"I Believe The Children Are Our Future..."

Can 'Health Edu-tainment' and Other Drivers Influence Health Oriented Diet Change in Millennials?

AUTHORS

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PURPOSE

I believe the children are our future. Teach them well and let them lead the way... are the lyrics made famous by singer Whitney Houston that truly expresses the sentiment behind our collective responsibility for our young people and their collective future. Unfortunately, when it comes to the health of our young people, we are severely letting them down. In the United States, the number of overweight children and adolescents has doubled in the last two decades. In fact, Type 2 Diabetes is now the dominant form of diabetes in children and adolescents (Deckelbaum and Williams, 2012).

Moreover, the Food and Beverage industries view children and adolescents as key consumer group and a major market force. \$1 billion dollars is spent on media advertising to young consumers and \$3 billion is spent on packaging. (Story and French, 2004). In addition, young consumers in the U.S. watch more television and consume more media than ever before. From a cultural perspective, African Americans on average have four televisions in the household and watch 213 hours of television per month (Nielsen Report, 2011). Young Latinos watch 132 hours per week and stream 6:15 hours of video per month. (Nielson Report, 2012). Could "health edu-tainment" be the answer to improve the health outcomes for Millennials? Similarly, identifying the "drivers" that influence health behaviors, such as diet choice, promises increased ability to appropriately execute marketing mix elements and deliver integrated marketing communications for this segment.

One of the basic and widely used models to explain consumer intentions to engage in a given behavior is the Theory of Planed Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). According to this model, behavior is the culmination of a number of four discrete factors. According to the TPB, the more positive the person's attitude, the stronger the subjective norms and the greater the perceived control over the behavior, the more likely it is that the person will intend to perform the behavior. Several meta-analyses have shown that behavioral intention is predictable from the three components of the TPB (Armitage and Conner 2001; Godin and Kok 1996; Sheeran and Taylor 1999). As a result, we offer the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Attitude towards a new diet is positively related to intention to try a new diet.

Hypothesis 2: Perceived behavioral control over trying a new diet is positively associated with intention to try a new diet.

Hypothesis 3: Subjective norm regarding a diet is positively associated with intention to try a new diet.

Hypothesis 4: Self-health identity is negatively related to intention to try a new diet.

Given its ability to influence behavior, we believe "health edu-tainment is the answer to effectively impact the eating habits of Millennials. In the public health and policy arenas, scholars call this concept, "entertainment education" or "transformation entertainment." However, there is a dearth of health communications literature specific to marketing that focuses on "health edu-tainment" and how health information can be *packaged* in an engaging and relevant manner for a target audience in order to impact behavior and affect social change.

Moreover, from a cognitive perspective, the theory of positive affect and its effects on learning and decision making can also support the use of 'health edu-tainment.' Gregory et al. (1999) suggests that positive affect greatly influences the outcomes of many cognitive activities, from memory to problem solving. Isen (2001) states that positive affect augments learning, decision making and problem solving that leads to cognitive flexibility. Specifically, the author's research in the healthcare domain show that the benefits of positive affect strongly influences areas of doctor-patient communication (Isen, 2001). Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 5: Health Edu-tainment is more entertaining than programming that is considered entertaining or direct health programming.

Hypothesis 6: Health Edu-tainment results in the absorption of more educational information than programming that is considered direct health programming.

Hypothesis 7: Health Edu-tainment results in more healthy intentions than programming that is considered direct health programming.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To investigate the drivers of intention to change eating habits, we collected data from a sample of 245 undergraduate students who were instructed to consider their current, future and intended eating habits. The administered questionnaire was adapted according to a standard, widely used format for Theory of Planned behavior (Azjen 1991). Since the theory is well developed, items for Perceived behavioral control, Attitude, Subjective norm and behavioral intention were all adapted from preexisting TBP scales (Azjen 1991) and then adapted to reflect the food and diet context. Subjective norms regarding peer, family and friend diet influence was assessed with a four item scale and captured the extent to which these social reference groups influenced respondents' diet choices. Perceived behavioral control regarding trying a new diet in the future was also assessed.

Self-health identity was assessed with a four item scale adapted from Povey, Wellens and Connor (2001) measured the extent to which respondents agreed with the following statements: "I think of myself as: a healthy eater; someone who is concerned about the consequences of what I eat; someone who is concerned with healthy eating; I think my diet is very health; I think my diet is very health conscious."

Next, we compared health edu-tainment television programming, such as ABC's *Private Practice*, with direct health programming, like the nationally syndicated program, *The Doctors*. The Bravo television program, *Project Runway*, was treated as the control group since it was an example of purely entertainment programming. Both the *Private Practice* and *The Doctors* episodes featured health information on ADHD.

Our data sample of 155 undergraduate students was randomly separated into three conditions. The participants were instructed to watch the TV clip that appeared onscreen (either *Private Practice, The Doctors* or *Project Runway*). Afterwards, they answered questions about the television clip (i.e. Did you find the TV clip entertaining? Did you find the TV clip educational?) and their own health behaviors. The PANAS scale (Watson et al., 1988) was included to assess mood. Additionally, we included the *TV Program Connectedness Scale* (Russell et. al., 2004) to assist in better defining the relationship a viewer develops with the characters and context of a television program. The scale is comprised of a sixteen 5-point Likert scales made up of six factors- escape, fashion, imitation, modeling, aspiration and paraphernalia. Such scale items included- "I would love to meet the characters of ______;" "I relate to what happens on TV to my own life."

