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Cristel Antonia Russell , John D. Clapp & William DeJong

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Done 4: Analysis of a Failed Social Norms Marketing Campaign

Cristel Antonia Russell
School of Business
San Diego State University

John D. Clapp
School of Social Work
San Diego State University

William DeJong
School of Public Health
Boston University

College students commonly believe their peers engage in higher levels of dangerous drinking than is actually the case. Social norms marketing campaigns attempt to correct these misperceptions, decrease the perceived normative pressure to drink, and thereby drive down high-risk alcohol consumption. In this case study, we critically examined "Done 4," an unsuccessful social norms marketing campaign conducted as part of a comprehensive prevention trial at a large urban university. As part of this analysis, undergraduate marketing students were shown the principal print advertisement used in the campaign and asked to complete an advertising analysis questionnaire. The results of this case study suggest that the advertisement was poorly constructed, which decreased its effectiveness and led to confusion about the social norms message. We discuss implications of these findings for future prevention campaigns and new research.

College students commonly believe that their peers engage in higher levels of dangerous drinking than is actually the case, which may lead to greater perceived normative pressure to drink (Clapp & McDonnell, 2000; Perkins, 1997). Social norms

Requests for reprints should be sent to John Clapp, School of Social Work, San Diego State University, 5500 Campanile Drive, San Diego, CA 92182–4119. E-mail: jdclapp@mail.sdsu.edu

marketing campaigns use campus-based mass media designed to correct this misperception, decrease the perceived normative pressure to drink, and thereby drive down high-risk alcohol consumption (Perkins, 1997).

Social norms marketing campaigns have become a staple of campus-based prevention, yet there is little published research examining this approach from either a social marketing or health communications perspective (DeJong, 2002). In this case study, we critically examined Done 4, an unsuccessful social norms marketing campaign conducted at a large urban university located in the Southwestern United States.

DONE 4 CAMPAIGN

The Done 4 campaign's primary objective was to correct students' misperceptions of the campus drinking norm, which in turn was expected to reduce overall alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems. The campaign used a print advertisement that had been developed by a professional advertising agency. The advertisement was selected for two primary reasons. First, students in focus groups consistently ranked it as their favorite advertisement among those tested. Second, preliminary results of a pilot test at another university suggested that the advertisement was effective in correcting students' misperceptions of drinking norms. The advertisement was purchased from the advertising firm that developed it for time-limited use on the study campus.

The advertisement is dominated by a black-and-white photograph of a young, white, male student who is bent over a toilet, presumably vomiting. The student's jeans are riding down, exposing the top part of his buttocks. A pizza box and several empty beer cans are strewn on the floor. The phrase "Bottoms Up!" appears at the top in large letters. Near the bottom of the advertisement is the campaign slogan, "Done 4" plus the following normative message: "Over 3/4 of [university] students drink 4 or fewer drinks when they party." This statistic was drawn from a survey conducted at the study university during the same year of the campaign.

Materials for the semester-long campaign included the following: (a) one thousand 11-in. × 17-in. posters displayed around campus; (b) 16 full-page advertisements in the campus newspaper (one each Thursday of the semester); (c) two thousand five hundred 2-in. × 4-in. magnets distributed around campus; and (d) a week long, on-campus promotion, "Toss Your Cookies." For the promotion, an 8-ft banner of the advertisement hung over a toilet into which students threw rubber cookies for prizes. In addition, the advertisement was mentioned or featured in a campus newspaper article four additional times during the semester. This mix of communications strategies is typical of social norms marketing campaigns, which use multiple channels to increase audience exposure to the

message (Zimmerman, 1997). It is important to note that this advertisement was the only message used in this campaign and that the campaign was one component of a larger prevention project that employed other prevention strategies, including policy changes, responsible beverage service training, and law enforcement (Clapp, Voas, & Segars, 2001).

One month into the campaign, a telephone survey of randomly selected students ($N = 409$) was conducted to assess recognition and understanding of the campaign message (Clapp & McDonnell, 2000). To assess recognition, students were read a set of campaign slogans—Done 4 plus several bogus slogans—and asked if they recognized each one. Students who indicated they recognized the Done 4 slogan were then asked a series of follow-up questions concerning the purpose of the campaign and their level of exposure to campaign materials.

Only 13.9% of the surveyed students recognized the Done 4 slogan. Of those, 45.6% ($N = 26$) could accurately identify the purpose of the campaign as alcohol-related. The surveyed students reported drinking a mean of 4.3 drinks ($SD = 2.9$) when they party, but they thought most students at the university consumed a mean of 5.6 drinks ($SD = 2.3$) when they party. Accuracy of the perceived drinking norm did not differ significantly between students who recognized the slogan and those who did not.

