

An Exploration of Attitudes towards Electronic Cigarettes towards Smokers

Rakkhini Periasamy

MBA Business Administration



ABSTRACT

Electronic cigarettes are an emerging phenomenon that is becoming increasingly popular with smokers worldwide. Awareness and use of electronic cigarettes have increased dramatically. As the popularity increases it is important to explore more about the characteristics, attitudes and beliefs of smokers.

The aim of this dissertation is to explore attitudes towards electronic cigarettes among smokers and to identify through primary research the linkage between attitudes and behavior. Considering an increase in demand and explosion of electronic cigarettes in the European market in the past four years, this study results will help electronic cigarette companies know more about their consumers and the study will also contribute to the research knowledge as this study will be one of the first studies that explores attitude of smokers towards electronic cigarettes.

The primary research was conducted using qualitative design through the use of focus groups. Two focus groups were conducted with electronic cigarette smokers and tobacco cigarette smokers. The findings of the study were analyzed and discussed with regards to objectives, sub-objectives and relevant literature. The findings revealed gaps in knowledge about the awareness, safety and efficacy of electronic cigarettes. Moreover the arguments were fueled with uncertainties regarding the long term use of electronic cigarettes and their regulations. Overall the users of electronic cigarettes displayed an extremely positive attitude. On the contrary the tobacco cigarette users had a mixed attitude of both positive and negative towards electronic cigarettes. Furthermore it was noted that there was a lack in long term proven studies for electronic cigarettes which was causing debates and high doubts about the product which resulted in a negative attitude in the minority.

Finally implications for further research include the attitudes of non-smokers and researching the topic with the use of questionnaires, observational studies and case studies is a recommendation for future research.

INTRODUCTION

Electronic cigarettes are one of today's most discussed and controversial issues in social, psychological, tobacco control and public health. (Theodore et al, 2012). Electronic cigarette are increasingly chosen by people trying to reduce smoking tobacco cigarettes. (Polosa et al, 2013) Between 2010 to 2014 there has been an explosion of electronic cigarettes worldwide and increase in their sales. (Marketline, 2014). "Electronic cigarettes have been described as the tobacco world's first truly "disruptive technology," defined by the Harvard Business Review as "a new technology that unexpectedly displaces an established technology." (Thomas and Glynn, 2014, pp.165). Moreover without long term research into the product safety, efficacy and regulations this product is exploding in the marketplace this issue needs to be considered from a global perspective of business, and consumer perception this is the reason this research merits to be analyzed and investigated.

In answering the following research questions

- What are smoker's attitudes towards electronic cigarettes?
- Is electronic cigarette a replacement for traditional cigarette?
- Has the cost effectiveness over regular cigarettes caused more people to use electronic cigarettes?
- Are people switching over to electronic cigarettes considering their less harmful effects over tobacco?

To answer the research questions the following research objectives are proposed

- To explore the attitudes towards electronic cigarettes among smokers.
- To analyze consumer attitude towards electronic cigarette as a replacement for tobacco cigarettes
- To determine the impact of cost factor on attitude towards electronic cigarettes
- To discover if electronic cigarettes perceived as less harmful than tobacco cigarettes has led to a more positive attitude among smokers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research identified the external and internal factors affecting attitude of the consumers towards the product. (Preloaf, 2003) noted that attitude is a learned process which are strongly linked to behavior. Attitude is formed as a result of learning process, as a result of the influence of external and internal factors like social media, friends, family and experiences or through the use of a product. Once formed it is hard to be influenced and harder to be changed. This is made use of by big companies in selling their products through advertising, and social media.

The literature review also defined attitudes and behavior and identified a linkage between these two variables. The literature also discussed the impact of cost and health benefits of electronic cigarettes which were the reasons smokers used electronic cigarettes. Overview of the electronic cigarette industry showed stupendous growth in the market place for these products. The age groups that were more likely using electronic cigarettes were between 35-55 is shown in the graph below : (Emily Krol, 2013 Mintel report)consisting of heavy tobacco smokers who are determined in using electronic cigarettes for its benefits over tobacco cigarettes.

METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the research questions and objectives this research used qualitative analysis through two focus groups. (Saunders et al 2012). The research design methods used in this study are tabulated below.

Research design	methods
Research philosophy	Interpretivism and subjectivism
Research approach	Inductive approach
Research strategy	Survey strategy
Research choice	Qualitative study
Time horizon	Cross-section

The sample group one consisted of candidates who smoke electronic cigarettes between the age range of 27-55 with a male predilection and participants smoking electronic cigarettes for a period of six months and more. The second group consisted of candidates who smoke tobacco cigarettes age ranging from 25-50. All the participants have been smoking tobacco cigarettes for the past three years or more. Both the studies took place in Dublin business school lecture hall on 19th July and 1st august. The study used the focus group script as the guidelines for the questions which is mentioned in the appendix 2.

RESULTS

Data was analysed using Miles and Huberman (2002) methods which is
Data reduction
Data display
Conclusion drawing and verification

The results were discussed in themes. Overall the results showed that users of electronic cigarettes had a positive attitude towards electronic cigarettes from experiencing their benefits over tobacco cigarettes. On the other hand the tobacco smokers had a mixed attitude towards electronic cigarettes, and a minority had a negative attitude towards electronic cigarettes due to lack of research in the long term use safety and efficacy.

DISCUSSION

In the discussion part of the dissertation the results of the qualitative data are taken into consideration dividing them into seven themes and discussed in accordance with the objectives and sub-objectives.

It was found that the key factors which were responsible for smoker's knowledge, awareness and use of electronic cigarettes were internet, friends and advertising. These factors coincided with the factors that influenced attitude towards electronic cigarettes discussed in the secondary research in a study conducted by Lotstock and Tahan (2014). Overall the findings indicate that older age group of smokers who are currently smoking electronic cigarettes have a more positive attitude and an increased level of awareness towards electronic cigarettes. However with the tobacco smokers electronic cigarettes do not appeal the same due to lack of knowledge and awareness. On the other hand the users of electronic cigarettes consider it as a boom in all aspects to tobacco and claim this product can change the future of tobacco cigarettes. Furthermore cost was a factor to have influenced attitudes but considering the regulations should come into play by increasing the product cost then it will put chronic smokers on a quandary.

CONCLUSION

In sum this research indicates that social media, advertising, peers influence are not sole determining factors that influence attitude towards electronic cigarettes user experience, beliefs, benefits, regulation, awareness, knowledge and technicalities, cost and reasoning are also equally important factors when considering attitude towards electronic cigarettes. Finally it was found that there is a mixed attitude towards electronic cigarette in terms of their health benefits, cost, and regulations and as a replacement for tobacco cigarettes. Positive attitude prevails among long term users of electronic cigarette. However among occasional users and indoor smokers much of uncertainties dwells. And as for others who are not satisfied with the current product because they are too niche have a mixed attitude towards electronic cigarettes.

REFERENCES

- Adkins, BW (2014), 'Electronic cigarette smokers ... Be Wary!', West Virginia Medical Journal, 1, p. 8, Academic OneFile, EBSCOhost, (Accessed: 31 July 2014).
- Etter, J, & Bullen, C (2014), 'A longitudinal study of electronic cigarette users', Addictive Behaviors, 2, p. 491, Expanded Academic ASAP, EBSCO host, (Accessed: 28 July 2014).
- Euromonitor International (2012) 'E-cigarettes: a US\$2 billion global industry – who should be worried?' (Accessed 20 July 2014)
- Marketline (2014) e-cigarettes Big Tobacco moves in for the kill, but could profits disappear in a puff of smoke? (Accessed: 4 July 2014)
- Marketline. (2012) 'Electronic Cigarettes This emerging market could be the savior of the tobacco industry' (Accessed: 8 July 2014)
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2012) Research Methods for Business Students. 6th edn. England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Shiffman L, LL Kanuk. (2007) Consumer behaviour'' Season 9th edn. england Pearson Prentice Hall.