

Highlighting Group Differences

Using segmentation to meet the needs of different types of people

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Key messages

- > Segmentation is a key social marketing principle.
- > Segmentation allows the wants, needs and characteristics of smaller groups within a larger target audience to be identified.
- > Segmentation offers additional insights about the groups that are most likely to change.
- > An example study outlines how two distinct segments were identified within one student population.
- > This segmentation analysis highlighted that it is essential to focus on making healthful eating opportunities more available – for example, ensuring the availability of food outlets offering healthy options and offering healthy breakfasts for students.

Introduction

Social marketing can change behaviors for the better. It has, for example, been used in healthy eating¹ and alcohol education.² Segmentation is a key marketing principle, and it is included in all widely recognized social marketing frameworks.³⁻⁶ The objective of segmentation is to divide a heterogeneous market into homogeneous consumer groups⁷ based on similarities. Segmentation then guides strategic planning and decision-making, ensuring we plan for as many different types of people as we can.⁸

Large multinational corporations recognize that we are all different. Companies such as Amazon and Netflix can cater to

our personal preferences. In most behavior change settings, this one-to-one focus is not always practical or feasible. The segmentation process is an excellent compromise, allowing differences within populations to be discovered and the emergence of insights that can assist us to reach more people.

“Segmentation can be used to discover unique needs, desires, wants and tendencies for different groups within a target population”

Segmentation discovers needs, desires, wants and tendencies among groups within a target population,^{5,9,10} and when we apply segmentation different responses to one program can be seen.^{2,11} The segmentation process follows three steps:

1. Finding homogeneous segments within a bigger heterogeneous group.
2. Assessing and choosing one or several segment(s) to target.
3. Developing a program, service or communication strategy matched to one or more target segment(s).¹²

Segmentation is effective.^{13,14} Segmentation delivers insights that facilitate understanding of the groups that are most likely to change, and applying segmentation means you can deliver programs, products and services that uniquely cater to different groups. By applying segmentation, different group interests are accommodated, which in turn delivers better outcomes.¹⁵

Segmentation discovers different groups of people using a range of measures. These might be demographic, psychographic and behavioral data (e.g., eating behavior), as well as geographic data. Let us take a look at an example of eating behavior. Here, demographic factors (describing ourselves), psychographic factors (describing how we think) and behavioral



Plate photograph to enumerate food selections demonstrating behavioral data

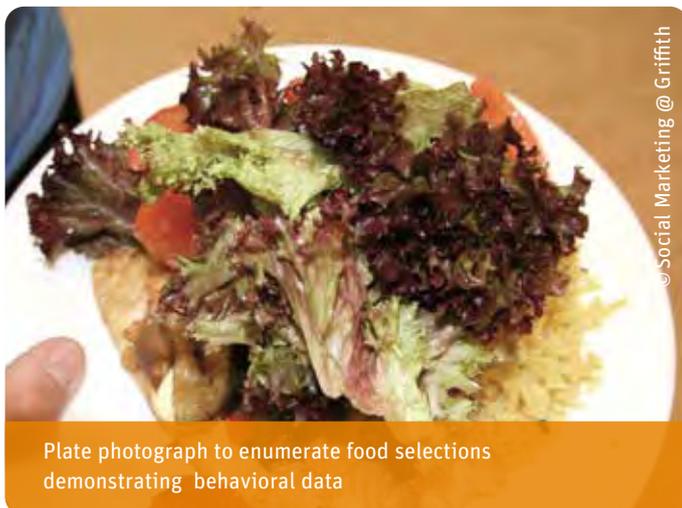


Plate photograph to enumerate food selections demonstrating behavioral data

factors (describing what we do) are applied in order to identify segments within one student population.

How do we identify segments?

