

*Social Marketing Quarterly: 16(4) Spring 2010*

www.socialmarketingquarterly.com

# Using Market Research to Characterize College Students and Identify Potential Targets for Influencing Health Behaviors

BY Carla J. Berg; Pamela M. Ling; Hongfei Guo; Michael Windle; Janet L. Thomas; Jasjit S. Ahluwalia; Lawrence C. An

## **Abstract**

Marketing campaigns, such as those developed by the tobacco industry, are based on market research, which defines segments of a population by assessing psychographic characteristics (i.e., attitudes, interests). This study uses a similar approach to define market segments of college smokers, to examine differences in their health behaviors (smoking, drinking, binge drinking, exercise, diet), and to determine the validity of these segments. A total of 2,265 undergraduate students aged 18-25 years completed a 108-item online survey in fall 2008 assessing demographic, psychographic (i.e., attitudes, interests), and health-related variables. Among the 753 students reporting past 30-day smoking, cluster analysis was conducted using 21 psychographic questions and identified three market segments - Stoic Individualists, Responsible Traditionalists, and Thrill-Seeking Socializers. We found that segment membership was related to frequency of alcohol use, binge drinking, and limiting dietary fat. We then developed three messages targeting each segment and conducted message testing to validate the segments on a subset of 73 smokers representing each segment in spring 2009. As hypothesized, each segment indicated greater relevance and salience for their respective message. These findings indicate that identifying qualitatively different subgroups of young adults through market research may inform the development of engaging interventions and health campaigns targeting college students

The logo for Social Marketing Quarterly, featuring the letters 'SMQ' in a large, bold, red sans-serif font. The 'Q' has a small tail that curves downwards and to the right.

SOCIAL MARKETING QUARTERLY