Research Proposal Draft: E-Cigarette Advertisement Platforms and

Their Effect on Adolescent Consumers

Sky Xavier

Christopher Finlay, Ph.D.

Communication Studies

*Abstract*

This research project seeks to find which media platform has the largest impact on adolescent smoking attitudes through a series of Juul e-cigarette advertisements. The increasing percentage of e-cigarette use among adolescents (Haught et. al, 2017) has raised great concern regarding their advertising methods, implying they are targeting underage users to hook new lifetime users. To lower the e-cigarette use rates among adolescents, it would be most effective to determine which media platform utilized by e-cigarette companies has the strongest effect on adolescents exposed to these advertisement campaigns. This is due to the reverse effect anti-cigarette campaigns have on adolescent consumers, encouraging usage rather than discouraging it (Nan & Zhao, 2016). If it can be determined which platform has the greatest impact on adolescent attitudes toward smoking, then the FDA could place regulations on these platforms. Ultimately, limiting adolescent exposure to these platforms and decreasing their use of e-cigarettes.

*Narrative*

With rising rates of teen e-cigarette usage, concern has been raised about how to lower these figures (Haught et. al, 2017). E-cigarette, or vape, use among adolescents is a point of concern as these devices utilize chemicals and water vapor to deliver nicotine to the user. Nicotine use in adolescence has been linked to: “the risk of developing psychiatric disorders and cognitive impairment in later life” (Goriounova & Mansvelder, 2012, p. 1) due to brain development occurring throughout adolescence (Goriounova & Mansvelder, 2012). The prevalence of underage addiction to these vapor devices containing high amounts of nicotine mirrors the reaction to the early days of cigarettes. In original cigarette advertisements, consistent messaging of social approval and glamour encouraged audiences to pick-up smoking (Nan & Zhao, 2016) just as seen in current e-cigarette advertisements. Over time as long-term studies began to show poor health effects associated with cigarettes, the deliberate advertisement and product placement of cigarettes diminished significantly due to FDA regulations (Haught et. al, 2017). Contrary to traditional cigarettes and tobacco products, e-cigarettes have not been grounded in long-term health effect studies. This has made it more difficult for the FDA to regulate e-cigarette advertisement and packaging. However, the FDA has begun to tackle the issue with another approach, anti-e-cigarette campaigns. As the dangers of cigarette use and increased adolescent use of e-cigarettes have received increasingly widespread awareness, there has been an increase of anti-smoking campaigns for both cigarettes and e-cigarettes. These campaigns include negative messaging related to smoking, in attempt to lower usage rates among current users and potential users. However, these anti-smoking campaigns have shown to encourage adolescent smoking behaviors rather than discourage them (Nan & Zhao, 2016). Although research has been done on the contents of the various forms of e-cigarette advertisements, there have yet to be studies done on the effectiveness of the media platform these advertisements are consumed through. Thus, I set out to answer my research question, “Which e-cigarette advertisement platform has the largest positive impact on adolescent attitudes toward e-cigarette smoking?”

Although cigarette portrayal in advertisement has become consistently negative, e-cigarette advisements have yet to do the same. E-cigarette companies and their advertisements have minor FDA regulations in comparison to cigarette advisements. Due to the recent development of e-cigarettes, there have been no long-term studies done to show significant impact on health. Rather, e-cigarettes are portrayed in a positive light through advertisement as tools to quit smoking cigarettes (Haught et. al, 2017). Popular e-cigarette companies such as Juul and Sourin spend on average over $18 million on advertising their products with positive messaging (Haught et. al, 2017). These messages which highlight perceived safety and positive outcomes associated with e-cigarettes compared to cigarettes. Due to the lack of long-term studies associated with side effects of e-cigarette use, these companies are able to advertise their products as a positive alternative to smoking cigarettes (Haught et. al, 2017). These companies heavily target susceptible audiences such as teenagers, a common practice in the tobacco industry to hook new lifelong users (Haught et. al, 2017). To reach a younger population, e-cigarette companies heavily market their products through online media platforms. A common strategy is to advertise through social media campaigns and social media accounts, allowing them to solidify their presence with young users (Haught et. al, 2017).

