, but participant responses indicated there is a strong desire for more factual based communication. Respondents, in both age groups, shared

that they would find messaging that was direct and factual would resonate more with them. Facts were mostly considered statistics about short and long-term health consequences. Interestingly, they also stated they would be more likely to share statistics featured in ads than the ads themselves.

And it just makes you like, after you see a commercial, there like a statistic or a poll or something, you wanna like tell your friends, "Oh my gosh, did you know this?" And then they tell their friends and like, everybody finds out. Girl, 12-14, Spokane (54)

I would think maybe get some more facts in there, and more comparison between a smoker and a non-smoker. And have it make sense, not have it be all weird, like the Blizonko one. Boy, 12-14, Seattle (84)

More fact based, more realistic. Girl, 12-14, Seattle (84)

I'd make it more happy, but then at the end tell facts about the consequences of smoking long-term. Boy, 12-14, Seattle (85)

Have like good music and a bunch of facts, that are told by kids and stuff like that. Girl, 12-14, Seattle (86)

It would impact you, like straightforward facts. Girl, 12-14, Seattle (86)

[referring to online ads] Well, I see 'em when I'm reading my emails, they pop up. Might as well change 'em up once a day. Give me an interesting fact. Girl, 15-16, Seattle (125)

And then you slip in like a health fact at the end or whatever that would push farther out, to like "Oh I shouldn't do this." Boy, 15-16, Seattle (131)

It's pretty much been summed up. But I think if they try to illustrate a statistic within the commercial, just like one fact. That was more appealing than dancing on teeth and stuff. Girl, 15-16, Seattle (137)

If I saw a commercial that said like, "Twenty million people die from cigarettes every year" or something, I might say, "Hey, I'm gonna tell my buddy that," or something. Boy, 15-16, Seattle (137)

Fear Factor: Fear appeals had mixed results within the two age ranges. Younger participants, as you may expect, found scarier or more grotesque ads more off-putting and less effective. Some participants even mentioned having nightmares from other campaigns they've

seen before. Older participants found the scarier or more grotesque ads to be more engaging and memorable. They even suggested departing from animations and instead showing actual effects of smoking in humans. Perhaps predictably, more boys were interested in “gross” ads than girls.

On that one, I would have changed the channel. It just doesn't look...like, I don't like nasty stuff. It doesn't look appealing 'cause it's nasty stuff. Boy, 12-14, Spokane (44)

Okay I didn't like it at all, it kind of scared me (chuckles) I don't like that “Aahh!” (referring to the hard, metal-style “yelling” type of music) I'd turn it. Girl, 12-14, Spokane (50).

That one creeped me out. Girl, 12-14, Spokane (50)

Um, it was a lot more interesting. And like, even though it was creepy, I think it's better when it's creepy because it actually like “oh my gosh, I don't want that happening to me.” Girl, 12-14, Spokane (51).

Um, less scary, 'cause I've seen a lot of scare smoking videos. And, well, like not happy, 'cause you don't want to be happy. But, serious, but not scary. Girl, 12-14, Spokane (66)

I think it's a little better than a scare tactic. Actually, some ads I've seen, it was like in front of a movie or something. It showed someone in a hospital or something and it actually showed a smoker. I think that was a little more convincing 'cause it showed like what could happen, not a cartoonish version. But I think it's a little easier to watch (referring to the more light-hearted ads). Boy, 12-14, Seattle (80)

I think the scare tactic convinces more people, but the colorful musical versions would hold people's attention more. Boy, 12-14, Seattle (80)

Well, it's more colorful so that's more attractive... but then I saw one out of three people will die... it like this scares you immediately. Those are more effective, but they're not very attractive. It's all dark and creepy stuff. Girl, 12-14. Seattle (80)

The scary ones kind of make me turn off the TV, they freak me out a bit, but the scare me more and make me not want to smoke. Girl, 12-14, Seattle (80)

I think that the scary would work better. If you were a person for you smoke, it would probably scare you, and so you would want to stop smoking. But if you saw the No Stank You ones, then you probably just consider it and probably still be smoking. I'm not saying that the scary ones automatically stop you from smoking, but they probably have a better chance. Boy, 12-14, Seattle (81).

I think that the gross commercials get the point across more. Like a lot of times, they showed the inside of people's bodies. And it's like, real. Girl, 15-16, Spokane (100)

I'd say something gross, that would probably affect you either long-term or something, like a really bad outcome that would kind of scare you from even trying to smoke. Would probably be more effective. Boy, 15-16, Spokane (102)

Scared stays with you longer than entertained. Boy, 15-16, Spokane (104)

Yeah. I think the most effective anti-smoking commercial I ever saw, it was a few years ago, I think I was younger, but the lady with the hole in her throat, and it shows like smoke through it? That gave me nightmares for such a long time. Girl, 15-16, Spokane (104)

Well, when you think of an anti-smoking and, what is it that stays in your head? I think about things like, it kind of scares you. If anyone watches are a movie, it sticks with you. Boy, 15-16. Spokane (103)

Implications

The four focus groups used to research the effectiveness of the DOH's NSY anti-tobacco campaign produced findings that share what is and isn't working with the campaign. The DOH can use these findings to adjust the next phase of creative that will make campaign messaging more meaningful and effective for their target audience. By making the adjustments recommend below, the DOH will be better positioned to achieve their goal of preventing teenage smoking in Washington State.