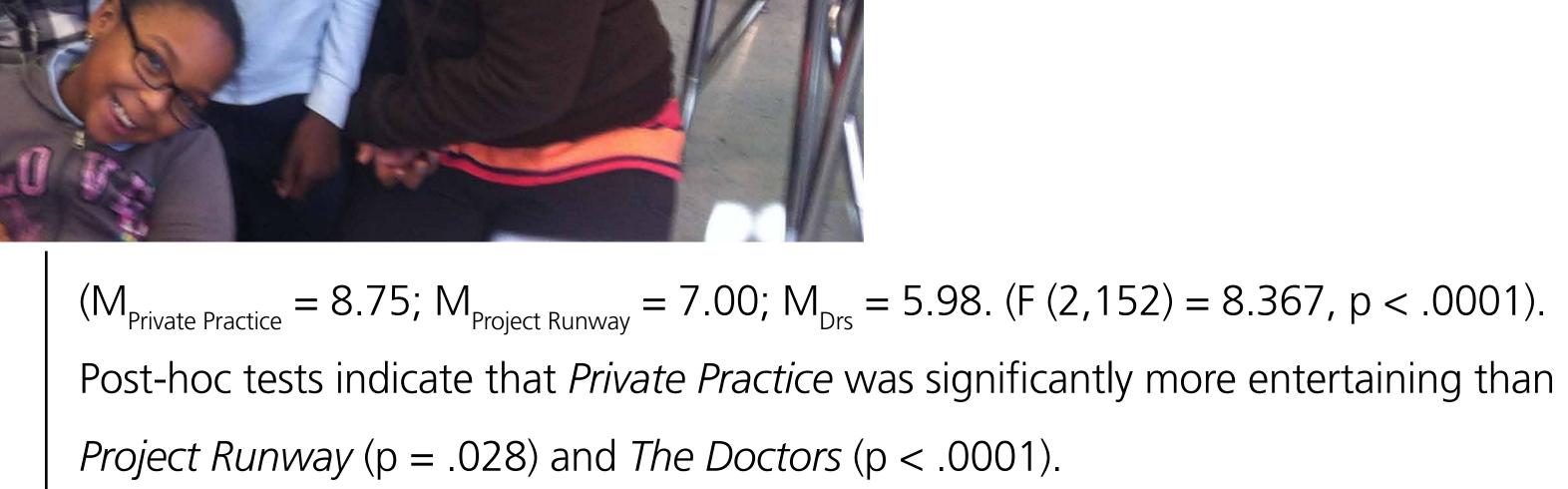
FINDINGS

A regression analysis was conducted to test the impact of the three attitudinal, behavioral and normative components as well as self- identity on intention to follow a new diet. Composite scores were created and used for hypothesis testing.

This variable was found to have a significant positive impact on intention to try a new diet (β =.183, p=.002). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported. Next, Hypothesis 2 states that subjective norm is positively associated with intention to try a new diet. This variable was operationalized as individuals' perception of their friends, family and peers on their own diet choices. Subjective norm had a positive significant impact on intention to try a new diet (=.131, p=.027). Thus hypothesis 2 is supported Hypothesis 3 argued that perceived behavioral control is positively associated with intention to try a new diet. (β =.739, p=.460).

The regression results are significant and negative (β =-4.501, p<.000). Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported. Overall, the Adjusted R Squared for the model was moderate at 29.3% indicating that the variables explained roughly thirty percent of the variance in intention to follow a new diet.

Next, we used a one-way ANOVA to test Hypothesis 5. Our results support H5 showing that *Private Practice* was more entertaining than *Project Runway* and *The Doctors*



Hypothesis 6 was also supported showing that Private Practice was more educational than *Project Runway* (p < .0001), however the difference between *Private Practice* and *The Doctors* was not significant (p = .937), indicating that while *Private Practice* was considered more entertaining, they were equally as educational with regards to ADHD $(M_{Private Practice} = 9.12; M_{Project Runway} = 3.13; M_{Drs} = 8.94, (F (2,152) = 90.597, p < .0001).$

Additionally, Hypothesis 7 was not significantly supported, but was directionally supported in that the health edu-tainment clip (*Private Practice*) increased health intentions when the participants were asked if they would be interested in receiving additional information on ADHD ($M_{Private Practice} = 5.98$; $M_{Project Runway} = 4.11$; $M_{Drs} = 5.18$; F (2,152) = 3.528, p = .031). Post hoc tests indicated that *Private Practice* and *The Doctors* both increased intentions to get additional information when compared to *Project Runway* (p = .024 and p = .291 respectively). However, *Private Practice* indicates directional support for hypothesis 3, the difference between *Private Practice* and *The Doctors* for intentions to get additional information on ADHD, was not significant (p = .508).

Furthermore, given the role positive affect plays in learning and decision-making, we ran a simple mediation analysis to determine whether positive affect mediates the relationship between TV clip and the absorption of educational information. As recommended by Hayes (2013), we subjected the data to a simple mediation analysis using the SPSS macro and methodology (model 4) with 5,000 bootstrapped samples. A 95% bootstrap confidence interval that did not include zero, revealed a significant indirect effect of TV clip on the absorption of educational information through positive affect (-.4999, -.0158). Thus, these findings indicate that positive affect likely drives the effect of TV clip on the absorption of educational information.

DISCUSSION

The results shed light on the categories of drivers of healthy diet intentions which fall into three primary categories: cost or access, social factors and individuals' self-identity as it pertains to health consciousness. Moreover, the results of this initial research could bring to the forefront the importance of using relevant methods and elements when packaging serious health information targeting Millennials. Ultimately, the key to making a difference in the lives of our young consumers and their health now and into the future may be the manner in which marketers communicate health messaging by achieving the right balance of educating <u>and</u> entertaining them.