



AMETHIST

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Achieving Maternal
Empowerment
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Health through
Implementation
Science and
Training

RESOURCE

USING AUDIENCE SEGMENTATION TO CORRECT MISINFORMATION

Audience segmentation is the process of dividing a population into meaningful subgroups based on shared psychological determinants of behavior, rather than demographic characteristics alone.

Segmentation identifies how people think and what beliefs they hold, not just who they are on paper.

Groups differ in perceived outcomes, social influences, and perceived barriers. These differences predict receptivity and behavioral intentions.

Key Takeaways:

1. Audience segmentation should be theoretical and push beyond demographics.
2. Don't assume what your audience believes.
3. The Reasoned Action Approach is a great way to analyze audience beliefs and engage in audience segmentation research.
4. You can measure your audience's beliefs using qualitative or quantitative approaches.
5. After measuring audience beliefs, use findings to develop messages that target misperceptions.

WHY IS SEGMENTATION NECESSARY?

Audience segmentation is helpful because it's the first step in developing targeted and evidence-based messages.

Problems with misinformation correction:

- Assumes uniform knowledge deficit
- Treats audiences as cognitively identical
- Produces mixed or null effects

Mixed findings often lie with narrative messages. In some cases, nonnarrative correction is evaluated as more credible.

Example: For pregnant women with skeptical towards vaccination, narratives (vs. expository) elicited stronger negative emotions, leading to decreased debunking efficacy and the intention to seek information (Jheng et al., 2025)

- Audience differ in:
 - Why they resist
 - What they believe prior to message exposure
 - Who they trust
 - What feels possible

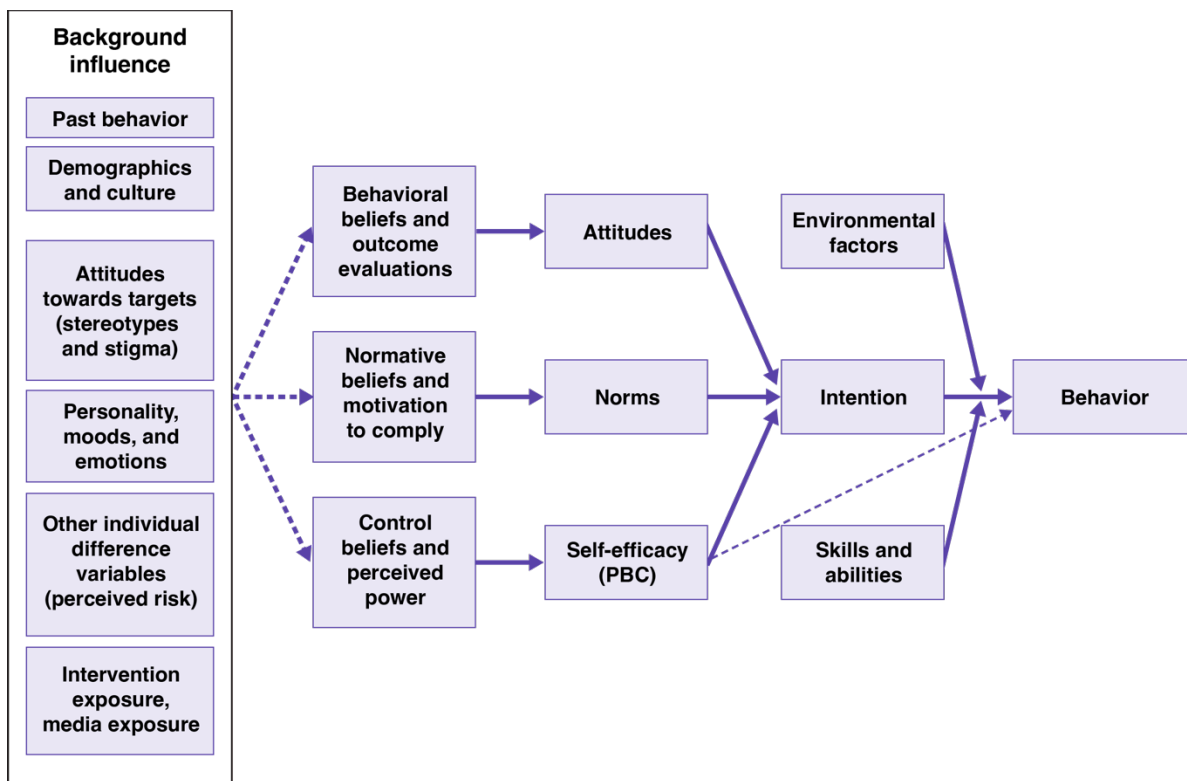
Traditional Segmentation	Theory-based Segmentation
Age, race, income	Beliefs, norms, control perceptions
Descriptive	Predictive
Media targeting	Message strategy targeting

