

Psychological Reactance and Effect of Health Warning Pictorial Messages Printed in Cigarette Packets in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

More than 500 million rupees was being spent per day in Sri Lanka on tobacco and alcohol and the low income groups are spending 35 percent of their earnings on tobacco and alcohol. Therefore, Sri Lankan government is making continuous effort to reduce and discourage smoking in the country and ordered to include health warning pictorial messages covering 80% of the cigarette packet in addition to the advertising restriction through public media for cigarettes and alcohol. But, according to many scholars, tobacco company advertisements to prevent smoking are, ineffective and, at worst, counterproductive. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to identify the effectiveness of health warning pictorial messages, among Sri Lankan males and to examine how the perceived effectiveness and intention to smoke vary according to the level of psychological reactance levels. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire taking seventy males as the sample on convenience basis. In Sri Lanka, there is no significant relationship between psychological reactance status and intention to smoke and there is no high perceived effectiveness of the pictorial advertisements. Therefore, the government intention to discourage smoking through health warning pictorial messages in cigarette packets is in vain.

Key words: Pictorial messages, Effectiveness, Psychological reactance, Intention to smoke

1. Introduction

In accordance with a July 11, 2014, Supreme Court order that came into effect on January 1, 2015, the leading tobacco manufacturer in Sri Lanka now must print health warnings on packs of cigarettes. The Ceylon Tobacco Company will be required to include pictures illustrating the dangers of tobacco on 60% of the area of the front and back panels of its

cigarette packages. Further, with effect from June 01st, 2015, the coverage of pictorial warning was increased from 60% to 80%.

There are seven graphic warnings, to be used for six months at a time that have been approved; the first shows a patient with heart disease in intensive care at a hospital. The picture is captioned in three languages, stating "smoking causes heart disease." But it has been revealed that numerous warning advertisements are counterproductive (Bialous & Shatenstein 2002, Henriksen et al 2006). According to Henriksen et al 2006 tobacco company advertisements to prevent smoking are, ineffective and, at worst, counterproductive. Similarly though the intention of American Legacy Foundation's "truth" campaign and Philip Morris's "Think. Don't Smoke" campaigns were to discourage youth smoking, it was found that Where as exposure to the "truth" campaign positively changed youths' attitudes toward tobacco, the Philip Morris campaign had a counterproductive influence (Matthew et al 2002). Hence the same thing may happen in the Sri Lankan context if too much pressure is given on anti smoking campaigns. According to ECONOMYNEXT, Ceylon Tobacco Company's (the monopolist in Sri Lankan cigarettes market) net profits rose 20 percent to 3.0 billion rupees in the quarter, giving earnings of 15.63 rupees per share. In the 6-months to June, 2016, the company reported earnings of 29.41 rupees per share on total profits of 5.5 billion rupees, up 21.4 percent from a year earlier. In the March 2015 quarter also CTC reported an 11 percent volume gain. Hence, according to the statistics, a doubt on effectiveness of the new rule will arise in anybody's mind. In order to address this issue this research focus on measuring the effectiveness of new 80% health warning pictorial messages on cigarette smoking among Sri Lankans. To identify the perceived effectiveness of health

warning pictorial messages, future intention to smoke, curiosity about tobacco use and tobacco industry sympathy among Sri Lankan males are the objectives of this research and further this research examines how the perceived effectiveness and intention to smoke vary according to the level of psychological reactance level of Sri Lankan males. Message familiarity also checked since many consumers buy loose cigarettes not in packets in Sri Lanka.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Psychological Reactance

Psychological reactance is a motivational state that functions to restore behavioral freedoms that are taken away or threatened with elimination (Brehm, 1966; Brehm & Brehm, 1981). The theory of psychological reactance explains how people are getting motivated when attempts are done to persuade adolescents not to do so. Opposite effect may be occurred by threatened messages according to the psychological reactance theory. According to Brehm's theory, messages that are perceived to reduce or threaten personal freedoms (for example, choosing to smoke) arouse a motivational state, reactance, which directs individuals toward re-establishing the lost or threatened freedom.

2.2. Intension to Smoke

According to Henriksen et al. (2006), exposure to antismoking information and messages may enhance prior beliefs about smoking and thus affect smoking-related behavioral intentions and attitudes. However, others argue that adolescents' exposure to antismoking messages or information has little effect on smoking behavior or smoking-related beliefs (Pechmann and Ratneshwar 1994). Some researchers have been also concerned with the factors which influence smoking (Pechmann and Knight 2002; Stanton, Barnett, and Silva 2004). These include family smoking habits, peer pressure, antismoking information (Harakeh et al. 2004; Smith and Stutts 1999), prior smoking behavior (Collins et al. 1987) and behavioral intention.

