UWE Bristol
Fear and Fire: Ethical Social Marketing Strategies for Home Fire Safety for Older People

Presentation by:

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Fear and fire

• Commissioned by Avon Fire & Rescue Service
• Targeting older people in deprived areas of Bristol, UK
• To develop effective social marketing strategies for home fire safety
Older people vulnerable to fire

- Live in older accommodation
- Furnishings do not meet fire regulations
- Loss of cognitive function or dexterity
- Loss of sense of smell and hearing
- Restricted mobility

AF&RS response

- Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSVs)
  - Smoke alarms with 10-year batteries
  - General home, heating and electrical safety
  - Reviews of cooking and smoking habits
  - Develop escape plans
  - Delivered by firefighters
  - But low uptake, despite being free of charge
  - So what messages, media and credible parties should be used?
The research: sampling

- People aged 64-87 in three deprived areas of Bristol, UK
- Quota sampling
  - Male/female
  - Smokers/non-smokers
  - Users of alcohol
  - Living alone/couples
  - States of health/mobility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hartcliffe/Southville/Southmead</td>
<td>5/5/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female/Male</td>
<td>11/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living alone/with housemate/as couple</td>
<td>8/1/12 (= 6 couples)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 65-69</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 70-75</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 75-79</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 80-84</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 85+</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoke</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drink occasionally/drink heavily</td>
<td>13/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor/moderate/good mobility</td>
<td>5/6/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal/informal/no support</td>
<td>2/6/7 interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council accommodation/privately owned</td>
<td>10/5 interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>21 respondents</td>
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</table>
The research: data collection

- Semi-structured, ethnographic interviews in own homes
  - Exploring perceptions and meanings associated with fire, home safety and ageing
  - Enacting behaviours associated with cooking, smoking and heating – especially around going to bed
  - Assessing fire safety in the home
  - Identifying key influencers and triggers to behaviour change
- Audio recorded and interpreted in light of existing data and theoretical models

Projective techniques
Results: segmentation of older people

Gerontographics - Segmentation System for Older People

Adverse health event e.g. stroke

- Adverse life event e.g. death of spouse

- 'Healthy indulgers' - behave like younger consumers

- 'Ailing outgoers' - concerned by health but positive self-esteem

- 'Healthy hermits' - social withdrawal

- 'Frail recluses' - biological and social ageing

Adverse health event e.g. stroke

Adverse life event

Habit and routine

“I've always done it that way, don't know why” Male, 80

- Daily and weekly routines provide predictable, methodical means of accomplishing tasks
- Particularly for those living alone or less socially active
- Cognitive shortcuts aid deteriorating memory/cognition
- Less mental effort and conscious decision making preceded by elaborate decision processes (Aarts et al., 1998)
- Disruption causes confusion and even distress
  - Indicates one off, environmental changes more ethical
Independence and age

“A lot of old people – I don’t feel old - who can’t get out. I feel sorry for them. How will they get out? They’ll burn to death.” Female, 81

- Many fiercely proud of independence...
- …though further probing often revealed they may not be as independent as they contended
- Closely tied to their perceptions of own ‘oldness’ - considering others of comparable age to be ‘old’
- Messages directed at ‘old’ people may be screened out

Triggers to behaviour change: portraying older people

- 1/3 of adult over age 55 boycotted products/companies because offended by how ads portrayed older people (Moschis, 2003)
  - Vulnerable
  - Cranky
  - Isolated
  - Figures of fun

- e.g. ad featuring older person lying on the floor shouting “I fell and can not get up” was taken off air after complaints
Perceived susceptibility to fire

- Most considered selves unlikely to be at risk of fire
- Though many had past incidents e.g. small kitchen fires, or knew people involved with significant domestic fires
- ‘That would never happen to me, I’m too careful’ or ‘if it did, it would an electrical fault’
- Possibly related to denying old age/loss of independence

“If the firemen found out how it started, I wouldn’t like to face them. Endangering their lives because of something stupid I’ve done” Female, 73

Health Belief Model

Adapted from Hochbaum et al, 1952; Rosenstock, 1966; Rosenstock et al. 1988
Key fears of fire

“I would top myself rather than go to a home” Male, 73

- Loss of own life
- Loss of independence
- Loss of others’ lives, whether loved ones, neighbours, firefighters, or pets
- Loss of irreplaceable personal possessions e.g. photos of dead relatives, mementos
- Loss of home

Ethical implications

- Older people no more vulnerable to fear messages (Benet et al., 1993)
- However fear campaigns risk reactance, ethical issues etc.
- Older people prefer emotion to facts in communications
- And avoid negative emotions, preferring positive ones (Williams & Drolet, 2005; Labouvie-Vief & Blanchard-Fields, 1982; Isaacowitz et al. 2000)
Triggers to behaviour change: messages

“It’s the feeling of losing something that has memories, things that have been with you. Can’t replace your home, it’s not the same” Female, 81

- We recommend more subtle approaches:
  - Use of images rather than explicit exposure of threats
  - Focus on protection of self and others rather than death
  - Altruism and connectedness (Wolfe, 1990)
  - Personal growth (Wolfe, 1990)
  - Nostalgia (Moschis, 2003)

Triggers to behaviour change: credible third parties

“My youngest son tells me off…he said don’t you dare climb on those [steps] again…I wouldn’t defy him” (Later) “I do what I want. My sons give advice and I decide whether to follow it” (Later) “If something’s wrong or I’m worried... I’d always ask my son.” Female, 87

- Adult offspring have strong role in implementing home safety measures – if not, local friends or neighbours
- Consider appealing to them to organise HFSVs
Locus of control

Adapted from Wallston et al., 1976

Possible position of locus of control for older deprived groups

Triggers to behaviour change: media

• Local media trusted
  – TV and radio better than press: eyesight
  – TV news is part of daily routine
  – Role for PR: social marketing as news

• The Fire & Rescue Services are trusted
  – Direct mail/leaflets likely to be read
  – Firefighters seen as authority figures

“I imagine if you have a fireman talking to you he stands out. He’s not like just you or me. It might penetrate even if someone’s mind is beginning to go” Female, 71
Conclusion

- Distressing impact of
  - Triggers such as loss of life, pets, possessions or independence
  - Disruption of deeply engrained routines
  - Lack of money, contacts or ability to implement change
- Do we need more ethical alternatives, for example
  - Positive emotions e.g. nostalgia, connectedness?
  - One-off interventions that minimise actual behaviour change?
- Or would powerful fear campaigns be more effective?
- Power of public relations, third parties and word-of-mouth

Thank you

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