An Investigation of the Relationships between College Students' Health literacy, Health Knowledge, Health Beliefs, and Smoking Behavior

Zhaohui Su, Doctoral student

Department of Advertising and Public Relations, Moody College of Communication, The University of Texas at Austin

BACKGROUND

Smoking causes a myriad of diseases (Lee, 2012; Sturgis & Cinciripini, 2007). It is also responsible for 17.3 million premature deaths in the U.S. from 1964 to 2012 (Holford et al., 2014). Young adults in the U.S. have the highest smoking rates among all age groups (Rock et al., 2007; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2010). Previous finding indicates that if smokers quit smoking before age 30, much of the harm caused by smoking could be alleviated (Doll et al., 2004). Considering that around 40% of young adults between age 18 to 24 attend college (Pew Research Center, 2009), it is imperative to gain an in-depth understanding of the factors that may strongly related to college students' smoking behavior.

Even though previous research has investigated the relationship between health literacy, health knowledge, health beliefs, and smoking behaviors separately (e.g., Mazanov & Byrne, 2007), little has compared the strength of these relationships in the same context. A thorough understanding of which health-related factors, health literacy, health knowledge, or college students' health beliefs has the strongest relationship with college students' smoking behaviors can yield great insights into creating effective tailored health promotion or smoking prevention campaigns.

OBEJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to investigate the strength of relationships between health literacy, health knowledge, health beliefs, and smoking behaviors of college students in the U.S.

Conceptual Model: An Adapted TPB Model
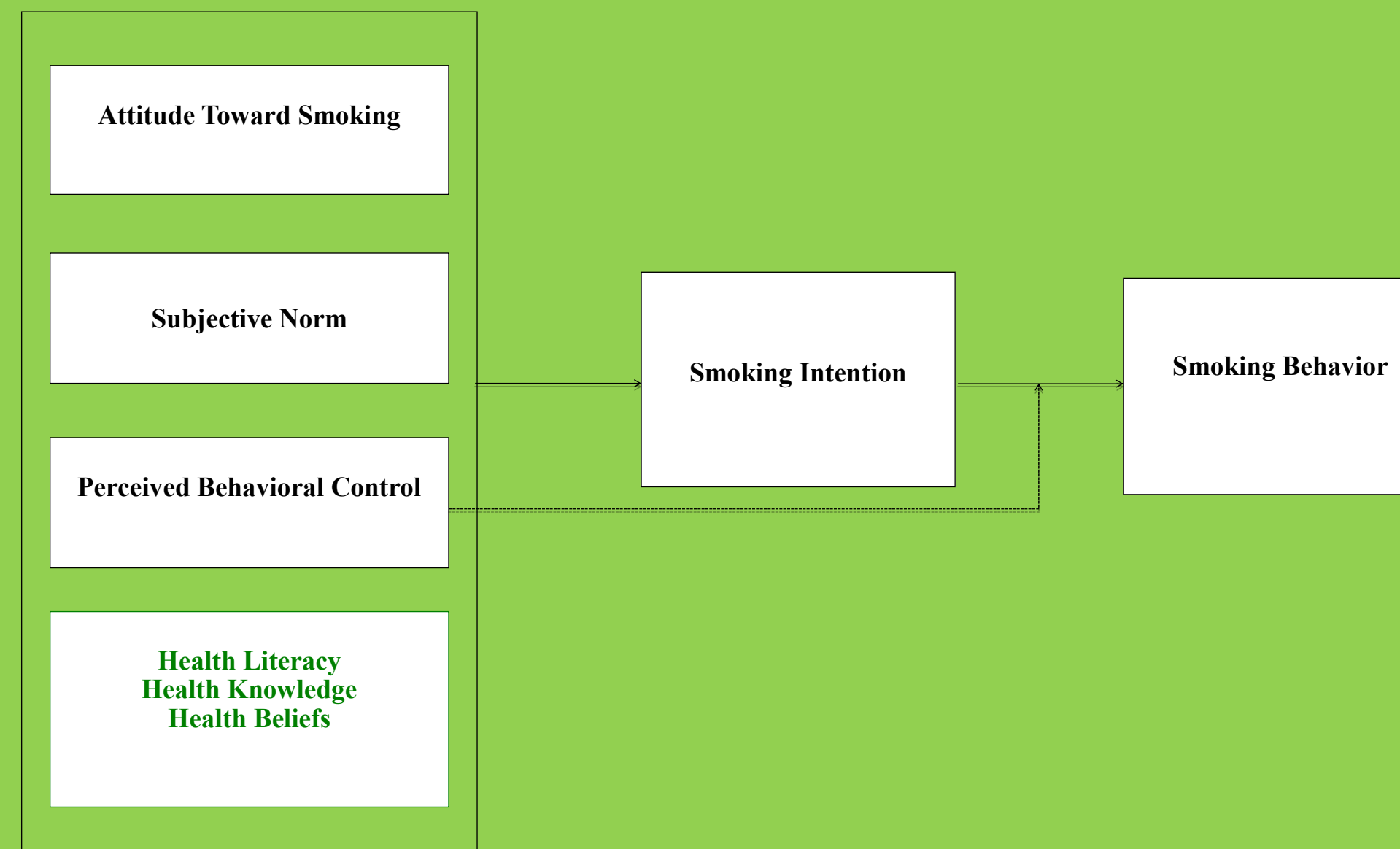
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to answer the research question, that is, what are the relationships between college students' health literacy, health knowledge, health beliefs, and smoking behavior, the theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1991) will be adopted as the theoretical model to guide the research design. The underlying rationale of the TPB is that individuals' behavior are predicted by their behavior intentions, which were further predicted by their attitudes toward the behaviors, perceived social support, social norms, and perceived behavior control (Ajzen, 1991). Based on the TPB, this study proposes that college students' smoking behavior is predicted by their smoking intentions, which are influenced by 1) their attitudes toward smoking, 2) how they perceive their significant others will approve or disapprove their smoking behaviors, 3) their perceived behavior control over smoking and 5) their health literacy, health knowledge, and health beliefs.

