

Chapter One – Introduction

*“Advertising does not first get attention, and then create an emotion.
Advertising creates an emotion, which results in attention.”*

(Du Plessis, 2005, p.84)

Advertising and the effect it can have on an individual's behaviour is a phenomenon that the researcher found intriguing; for example, how could people believe that drinking 'exercise in a bottle' could absolve them from exercising and warrant no ill-effect from bingeing? Or in this instance, how could people believe that they would be perceived as more 'glamorous' or 'appealing' if they had a cigarette stuck between their lips?

This kind of thinking led the researcher to believe that the perceived reality portrayed by the media is really more complex than it looks. Writing this mini-dissertation was the most daunting task attempted. It is sincerely hoped that what has been learnt about the perceptions of smokers regarding anti-smoking advertising that employs fear-appeal techniques can be shared.

The aim of this research is to explore the perceptions held by smokers on anti-smoking advertising, particular with the incorporation of fear-appeal. A qualitative approach to research design, data gathering and data analysis was taken to accomplish this. The motivation behind this research programme was to help guide the National Council Against Smoking (NCAS) on the genre of advertising used in anti-smoking campaigns, to help them be successful and more effective.

Although it is very important to be able to measure the efficacy of any kind of advertising campaign, the NCAS does not have funding available to do this kind of testing - their one and only available measurement tool is the amount of calls made to their hotline number, after the advertising campaign. Increases in calls have been recorded during the two months that a campaign has run its course; therefore it is possible to infer that the campaign does have an impact on the smoking population. This is the NCAS' only method of measuring the efficacy of the campaigns flighted on South African Television – no additional research has been done.

1.1 Research Problem

Fear-appeal advertising may be associated with smokers' health-risk appraisal and may underlie their responses to these advertisements. Thus, this study aims to explore the perceptions of smokers to the 'milder' anti-smoking campaigns with little or no fear-appeal that are used in South Africa and compare them with advertisements that contain a higher level of fear-appeal.

In light of the fact that this study is qualitative and exploratory in nature and it thus aims to explore the themes underlying smokers' perceptions of fear-appeal advertising.

As part of this introduction, a description of the term fear-appeal advertising and its use throughout this article would be in order. Fear-appeal advertising can be defined as:

“An informative communication about a threat to an individual's well-being. Along with details of the threat itself, the communication suggests measures that can be taken to avoid such threats or reduce its impact. The use of frightening, visceral, offensive, taboo, realistic and emotion-provoking images, concepts and words, presented as facts or opinions are included to sell a product or idea.”

(Milne, Sheeran & Orbell, 2000, p.107)

1.2 Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 contains the literature review undertaken for this study. The objectives of this literature survey were firstly, to set out previous research in this field, with brief reference to the theoretical approaches taken during studies done on this phenomenon in the past. Secondly, to focus on and discuss current research in the field of advertising, specifically advertising with high levels of emotional content, as used in the realms of Western society and specifically those targeting South African adults who smoke. A rather tiresome task, as hardly any research has been done in this area. The reason for this lack is that the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) does not allow advertising that is 'high in shock-value' to be flighted on television. The third objective was to identify the relevant methodological and measurement issues experienced during previous research and to find literature on fear-appeal advertising and on public health campaigns. The purpose of the last objective is to highlight the relevance of this study to the current body of knowledge.

Chapter 3 concentrates on the theoretical framework and current literature on smoking and related legislation.

Chapter 4 contains the research design and methodology. In this chapter, the rationale behind focus groups is given; an appropriate methodological approach for a study of this kind.

Thematic analysis was applied to create themes and sub-themes; these facilitate in presenting the findings in an ordered manner and conveys meaning to the reader. The purpose of such thematic analysis is also to explore and describe the perceptions of smokers as a whole. This analytic technique is used to gather information on the acceptability and usability of new products and services, as well as to test consumers' reactions to new advertising campaigns or specific advertisements. This causes much of the information gathered during exploratory research to be unique (Fern, 2001). The reasoning behind the selected method was informed by the evident success of focus groups as a marketing tool in the private sector, which eventually led to public organisations adopting the focus group approach for their own marketing purposes – such as assessing the impact of health education campaigns (Bloor et al., 2001). Nevertheless, it is clear that the access that focus groups allow to group norms, group meanings and group processes, validates it in principle as a useful research method in its own right. In addition, focus groups could potentially act as a vehicle to extend public participation in the research process (Bloor et al., 2001). Even though constructs such as affection and cognition may be considered as subjective experiences, smokers are viewed as a group that has developed its own norms and values; thus, focus groups could be considered the most suitable method to elicit responses reflecting these norms.

Chapter 5 was allocated to the analysis and interpretation of focus group transcripts.

Chapter 6 concludes the study with a concise discussion of the results, limitations and recommendations for future research. The bulk of this study represents only a starting point on the journey of discovery – much more needs to be done before the impact of advertising on individuals' lives and the power it exerts over the decisions these individuals make, will be fully understood.

It is not the researcher's intention to claim that this study is all-encompassing or flawless; emphasis should rather be placed on its potential as an exploratory study, leaving ample space for further research.

By increasing the trustworthiness and credibility of the research and results, an alternative field has been exposed for future researchers to carry out comparable studies, stretching from the impact of fear-appeal advertising in South Africa to the effect of smokers' group-think on this addiction.