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Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Australasian Marketing Journal

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/amj

The role of self-construal in resisting tobacco smoking

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Available onlineKeywords:
Non-smokers
Consumer resistance
Self-construal
Tongan
New Zealand

ABSTRACT

We interpreted depth interviews and personal observations of 29 Tongan and New Zealand European (NZE) women who self-identified as non-smokers to examine the role of self-construal in the creation and maintenance of their smoking-resistant identities. Our research offers substantive contributions to the smoking prevention literature because most prior work has been situated wholly within Western cultural contexts. We contribute methodologically by showing how a multicultural team-based approach can reap the advantages of interviewer–participant congruity whilst overcoming its limitations, thus paving the way for more fruitful qualitative research with minority groups. Our research also contributes theoretically to the self-construal literature by comparing the role of self-construal not just within the two groups but also across them. Our findings show that independent self-construal played a significant role in NZE women’s resistance to smoking. However, for Tongan women, both independent and interdependent self-construals played important roles in their smoking resistance. Our findings both confirm and extend the current view that there are marked differences between collectivist and independent societies. We extend this view because our findings contradict the notion that Tongan women are likely to only use an interdependent self-concept when deciding to resist smoking, suggesting instead that Tongan women negotiate their self-construals in ways that allow them to employ the positives from both Tongan values and Western world views. We suggest that future appeals to Pacific women to resist smoking should draw on both traditional Pacific values and modern Western independence.

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CHINESE ABSTRACT

我们阐释了29名自我认定为非吸烟者的汤加和新西兰欧洲（NZE）女性的深度访谈和个人观察，以便从确立和维持其抵制吸烟身份等方面，考察自我构念的作用。我们的研究为吸烟预防方面的文献提供了实质性的贡献，因为大部分前期著作都是完全以西方的文化为背景。我们通过阐述研究员的定位如何影响少数群体的人种学，从方法论角度作出贡献，以取得与太平洋地区各国人群相关的更丰硕的研究成果。我们的研究不仅比较两组内的自我构念的作用，也比较了两组之间的自我构念的作用，从而从理论上为自我构念类文献作出贡献。我们的研究结果表明，独立的自我构念在NZE女性抵制吸烟方面起到重要的作用。但是，对于汤加女性抵制吸烟方面而言，独立的和相互依赖的自我构念同时发挥重要的作用。我们的研究结果确认并扩展了目前的观点（即集体社会和独立社会之间存在显著性差异）。我们扩展了这个观点，因为我们的研究结果与认为汤加妇女在决定抵制吸烟时可能只使用相互依存的自我概念这一见解相互矛盾，我们的研究结果反而提示了汤加女性同时利用汤加的价值观念与西方的世界中的积极因素，并以此方式来处理自我构念。我们认为，今后在呼吁太平洋女性抵制吸烟时，应借鉴传统的太平洋价值观念和现代西方的独立性。

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1. Introduction

In 1964 the Surgeon General’s Report provided evidence of the harm smoking causes to public health. These negative effects include heart disease and lung cancer mortality (Proctor, 2012). Despite efforts to reduce smoking prevalence, tobacco smoking is still the leading cause of preventable death internationally (Burton et al.,

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2011; World Health Organization, 2015), motivating the New Zealand government to declare a goal for the country to be smoke-free by 2025 (Maubach et al., 2013). In an attempt to achieve this ambitious target, public policy makers have introduced many types of initiatives to reduce smoking. Some of these initiatives aim to ensure smokers quit smoking altogether, i.e. smoking cessation (Shiu et al., 2009).

However, Burton et al. (2013) discovered that some smoking reduction or cessation schemes, such as removing tobacco from display in retail outlets, have not significantly reduced the prevalence of smoking. The ineffectiveness of some policy initiatives is most likely because the addictive nature of nicotine (Cummings, 2015) makes it extremely difficult for smokers to give it up. Consequently, Hassan and Shiu (2015) suggest that public policy makers should focus on preventing smoking initiation. One example of an initiative to reduce smoking initiation might be the introduction of effective “social norm” campaigns that aim to make “not-smoking” a social norm (Hoek et al., 2011). However, very little is known about what makes such campaigns more or less effective in changing a prevailing consumption culture that is conducive to smoking.

Moreover, in developed countries throughout the world, greater proportions of indigenous people and minority ethnic populations (relative to the dominant majority) smoke (Bramley et al., 2005). This disparity is also true in New Zealand. One in four Pacific (24.7%) adults smoke, which is a significantly higher proportion than the New Zealand European (15.4%) and Asian (10.2%) populations (Ministry of Health, 2013). Furthermore, it is well documented that tobacco smoking amongst women in general in New Zealand has increased (Action on Smoking and Health New Zealand, 2014). In addition, Maori and Pacific youth are over-represented in the smoking statistics, and female members of some Pacific sub-groups are increasingly becoming smokers (Action on Smoking and Health New Zealand, 2014). Thus it is critical that social norm campaigns effectively target Maori and Pacific women and youth. Yet, since cultural values can and do influence attitudes and behaviours with respect to smoking (Hassan and Shiu, 2015), social norm campaigns have to be designed with the respective target population's culture in mind. Therefore it is important that researchers examine the intersection between the dominant consumer culture and its attempts to represent smoking as harmful and dangerous, and the ethnic cultures of minority groups.