METHODS

This study adopts a cross-sectional, self-reported survey design. This survey is designed based on the theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1991) framework, which includes the TPB measures, health literacy, health knowledge, health beliefs, and smoking behavior measures, and demographic questions. Around 300 college student participants will be recruited from a large southern university. The surveys will be distributed online, using the online Qualtrics (Version 2014) survey distribution platform. The participants will be asked to fill out the survey online after they read and agreed with the consent form.. Participants will be asked questions regarding their demographics information, attitudes toward smoking, subjective norm, perceived behavior control, health literacy, health knowledge, health beliefs, smoking intention, and smoking behavior.

Health literacy will be measured with the Newest Vital Sign scale (Weiss et al., 2005), health belief will be measured with the Health Orientation Scale (HOS) (Snell et al., 1991), health knowledge will be measured with the Smoking Consequences Questionnaire—Adult (SCQ-A) (Copeland et al., 1995), smoking behavior will be measure with the Fagerström Test for Nicotine Dependence instrument (FTNC; Heatherton et al., 1991).

Using SPSS (Version 20.0), statistical analyses such as standard descriptive and inferential statistics will be performed on the data obtained from the surveys in order to answer the research question.

EXPECTED FINDINGS

This study is interested in examining the relationships between health literacy, health knowledge, health beliefs, and smoking behavior. The TPB model was adopted as the theoretical framework to guide the research design. The expected results of this study are: 1) knowledge and better understanding of the strength of the relationships between health literacy, health knowledge, health beliefs, and smoking behavior and 2) understanding the roles of health literacy, health knowledge, health beliefs in predicting college students' smoking behaviors.

REFERENCES: UPON REQUEST