Segmentation allows communication to match the psychological drivers of behavior

HOW YOU CAN MEASURE BELIEFS IN YOUR AUDIENCE TO SEGMENT

We use the Reasoned Action Approach or other behavioral theories to understand underlying beliefs that function as determinants to behavior. To conduct an audience segmentation, we survey our audiences' intentions, attitudes, norms, perceived behavioral control, and underlying beliefs.

The Reasoned Action Approach (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010) claims that behavioral intention predicts actual behavior. Importantly, the three predictors of intention are attitudes, normative pressure, and perceived behavioral control. Each of the three core predictors includes a set of salient beliefs.



A Reasoned Action Approach (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010)

Important components of the Reasoned Action Approach

Intention: The strongest predictor of behavior

- To measure, consider specific action, target, context, and time (principle of compatibility)
- Example measure: “I intend to receive a flu vaccine during my current pregnancy when it is recommended by my healthcare provider this fall.”

Attitudes: A core predictor of intention

- Refers to how favorable or unfavorable we feel about a health behavior
- Predicted by behavioral beliefs, which can be experiential or instrumental
- Example behavioral beliefs measured on a 7-point sliding scale:

Experiential: Painful-not painful

Instrumental: Effective-ineffective

Normative pressure: Another core predictor of intention

- Refers to social proof and societal norms, includes:

Descriptive norms: What others like me are doing

Injunctive norms: What others who are important to me think I should do

- Descriptive and injunctive norms are predicted by normative beliefs

Descriptive norms measures: “Other ____ [women, sisters, friends, doctors, coworkers, influencers, etc.] who are pregnant are receiving a flu vaccine in the fall when recommended by their healthcare provider.”

Injunctive norms measures: “My ____ [women, sisters, friends, doctors, coworkers, influencers, etc] want me to receive a flu vaccination when I’m pregnant and it’s recommended by my healthcare provider.”

- Goal: Figure out who the important “referents” are. In other words, the people in your audience’s lives that influence them most.



Perceived behavioral control (i.e., efficacy): Final core predictor of intention

- Includes:

Capacity: Ability to perform a recommended behavior

Autonomy: Extent to which performing the behavior is under the individual's control

- Capacity and autonomy are predicted by barriers and facilitators beliefs

Example control measures: Rate your confidence in getting a flu vaccine during pregnancy given the following contexts. (5 or 7-point scale)

- "It was at odds with my political views"
- "I had uncertainty about the effectiveness"
- "I had uncertainty about safety"

Two example ways you can segment your audience using qualitative and quantitative research

Here are two audience segmentation studies, which we call "elicitation" research, including one qualitative and one quantitative approach.

Qualitative

Research Article

An Elicitation Study to Understand Young Adults' Beliefs About Seeking Health Information From Social Media Influencers

Emily Pfender¹  and Amy Bleakley¹

Qualitative Health Research
2024, Vol. 34(3) 205–216
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Quantitative

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Dispensing choice: understanding intention to adopt Opill among college students using the reasoned action approach

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QUALITATIVE APPROACH

In an audience segmentation study asking colleges students about their intentions to get health information from influencers, we used the Reasoned Action Approach to build a qualitative focus group guide using to extract beliefs pertaining to attitudes, norms, and control.