Young adults studying at three universities in South East Queensland, Australia, were surveyed; full details of this study are available in our forthcoming paper.¹⁶ Participation in the

survey was voluntary and completely anonymous. Survey respondents were given an equal chance of winning one of five AUD\$50 gift vouchers. A sample of 475 young adults completed the survey. The sample consisted of high school educated (48.6 percent) women (77.1 percent). Most of the respondents were 21-year-olds (11.6 percent), followed by 20- and 23-year-olds (both 10.4 percent). Half of the sample (55.4 percent) reported always eating breakfast and nearly half (43.1 percent) reported always eating at least two portions (200 g) of vegetables on a daily basis and at least two portions (200 g) of fruit daily (43.1 percent).

The survey assessed food habits and eating behavior – specifically, breakfast intake, the number of meals consumed daily, the consumption of fruit and vegetables on a daily basis and the daily consumption of both alcohol and desserts.¹⁷ A four-point Likert scale with eight items was used to measure eating behavior according to four categories: never, sometimes, often and always. The answer options represented a score from zero to three; the lowest score was assigned to the least healthy option and the highest score to the healthiest option, generating an overall eating behavior score for each participant (zero being the lowest and 24 the highest possible score).¹⁷

The survey continued by assessing the motivation, opportunity and ability to eat healthily. Six items drawn from previous studies¹⁸ were used to measure motivation (health and weight control), and three items were used to measure opportunity (cooking fruit and vegetables) and three items measured ability (shopping for fruit and vegetables). Seven-point Likert scales were used to measure the participants' motivation, opportunity and ability to eat healthily, using the categories: never, rarely, occasionally, sometimes, frequently, usually and always. The final section of the survey comprised demographic questions.

Results

Two distinguishable segments (Breakfast Skippers and Weight Conscious) were identified from the sample, using two-step cluster analysis in IBM SPSS Statistics version 25. The seg-

TABLE 1: Summary of the two-step cluster analysis results

Segmentation variable	Importance	Breakfast Skippers <i>n</i> = 159 (48.6%)	Weight Conscious <i>n</i> = 168 (51.4%)	Significance*
Education	1.00	High school (100%)	Bachelor's degree (38.7%)	.000
Motivation	0.04	4.4 (1.4)	4.9 (1.2)	.002
Turconi ¹⁷ eating behavior score	0.03	15.9	16.9	.009
Ability	0.02	4.5 (1.5)	4.9 (1.5)	.024
Opportunity	0.02	4.3 (1.5)	4.7 (1.5)	.041

**P* < .001

TABLE 2: Segment profiling variables

	Total 100% n = 327	Breakfast Skippers n = 159 (48.6%)	Weight Conscious n = 168 (51.4%)	P
Education*				.000
High school		100%	0%	
Graduate certificate and above		0%	100%	
Age*				.000
20–24		77.7%	30.9%	
25–29		14.9%	40%	
30–35		7.4%	29.1%	
BMI*		24.3 (5.8)	26.9 (13.8)	.035
Motivation				
I eat what I eat ...				
... to maintain a balanced diet*		4.7 (1.9)	5.2 (1.7)	.014
... because it's healthy*		4.9 (1.4)	5.3 (1.4)	.026
... because I watch my weight*		3.7 (1.8)	4.2 (1.7)	.013
Ability				
... because I have the skills to shop for my own food*		5.0 (1.8)	5.4 (1.7)	.023
Turconi score				
You eat breakfast*		2.1 (1.0)	2.3 (0.9)	.044
You eat at least 200 g of vegetables*		2.1 (0.8)	2.3 (0.8)	.023
You drink at least 1–1.5 L of water*		2.1 (1.0)	2.4 (0.7)	.002
Opportunity				
I eat what I eat ...				
... because there are lots of different fruits and vegetables available*		4.4 (1.8)	4.9 (1.7)	.016

*Significant at the 0.05 level or less

ments were named based on the differences between profiling variables (Weight Conscious being motivated due to watching their weight, and Breakfast Skippers consuming breakfast less frequently). The segments are outlined in [Table 1](#).