The survey was replicated 4 months later at the end of the campaign using the same method ($N = 401$). Then only 9.5% of the surveyed students recognized the campaign slogan. Of those students, 31.6% ($N = 12$) could accurately identify the purpose of the campaign. In this wave, the perceived drinking norm for the typical number of drinks consumed by students when partying was 5.8 ($SD = 2.5$) drinks, whereas the true norm was 2.8 drinks ($SD = 3.0$). Again, accuracy of the perceived drinking norm did not differ significantly between students who recognized the slogan and those who did not.

Why did the Done 4 campaign fail? One possibility is that recall of the Done 4 slogan may have been hindered by the prominence of the photograph and the slogan's placement in the lower right corner rather than at the top of the advertisement (Ogilvy, 1983). In addition, the photograph does not reinforce the slogan's social norms message or help make it more memorable. Another possibility is suggested by the fact that students who recognized the slogan did not perceive the drinking norm more accurately. Process theories of attitude formation suggest that cognitive responses to an advertising message play a more important role in persuasion than does mere retention of the message (Greenwald, 1981). It is critical, therefore, to learn more about the types of thoughts stimulated by the print advertisement and the interplay between its visual and text components.

To inform our post hoc analysis of the campaign, we showed the advertisement to 74 students in an undergraduate marketing class and asked them to evaluate it. As part of the evaluation, we asked students to record their immediate thoughts while viewing the advertisement. This testing procedure, pioneered in

psychology by Greenwald (1968) and then introduced into advertising by Wright (1973), is based on the premise that people's recorded cognitive responses will match their actual thoughts when responding to a persuasive message and can be an important predictor of message effectiveness (Zinkhan & Martin, 1983). Our expectation was that this method of advertising analysis would enable us to learn why the campaign failed to change students' perceptions of the true drinking norm on campus.

METHOD

Participants

Seventy-four students (38 men and 36 women) participated in this study. Their mean age was 23.0 years (SD = 3.2), with the majority of respondents being between 21 and 25 years (N = 67). Two were younger than 21 years, and 5 were older than 25 years. Ethnically, the sample included 59.2% Whites, 12.7% Latinos, and 8.5% Asians, with the rest indicating "Other." Compared to demographics for the university, this sample slightly overrepresented men (46% in the population) and White students (44% in the population). The mean ages of the sample and the population were similar (23.8 years for the population).

Procedures

We administered a self-paced questionnaire at the beginning of two undergraduate marketing classes held at the same university where the Done 4 campaign was implemented. Because this was a marketing course, we presented the exercise as a hands-on application of advertising analysis. We instructed the respondents to look at the Done 4 advertisement, which was featured on the cover of the questionnaire, and then to answer a series of questions.

The first task was a cognitive response task in which the respondents wrote down the thoughts that went through their minds while viewing the advertisement. Thirteen bulleted points were provided for students to list their answers. Next, we asked the respondents to indicate their overall evaluations of the advertisement using two 7-point semantic differential items, the first ranging from 1 (*Good*) to 7 (*Bad*), and the second ranging from 1 (*I like it*) to 7 (*I don't like it*).

To analyze responses to the Done 4 advertisement, we applied a coding procedure commonly used in advertising testing (e.g., Lutz, MacKenzie, & Belch, 1983). Two trained coders, both blind to the study's purpose, categorized each cognitive response as either providing a general reaction to the advertisement or commenting specifically on its visual or copy (i.e., text) elements. The response listed

for each bulleted point was treated as a thought unit and coded on the basis of whether it related to the advertisement in general (e.g., "interesting ad"), its visual elements (e.g., "gross photo"), or its copy elements (e.g., "I doubt 75% of the students drink this little").

RESULTS

Reactions to the Done 4 Advertisement

Because the two evaluation rating scales were highly correlated ($r = .86$, $p < .01$), they were combined to create an overall attitude measure (7 = *I dislike it*/*Bad*). Using the combined measure, women were found to be significantly more negative toward the advertisement than men ($M = 4.5$ vs. 3.6), $t(72) = 2.06$, $p < .05$, whereas Latino respondents were more negative than White respondents ($M = 5.3$ vs. 3.8), $t(49) = 2.25$, $p < .05$. Note that the significant ethnic differences were particularly compelling given the relatively small number of Latinos in our sample ($N = 9$).

Cognitive Response Analysis

Liking for an advertisement is usually a good indicator of its effectiveness, as that attitude can generalize to the brand, product, or service being advertised (Brown & Stayman, 1992). In this case, however, the purpose of the Done 4 advertisement was to communicate a specific piece of information to correct misperceptions of student drinking norms, which the advertisement might have accomplished regardless of whether respondents had a positive attitude toward it. To gauge whether this new factual information was salient, we asked the respondents to write down their first thoughts about the advertisement, which two judges then coded.