Construct	Measure
Attitudes (<i>expectancies</i>)	What are some of the good things you think could happen if you get health information from an influencer? What are some of the bad things you think could happen if you get health information from an influencer?
Normative pressure (<i>normative referents</i>)	Who are the people in your life that think you <i>should</i> get health information from an influencer? Are their people in your life who think you <i>shouldn't</i> get health information from an influencer? Which of these people in your life get health information from an influencer?
Perceived behavioral control/self-efficacy (<i>barriers and facilitators</i>)	What are some things that might make it easy to get health information from an influencer? What are some things that might make it harder to get health information from an influencer?

Interview measures

Using thematic analysis, we identified the following themes, which can be used to develop counter messaging and push back about getting health information from influencers.

Attitudes:

- Influencers provide trial-and-error approach by testing health products
- Can cause negative health outcomes

Normative pressure:

- Parents and older siblings (referents) would not approve

Control:

- Facilitator: convenience of health information
- Barrier: not always credible

QUANTITATIVE APPROACH

For a quantitative audience segmentation, perform the following steps:

1. Measure behavioral intention (7-point scale) and recode it into a binary variable. Measuring on a 7-point scale is important because it allows for more accuracy in understanding who really intends to adopt a behavior.
 - a. 0-4 = 0 (non-intender)
 - b. 5-7 = 1 (intender)
2. Make sure your beliefs for attitudes, normative pressure, and control are continuous (1-7)
3. Run t-tests to understand differences in beliefs by intenders and non-intenders



This approach separates:

- Individuals resistant to or uncertain about adoption
- Individuals already inclined to perform the behavior

Use those that vary significantly by intender and non-intender to design messages.

ANALYSIS

Below is an example of the analysis of control beliefs (i.e., facilitators and barriers) for a study about intentions to use Opill, the first over-the-counter birth control pill.

Notice that there is a significant difference (marked by bold) for intenders and non-intenders of Opill uptake for the first belief: “Opill is at odds with my political views.” Here is an area of intervention and strategic message design.

Now, notice there is no significant different for intenders and non-intenders of Opill uptake for the third belief: “Opill would require me to take a pill at the same time every day.” This is not a place for message design intervention.

Control beliefs	Correlation between belief and intention	Full sample M/SD	Average belief for non-intenders (M/SE)	Average belief for intenders (M/SE)	% “likely” for non-intenders	% “likely” for intenders	Effect sizes (Hedge’s g)
Odds with my political views	.17***	3.09 (1.86)	2.94 (.10)	3.40 (1.6)	28.6%	40.5%	-.25
Presented negatively on social media	.17***	3.18 (1.81)	3.04 (.10)	3.47 (.15)	28.8%	39.8%	-.24
Required me to take a pill at the same time every day	.10*	3.19 (1.66)	3.11	3.33	28.9%	41.9%	-.13
Uncertainty about its effectiveness	.14**	3.66 (1.87)	3.50 (.10)	3.98 (.14)	27.8%	38.4%	-.27
Pill is expensive	.00	3.29 (1.84)	3.29	3.30	30.6%	34.2%	-.23
Many people experience side effects	.16***	3.01 (1.58)	2.88 (.08)	3.28 (.14)	28.2%	46.3%	-.25

Audience segmentation for underlying control beliefs related to intention to use Opill for pregnancy prevention.
Pfender, EJ, et al. (2025) *Journal of American College Health*, **74**(3):614-625

Additional reading material

Fishbein & Ajzen’s (2010) book provides sample measures in the appendix for conducting audience segmentation using the Reasoned Action Approach.

References

- Fishbein M, and Ajzen I (2010) Predicting and changing behavior: The reasoned action approach. *Psychology Press*
- Pfender EJ, Wanzer CV, Kuijpers KL, Maloney E, Travis N, and Bleakley A (2025) Dispensing choice: Understanding Opill adoption intention through the reasoned action approach. *Journal of American College Health*, **74**(3):614-625.
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