In 2017 the Center for Disease Control gathered data from multiple research studies looking at adolescent exposure rates to e-cigarette advertisements. They found that adolescents were exposed to e-cigarette advertisements in retail stores at the largest volume, then internet advertisements coming in second (CDC, 2017). The smallest amount of exposure occurred through newspaper and print ads (CDC, 2017). These e-cigarette advertisements contain consistent messaging relating to safety of use (Hart et. al, 2017), which would encourage rather than discourage use. Across advertisements adolescents were exposed to, the consistent highlighting of positive uses associated with e-cigarettes have caused a positive outlook on the health impacts of vaping among consumers (Hart et. al, 2017). Although these advertisements frame e-cigarettes as a means to quit smoking, college students have been shown to participate in vaping as a need to feed into the glamorous and popular portrayal of characteristics associated with e-cigarettes (Hart et. al, 2017). Thus, e-cigarettes have begun to hook new adolescent smokers rather than helping current smokers quit.

As e-cigarettes have increasingly been hooking adolescents on nicotine and smoking, anti-e-cigarette advertisements have become more common. However, these anti-e-cigarette campaigns have made the issue more prevalent among adolescents. Studies done on anti-cigarette advertisements show that these campaigns generate an effect opposite of what they intended in adolescent audiences (Nan & Zhao, 2016). Rather than discouraging adolescents from smoking, these anti-smoking campaigns increase adolescent awareness of the issue. (Nan & Zhao, 2016). By increasing awareness of the e-cigarette epidemic among adolescents, they are more probable to smoke as a means to fit in and earn their approval. This occurs because they believe their peers are engaging in these behaviors, so they begin to as well. Although this has only been tested with anti-cigarette campaigns, the similarities shared with anti-e-cigarette campaigns imply similar results. Hence, why I am interested in limiting adolescent exposure to e-cigarette advertisements, rather than investing larger amounts of funding into anti-smoking campaigns.

To make a significant change in rising adolescent vaping rates, it must first be determined which advertisement platform would be most impactful in influencing adolescent attitudes about e-cigarette usage. Previous research has been done regarding the effectiveness of e-cigarette advertisement content on adolescent consumers. However, there has yet to be research done on which media advertisement platform utilized by e-cigarette companies has the most impact on teenagers. For this study, I will test which advertisement platform utilized by the popular vape company, Juul, has the strongest impact on consumers aged 13-19. I chose to narrow the testing to Juul advertisements, as this is the most popular e-cigarette company and making growth in the market (Craver, 2018). To test the impact of Juul e-cigarette advertisements on adolescents, I will conduct a media effects study incorporating print and electronic platforms. Participants will be exposed to a variety of social media campaigns, videos, digital photo ads, and print ads created by Juul to promote their product. The media effects study will measure adolescent attitudes toward smoking before and after exposure to the selected Juul advertisements. Due to the multiple factors which influence adolescent opinions such as: peers, family beliefs, education, and popular culture, I will limit the testing of these factors by conducting a pre-screening test on the participants. The participating group will be comprised of two separate groups determined by the pre-screening test. One group will include participants who reported having close friends who smoke and smokers in their household. The other group will include participants who report having close friends who do not smoke and live in a non-smoking household. These two groups will take a Likert scale questionnaire before and after exposure to Juul advertisements to determine their attitudes toward smoking. These Likert scale questions will be administered to 100 students at each location I visit, split by 50 high-schoolers and 50 middle-schoolers. These will be conducted electronically to conserve paper and costs associated with printing.

If it can be determined which form of advertisement has the strongest impact on adolescents’ attitudes surrounding e-cigarette advertisements, regulations could then target these platforms to lessen adolescent exposure to vape advertisements on the said platform(s). The ultimate goal of this study is to decrease the rising rates of adolescent e-cigarette use through lessening their exposure to e-cigarette advertisements on platforms, which have the strongest impact on their attitudes toward smoking.