Two segments were identified in this study. Segment 1 (Breakfast Skippers; 48.6 percent) was slightly smaller than Segment 2 (Weight Conscious; 51.4 percent). The results show that Breakfast Skippers consisted of respondents educated to high school level, whereas most of the Weight Conscious segment had achieved additional qualifications after leaving high school (38.7 percent). The respondents in the Weight Conscious segment possessed a stronger motivation to eat healthily ($M = 4.9$, $SD = 1.2$), had a stronger belief in their ability to eat healthily ($M = 4.9$, $SD = 1.5$), and they felt they had more opportunity ($M = 4.7$, $SD = 1.5$) to eat healthily compared with Breakfast Skippers. Breakfast Skippers reported a lower Turconi eating behavior score (15.9) indicating they had less healthful eating habits compared with Weight Conscious (16.9). The detailed results of the segments are presented in [Table 2](#).

“By applying segmentation, insights that can be used to change the eating behavior of different types of young adults can be obtained”

Discussion

By applying segmentation, insights that can be used to change the eating behavior of different types of young adults can be discovered. Two distinguishable segments (Breakfast Skippers and Weight Conscious) were discovered, and each had singular beliefs about what motivates them to eat more healthily, the different opportunities they have to eat healthily and their ability to make healthy food for themselves. This study demonstrates how segmentation can be applied to provide useful insights for social marketers working on improving the eating habits of young adults.



Communication used in the GO FOOD programs to emphasize the availability of healthy options

One or more social marketing interventions could be used to target the two segments. The factors motivating Weight Conscious to eat healthily in comparison with Breakfast Skippers are maintaining a balanced diet, a willingness to consume food that is healthy and being conscious of their weight. Weight Conscious also reported a higher ability to purchase their own food, better availability of fruit and vegetables and being more skillful compared with Breakfast Skippers. Consistently, Weight Conscious were also more likely to drink at least 1 L of water and eat two portions of vegetables on a daily basis in comparison to Breakfast Skippers.

In light of the results, the attitudes of Breakfast Skippers could be targeted by social marketing interventions to strengthen positive perceptions of buying and cooking healthy foods so as to increase healthful eating behavior. Interventions might benefit from reinforcing the beliefs of Breakfast Skippers about the enjoyability and benefits of healthful eating, especially as the levels of motivation, opportunity and ability and their Turconi eating behavior scores were lowest of the two segments. Promotional items such as a 1 L water bottle and ensuring that water fountains are provided are examples of strategies that can be applied to increase the amount of water consumed.

“Social marketing interventions can enhance environmental support for healthful eating”

Additionally, social marketing interventions can enhance environmental support for healthful eating along with the previously outlined individual approaches. Evidence showing the value of environmental support is available. Carins et al., for example, took advantage of environmental support by altering the food environment in a way that paying customers were able to choose more of the healthiest foods from the available options (making healthier alternatives more prominent),¹ whereas Sanigorski et al. created a program that sold healthy lunch (combo) packs in school cafeterias.¹⁹ Different segments can be engaged in healthful eating behavior by finding factors that reduce the barriers and make healthful eating easier and more enjoyable.

Increasing healthful eating opportunities on the university campus – for instance, ‘come and try free healthy breakfasts’ communications combined with discount vouchers to food outlets – would make healthful eating opportunities more accessible. Moreover, the number of healthy food outlets on campus should be increased by university management. Social marketers could also get local supermarkets involved with universities by negotiating a student discount on fruit and vegetables purchased through online delivery providers.

“University management should prioritize increasing the number of healthy food outlets on campus”

Conclusions

Segmentation in social marketing has proven to be an effective method to target messages to reach specific groups, and to meet the needs and wants of these groups in order to achieve attitude and behavior change. Two distinct segments were revealed in a young adult population in a healthful eating context, and suggestions on how to engage these segments in healthful eating programs were provided, emphasizing a focus on attitudes towards healthful eating and reinforcing the beliefs that healthful eating is enjoyable. The role of environmental support in encouraging healthful eating was also noted by making it easier to select healthful options.

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A stylized, minimalist illustration of a computer monitor. The monitor is represented by a large, rounded rectangle with a thick orange border. Below the rectangle is a trapezoidal shape representing the base of the monitor, also in orange. The entire graphic is centered at the bottom of the page.