Prior research has uncovered the significant influence that friends, family and society have on smoking initiation (Kong et al., 2012). Moreover, this interpersonal influence is even greater for Maori and Pacific peoples (Lee et al., 2003). This finding suggests that self-construal, the “constellation of thoughts, feelings, and actions concerning the relationship of the self to others and the self as distinct from others” (Singelis and Sharkey, 1995, p. 624), could shed light on how others influence a person's decision to smoke, or not to smoke. Moreover, understanding the ways people define themselves in relation to others is essential to enhancing the effectiveness of social marketing communications (Spassova and Lee, 2008) that focus on smoking prevention.

Furthermore, prior research indicates that advertising themes that are congruent with cultural values of the intended audience are more effective than advertisements that reflect values that are incongruent (Belk et al., 1985). Collectivist societies have different cultural values to those of individualist societies (Triandis, 1989). Hence, an individual's cultural worldview plays an important role in the perception and use of marketing communications to prevent smoking initiation. According to Hofstede's (1980) research on cultural dimensions, Pacific peoples would be classified as being part of a collectivist society. Since individuals with a dominant interdependent self-construal tend to be more receptive to interpersonal influence and therefore more susceptible to the influence of others (White et al., 2012), it may be particularly difficult for Pacific peoples

to resist smoking initiation. Furthermore, it is well known that smoking is a key shaper of identity for smokers, particularly in their youth (Hoek et al., 2011).

Despite these difficulties, some young Pacific women do manage to resist smoking. If we could understand how these people, who we presume would be particularly likely to be susceptible to interpersonal influence, are able to resist peer pressure to smoke, we might be able to design more effective social norm campaigns. Thus exploratory research is needed to investigate the role of self-construal in developing a smoking-resistant consumer identity.

2. Conceptual foundations

Consumer resistance, “the way in which individuals or groups practice a strategy of appropriation in response to structures of domination” (Poster, 1992, p. 1), is of growing interest to researchers in marketing (e.g. Giesler and Pohlmann, 2003; Hemetsberger, 2006; Kates and Belk, 2001; Kozinets and Handelman, 2004). Roux (2007) argues that the perspective of non-consumers can provide a more complete understanding for most consumption phenomena. Consequently, consumer resistance researchers have started to examine consumer resistant identities (Cherrier, 2009; Fernandez et al., 2011; Fry, 2011). To extend work on consumer resistance, we aim to understand the ways ethnicity influences how someone creates and maintains a smoking-resistant identity. We posit that self-construal plays a significant role in creating and maintaining a resistant identity towards tobacco smoking, in particular due to the influence of others and culture on the individual's definition of self or identity. According to Firat and Dholakia (1998), consumer resistance aims to defy the entire “consumption pattern” which does not align with personal values and beliefs. Thus, the way an individual construes their self in relation to others may determine how their values and beliefs are determined by ‘others’ within their in-groups.

Self and identity, whilst inter-related, are both abstract and constantly changing. Thus the way self is construed shapes the axiological and motivational constituents that go into forming and maintaining identity (Pilarska, 2014). Self-construal was initially introduced by Markus and Kitayama (1991) to conceptualise how individuals perceive themselves to be linked or not linked with others and how they consequently form a set of thoughts, feelings and actions with a concern for their connection or separation from others. In considering cultural variations of the self, Markus and Kitayama (1991) distinguished the conventional view of self in individualistic cultures from views of self in collectivistic cultures, and suggested two different types of self-construal, namely, independent and interdependent. Although all individuals develop both an independent self-construal and an interdependent self-construal (Brewer and Gardner, 1996; Oyserman et al., 2002; Singelis, 1994), within a specific culture, social customs, institutions, and beliefs tend to encourage the development of one over the other (Gudykunst and Lee, 2003; Kitayama et al., 1995; Zhang and Shrum, 2009). Hence, the independent and interdependent self-construals may be valued and emphasised differently within different cultures, resulting in a differential development of the two self-construals (Triandis, 1989).

In addition, Markus and Kitayama (1991) found that an independent perspective of self is a view predominantly held by those in Western cultures whereby individualism is dominant, and an interdependent perspective of the self is a view emphasised more than the independent self-construal in non-Western cultures, which are collectivistic. However, Kurman and Sriram (2002) argue that individuals within a collectivistic society could have “strong unique self-identities” (p. 72); hence an understanding of the differences between independent self-construal and interdependent self-construal within different cultures is vital as they result in different motivations for individual's behaviour (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). Markus and Kitayama (1991) assert that independent and

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