As discussed in the results section, exposure to the NSY campaign is high. The current promotion mix – television and internet - is working well. Most participants reported having had seen the ads on television and fewer online. This feedback suggests that television spend is on target and the DOH could potentially increase spend for digital advertising. However, it should be noted that today's media savvy teenager can easily tune out digital ads that appear around their online activities. If the DOH does decide to invest more in digital, I recommend the creative be in the form of an interactive game that draws the viewer in and ultimately drives them to the campaign website.

My key recommendation for the DOH is to understand that young people between the ages 12-18 are widely different in terms of maturity. Simply, what is effective for a 12-year-old will not be for a 16-year-old. The current creative was more effective for participants in the 12-14-year-old groups, however there was a big disconnect for those in the 15-16-year-old groups. In fact, some felt that they were being "talked down" to, which as the respondent accurately stated, is something you should never do in a commercial.

As young people aged 15-18 years-old are at most risk of trying smoking for the first time it would be wise for the DOH to create commercials and content that resonates with them. The emerging trends from the focus group provide insights on what will be effective. This target age range will connect with advertisements that are authentic (show them), focus on peer pressure not to smoke, demonstrate how smoking can prevent them from fulfilling their potential, and is factual. Combining some of these elements into a well-produced and mature advertisement will create a sense of fear within this demographic and hopefully prevent them from trying cigarettes.

As much as we'd like, no mass media campaign will be able to reach everyone in the target audience. Any qualified marketer or communication professional will tell you it's important to track, measure, and adjust during the life of a campaign. By conducting these focus groups, the DOH has completed the first two steps (track and measure) and now has the ability to adjust their creative strategy to be more effective. The emerging trends included in this report, along with the detailed transcripts of the focus groups, candidly tell the DOH exactly what their target audience likes and doesn't like when being communicated to. While it is unreasonable to expect the DOH to implement all the emerging trends into new creative, including a couple and adjusting their promotion mix will result in a more meaningful campaign that will resonate with, and reach, their target audience.

Discussion Questions

1. *What issues will this research method and sampling procedures raise in terms of internal and external validity (projectability), sampling, reliability?*

Focus groups allow researchers to understand target audience members at a much deeper level than other research methods, but it should be noted that there are issues concerning internal and external validity, sampling methods, and reliability. Internal validity is a primary consideration in this study as we are attempting to prove a causal relationship between the NSY campaign and reduced smoking in young people. However, internal validity may be compromised if the moderator is too strict or lenient with the group, or if some participants dominate the discussion or devalue the opinions of others. This may lead to results that are influenced by the study and not representative of the true situation.

Regarding external validity, focus groups are widely known for their inability to create results that are high in external validity. This is due to their small and homogenous samples. To create results high in external validity researchers should use surveys that are distributed to large, diverse, and randomly chosen samples.

As we used two sampling methods to fill our focus groups, there are a variety of issues. First, with quota sampling, our research may select the sample non-randomly by taking the first students available who fit our criteria. With purposive sampling, our recruited guidance counselors may nominate students differently – some may choose their best students, some may choose their worst. As with quota, some guidance counselors may pick the first students they see.

For focus groups, reliability is a major issue. As you can see from the four conducted, none of the results were the same. There are of course common emerging trends, but no two answers are the same. This does not mean the results should not be trusted, they are accurate, this simply means results will be different each time and will require more scrutiny.

- 2. Given your answer to question 1, how should Department of Health administrators use the information generated by this study? What does this study provide to administrators in their desire to generate more effective tobacco use prevention messages?*

The DOH should consider the information generated by this study as direct feedback from their target audience. They should use the information provide to assist with develop new messaging and distribution strategies. They should not use this information as proof that their campaign is effective on a large scale. The results of this study provide the DOH with the thoughts, opinions, values, and desires of their target demographic. Essentially, the study provides the DOH with a guide to communicating effectively with young people in Washington State.

- 3. What are the limitations of this research? Given these limitations, how are these findings different from (perhaps better than or worse than) the focus groups conducted by the advertising agency?*

The most obvious limitation of this research is the inability to create results with high external validity. The thoughts and opinions of 45 participants do not reflect the entire population of 900,000 young people in Washington State. Furthermore, since the focus groups were conducted in urban areas, they do not reflect the values of rural residents, where tobacco use is more prevalent.

These findings are different than those of the advertising agency in two ways. First, our results were more critical of the creative. The agency did not include any feedback that cast their work in a negative light. Second, their research focused on more than the creative, e.g. their daily life, how they hang out. While our focus groups brought these topics to light, our moderators were not tasked with seeking out this information. The DOH can use this information in tandem with ours to plan their next campaign, however they should be aware of potential bias of agency's results in favor of the creative.

References

Austin, E. W., & Pinkleton, B. E. (2015). Strategic public relations management. New York: Taylor and Francis.