Respondents listed between 0 and 13 thoughts, with an average of 7.0 items. The judges coded a total of 549 thoughts related to (a) the advertisement in general, (b) its visual elements, and (c) its copy elements. The judges agreed on 79.0% of their classifications (Cohen's improvement over chance = .58). In most cases (86.0%), disagreements occurred when one coder said an item referred to the advertisement's copy or visual elements, but the other coder categorized the item as general. We were interested primarily in those thoughts that could be related specifically to the advertisement's visual or copy elements. Hence, to be conservative, we reclassified all of these types of disputed items as general. With this revision, the remaining disagreements constituted only 2.9% of the items (Cohen's improvement over chance = .94).

The recorded thoughts were categorized as referring to the advertisement's visual elements ($M = 4.8$, $SD = 3.4$) or as general ($M = 1.53$, $SD = 1.5$). Relatively few comments ($M = .50$, $SD = 1.0$) related to the advertisement's copy elements. Correlation analyses showed that liking for the advertisement as measured by the general evaluation index (7 = *I don't like/bad*) was significantly associated with the total number of general thoughts ($r = .31$, $p < .01$) but not with the total number of thoughts related to the advertisement's visual or copy elements.

We also looked closely at the reactions triggered by the advertisement's visual and copy elements. As anticipated, thoughts related to visual elements mostly dealt with the negative consequences of drinking depicted in the photograph and feelings of disgust. Typical comments included "gross, distasteful"; "sick"; or "guy puking."

For the most part, thoughts related to the advertisement's copy reflected confusion or disagreement with the social norms message. In some cases, confusion emerged from the wording of the social norms message (e.g., "If you drink less than 4 drinks do you have a problem?"). In other cases, the slogan or other copy was misunderstood (e.g., "What does bottoms up mean?" or "Done 4?"). Disagreement with the social norms message was often expressed by challenging the survey results that were featured in the advertisement—"I highly doubt that 3/4 of students drink less than 4 drinks when they party," "Were students answering truthfully?," or "How many students (were) surveyed?" As noted previously, relatively few recorded responses focused on the advertisement's copy elements, indicating that the majority of respondents did not attend to the copy. Those who did reacted to it negatively.

Finally, it should be noted that some respondents commented on the design of the advertisement, in particular, the dominance of the photograph compared to the social norms message. For example, one respondent wrote that it was "hard to see real message." Another noted, "bottoms up (was) emphasized too much and the important message is in small print."

DISCUSSION

In this study, we examined students' reactions to an advertisement from a failed social norms marketing campaign using cognitive response analysis. The cognitive response task we used allowed us study comprehension and response to the advertisement, thus providing a post hoc tool to assess why the campaign failed. Message testing, based on a model of human response to communications (Belch & Belch, 2001), should examine reception, comprehension, and response to the stimulus because these ultimately determine attitude and behavioral changes (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

The advertisement was chosen because it had been developed by a professional advertising agency, it tested well in student focus groups, and had been used at another university. Typically, advertising agencies conduct focus groups to see whether members of the target audience like an advertisement and think it will be effective (DeJong & Winsten, 1998). In this case, however, the agency nonetheless failed to produce a successful advertisement. A chief reason for this failure was that positive attitude toward the advertisement, the key measure used by the agency for message selection, was actually irrelevant to the successful communication of new information about campus drinking norms. The campaign's success depended instead on that information being salient, understood, and memorable.

Advertising testing must be conducted and interpreted with caution: Members of the target audience are not necessarily in a position to know whether an advertisement will be effective. Focus group respondents, in particular, relying on their own intuitive psychology, are often drawn to humorous or fear-based approaches, yet the literature shows that such approaches have been extremely difficult to execute and often fail and therefore should be used only under limited circumstances (DeJong & Winsten, 1998; Hale & Dillard, 1995; Job, 1988, Roman & Maas, 1992).

The cognitive response procedure we used for the post hoc advertising testing is a far superior method (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Wright, 1973). Such "laboratory tests" (Belch & Belch, 2001) provide means to isolate the contribution of each component of an advertising message and their interplay in the process of attention, comprehension, and retention of the key message. Ideally, such tests should be conducted prior to the launch of the campaign at the concept-testing phase with a sample similar to the target audience. Unfortunately, the Done 4 campaign used traditional focus groups rather than this more formal testing process during the selection of campaign materials.

Although this analysis focused on attributes of the failed Done 4 advertisement, it is important to note that other factors may have also contributed to the failure of the overall campaign. First, it is possible that the duration of the campaign was insufficient. Uncontrolled evaluations of many campus based social norms campaigns had not seen changes in student alcohol consumption until the effort had been underway for 2 years (Haines & Spear, 1996; Johannessen, Collins, Mills-Nova, & Glider, 1999; Perkins & Craig, 2002). Additional research is needed to determine the optimal duration of such campaigns.

Second, the low rates of exposure to campaign materials found in our initial study suggest relying primarily on newspaper advertising and posters will not produce sufficient repetition of the message. Every campus provides multiple options, including student orientation packets, flyers, mailing inserts, e-mail messages, Web site homepages, table tents, and newspaper editorials. Future research is needed to evaluate such how such media might be combined to produce optimal exposure to campaign materials.

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