2.3. Curiosity about tobacco use

Peer influence, access to tobacco, media and advertising etc play a strong role in youth initiation to smoke (USDHHS 1994, 2012, 2014). These factors also may lead to tobacco initiation through increasing curiosity, leading to susceptibility, which in turn may lead to experimentation and established

use. (Pierce, 2005). Curiosity indicates interest, even in the absence of intentions to use it. Curiosity can lead to attention to behavior-relevant stimuli, such as advertising, as well as impulsive behavior (Pierce, 2005). Thus, curiosity may serve as an early warning for youth who may become susceptible and later progress to experimentation and established use. Curiosity has been associated with smoking experimentation and subsequent progression to established smoking, even after accounting for susceptibility (Pierce, 2005). Exposure to advertising is thought to be a key determinant of curiosity (USDHHS, 2012).

2.4. Perceived Effectiveness

Graphic messages and testimonials that evoke specific emotional responses that portray the serious health effects of smoking play a vital role in promoting smoking cessation (Davis et al, 2010). Use graphic images to depict the negative health consequences of smoking are effective in promoting cessation and reinforcing smokers' intentions to quit (Durkin, 2010).

3. Methodology

Seventy males were taken as the sample on convenience basis since in Sri Lanka; smoking does not popular among females. Validity and reliability of the variables were tested and ensured. Psychological reactance was measured using Hong Psychological Reactance Scale and it includes 14 items. Perceived effectiveness (05 items), intention to smoke (03 items) and curiosity about tobacco use (03 items) and tobacco industry sympathy (03 items) were measured according to Henriksen et al (2005). The above mentioned variables were measured by using the responses to the questionnaire in a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). In addition to the above discussed variables, a number of individual characteristics were measured. These included smoking status, familiarity of the pictorial messages, and family and close friends smoking status. Smoking status measured using nominal data indicating 1= daily smoker, 2= occasional smoker, 3= rare smoker and 4= never smoker. Familiarity of the pictorial messages was measured using nominal data indicating 1= has seen the message, 2= not seen but heard the message, 3= not either seen or heard.

Analysis and Interpretation

There are 24% of daily smokers, 10% of occasional smokers, 23% of rare smokers and 41 % consist of

people who never smoke cigarettes in the sample. Intention to smoke ($M=1.68$, $SD=0.873$) and curiosity about tobacco use ($M=1.97$, $SD=0.902$) among Sri Lankan younger male consumers are low according to the mean values of the respective variables. But, intention to smoke significant differ between people who daily smoke and people who have never smoked before ($p<0.05$, $F_{10,331}=1.092$). Intention to smoke in the future is higher among daily smokers than people who have never smoked before. Further there is no significant perception difference between daily smokers and people who have never smoked before regarding the effectiveness of 80% pictorial advertisements in cigarette packets ($p>0.05$, $F_{1,402}=0.302$). According to the analysis, there is no high perceived effectiveness of the pictorial advertisements ($M=3.06$, $SD=0.775$) and also there is no significant impact from perceived effectiveness on intention to smoke ($p>0.05$). Further, tobacco company sympathy among respondents is at a moderate level ($M=3.21$, $SD=0.953$).

73% of the respondents have seen the pictorial advertisements in cigarette packets. But intention to smoke is higher among people who have seen the advertisement than people have not seen the advertisement. And also there is a significant difference in intention to smoke between people who have seen and not seen the advertisements ($p<0.05$, $F_{13,744}=0.699$).

In daily smokers group, either of their family members smoke (47%), close friends smoke (23%) or both family and close friends are smoke (29%). But, no family and close friends are smoking in 21% of never smoking group. Further, there is no significant difference between smokers and non smokers regarding psychological reactance ($p>0.05$). Psychological reactance of both smokers ($M=2.78$) and non smokers ($M=2.74$) are at a moderate level. As well as there is no significant relationship between intention to smoke and psychological reactance status of the respondents ($p>0.05$).

4. Conclusions

In Sri Lanka, numerous activities have being taken to discourage smoking among the citizens of the country. Increasing taxes, banning advertising and health warning pictorial messages in cigarette packets are among them. According to many scholars, tobacco company advertisements to prevent smoking are, ineffective and, at worst, counterproductive (Henriksen et al (2005), Bialous & Shatenstein, (2002)). But in Sri Lanka, the situation is different. There is no significant relationship between psychological reactance status and intention to smoke. Further, there is no high

perceived effectiveness of the pictorial advertisements and also there is no significant impact from perceived effectiveness on intention to smoke. Therefore, the government intention to discourage smoking through health warning pictorial messages in cigarette packets is in vain.

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