*References*

Center for Tobacco Products. (2018, August 13). Advertising and Promotion. Retrieved from <https://www.fda.gov/tobaccoproducts/labeling/marketingandadvertising/default.htm>

Center for Tobacco Products. (2018, February 11). Products, Guidance & Regulations - Vaporizers, E-Cigarettes, and other Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS). Retrieved from <https://www.fda.gov/TobaccoProducts/Labeling/ucm456610.htm>

Craver, R. (2018, January 10). Juul continues to expand e-cig market share gap with Vuse; Newport keeps ticking up. Retrieved from https://www.journalnow.com/business/juul-continues-to-expand-e-cig-market-share-gap-with/article\_a18fad85-7200-5bc1-a148-a4055bdf2e4b.html

E-cigarette Ads and Youth. (2017, March 23). Retrieved October 1, 2018, from <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/ecigarette-ads/index.html>

Goriounova, N. A., & Mansvelder, H. D. (2012). Short- and Long-Term Consequences of Nicotine Exposure during Adolescence for Prefrontal Cortex Neuronal Network Function. *Cold Spring Harbor Perspectives in Medicine,*1-14. doi:10.1101/cshperspect.a012120

Hart, P. E., Sears, C. G., Hart, J. L., & Walker, K. L. (2017). Electronic Cigarettes and Communication: An Examination of College Students’ Perceptions of Safety and Use. *Kentucky Journal of Communication,36*(1), 1533-3140, 35-51. Retrieved September 27, 2018, from http://electra.lmu.edu:2048/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&AN=129069722&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Jeong, M. (2018). Sharing Tobacco and E-Cigarette Information: Predicting its Occurrence and Valence among Youth and Young Adults. *Health Communication,33*(9), 1114-1123. doi:10.1080/10410236.2017.1331310

Kwok, R. (2017, December 4). Why Banning E-cigarette Ads on TV Could Backfire. Retrieved October 11, 2018, from https://insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu/article/why-banning-e-cigarette-ads-on-tv-could-backfire

Marynak, K., MPP, Gentzke, A., PhD, Wang, T. W., PhD, Neff, L., PhD, & King, B. A., PhD. (2018, March 15). Exposure to Electronic Cigarette Advertising Among Middle and High School Students — United States, 2014–2016. Retrieved October 12, 2018, from <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6710a3.htm?s_cid=mm6710a3_w>

Nan, X., & Zhao, X. (2015). The Mediating Role of Perceived Descriptive and Injunctive Norms in the Effects of Media Messages on Youth Smoking. *Journal of Health Communication,21*(1), 56-66. doi:10.1080/10810730.2015.1023958

Richtel, M., & Kaplan, S. (2018, August 27). Did Juul Lure Teenagers and Get 'Customers for Life'? Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/27/science/juul-vaping-teen-marketing.html>

Simon, S. (2018, March 19). Report: More and More Teens Seeing E-Cigarette Ads. Retrieved October 2, 2018, from https://www.cancer.org/latest-news/report-more-and-more-teens-seeing-e-cigarette-ads.html

Smoking & Tobacco Use. (2018, June 25). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/youth_data/tobacco_use/index.htm>

Sowles, S. J., Krauss, M. J., Connolly, S., & Cavazos-Rehg, P. A. (2016). A Content Analysis of Vaping Advertisements on Twitter, November 2014. *Preventing Chronic Disease,13*. doi:10.5888/pcd13.160274

Willis, E., Haught, M. J., & Il, Morris, D. (2017). Up in Vapor: Exploring the Health Messages of E-Cigarette Advertisements. *Health Communication,32*(3), 372-380. doi:10.1080/10410236.2016.1138388

*Budget*

The predicted budget for this research project is not extensive, as most materials required will not require money to acquire. The Likert scale questionnaires will be given through computers that schools I partner with will provide. This eliminates the cost of printing and renting equipment. The foreseen expenses include airfare travel and hotel accommodations. I will need three nights of overnight stay in hotels, which will total to roughly $300. The first study I will conduct in Los Angeles, which will not require cost coverage. I will need airfare to Northern California, one state in the Mid-West, one state on the East Coast, and back to Los Angeles. This will total to roughly $600. The total budget for this project will be around $900.