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## **Analysis of The Public's Perception on the Use of E-cigarettes as an Alternative to Smoking**

By Richard F. Marquardt II

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Over the last decade the rate of electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), use has increased at exponential rates. For the first-time smokers who have failed at smoking cessation were given a real chance with this technology. The goal in using electronic nicotine delivery systems, commonly referred to as e-cigarettes, is as an alternative way to quit smoking and reduce nicotine intake and dependency. The Journal of Dental Hygiene defines e-cigarettes as, “battery operated devices that work by heating and converting a liquid mixture, often called e-liquid, into an aerosol, commonly termed vapor and delivering nicotine to the user without combustion of tobacco” (JDH 1). This method of smoking cessation has gained significant popularity in young adults. There are multiple points to look into when researching the field of vaping. These points include but are not limited to efficacy, behaviors, demographic, policies/regulations, awareness, and risks/factors associated with use.

### **Efficacy**

When observing vaping as a critical factor of smoking cessation it is important to first establish the fact that it actually works. The efficiency in cessation involved with vaping is far superior to traditional methods such as nicotine patches or gum. Many smokers get their satisfaction from the motion and oral pleasure associated with smoking cigarettes. Traditional methods of cessation are purely to deliver nicotine to the user without any related motions to smoking. E-cigarettes deliver nicotine to the user while involving the motion and oral pleasure similar to as if they are smoking. It is also important to consider that the level of nicotine present in an E-cigarette is completely up to the user's choice. Which makes it easy for smokers trying to quit the ability to have a higher level of nicotine and gradually work their way down to not having any nicotine at all.

Logically thinking, if e-cigarettes were ineffective they wouldn't have stayed on the smoking cessation market this long, let alone completely taken it over. Results from a study done by doctors from *American Journal of Health Behaviors*, in 2017, showed that vaping was an effective method of smoking cessation for upwards of 80% of those that took part in the study. A staggering statistic, nonetheless, I wanted to know more about which products get smokers to make the switch. So, I conducted an interview with the manager of Vape Supercenter in Bowling Green, Ohio. Derrick Davis claims that salt based nicotine juices in combination with small starter kits best simulate the feeling of smoking a cigarette and tend to keep smokers off of cigarettes the best. He continued to say that as new vapers learn more through experience and experiment with more advanced products they stay further and further away from reverting to cigarettes.

### **Behaviors**

Behaviors traditionally associated with smoking cessation are usually derived from the smoker's lack of nicotine. The fact that the level of nicotine is controlled in e-cigarettes allows users to

have control over their cravings. Although not everyone vapes for nicotine, some people vape for flavor, vape tricks, or oral fixation. The behaviors of these types of vapers have the potential to be less addictive than those who vape with nicotine. Through my method of empirical research pertaining to the interview, I was able to conclude from Derrick's responses that the local vape shop gains about 5-10 new consistent customers every week. Derrick said that on average customers spend 30 minutes in the shop depending on their needs while in the shop. A customer who needs educated on devices or wants to relax and vape in the shop will spend upwards to an hour there, whereas a customer who knows exactly what they desire and doesn't want to chat can spend as little as 30 seconds in the shop. I asked Derrick if the Vape Super Center had any sort of program in order specifically designed to pair smokers with the proper products to get them to quit cigarettes. He said they do not, however he would like to look further into that matter as it would be beneficial to smokers, the shop, and reputation of e-cigarettes. Derrick also added that it would be difficult to pull off because of time management and attracting enough smokers with the willpower to stick with it. The Vape Super Center differentiates itself from other vape shops and online shops through variety of selection, stocking the latest and highest quality products, and giving customers the ability to see, touch, and feel the products before purchasing them.

## Demographics

Vaping is generally seen as a modern evolution of smoking and associated with young adults, specifically millennials. Manufacturers of e-cigarettes and e-juice companies tend to market towards this demographic and although this may be true, it does not mean that older folks cannot enjoy the benefits of cessation through using e-cigarettes as well. According to the *American Journal of Health Behaviors*, "Since the introduction of e-cigarettes to the US in 2007, e-cigarette marketing has increased in connection with the rise in e-cigarette popularity," (1). This direct relationship only makes sense, as new products emerge on the market, more marketing campaigns will emerge with these expanding companies. Through the empirical method of research pertaining to the interview done with Derrick of Vape Super Center, I was able to conclude that a good portion of his customers, about 75%-80%, are towns people and factory workers from the surrounding area of Bowling Green. The other 15%-20% is made up of students from Bowling Green State University. These results were contrary to what I had initially anticipated. I would have figured that upwards of 90% of their demographic would have been made up of students from Bowling Green State University, and that the other 10% would have been made up of people from the surrounding area and/or people traveling through town. However, his statistic makes much more sense because if majority of their customer base was dependent upon students from their university they would be unable to operate in summer months. Nonetheless, Derrick also stated that business picks up significantly in the winter months because customers do not want to go outside in the cold to smoke their cigarettes when they could use an e-cigarette without smelling up their homes. It is also important to note that many of the people who quit for the winter end up sticking with it, because they see the adverse health effects dissipate and do not desire them to return when they have the opportunity to continue using e-cigarettes as a method of cessation.

## **Campus Policy/Regulation**

Most college universities have some sort of policy for smoking on campus and may even have designated places where smoking is permitted, however many do not clearly specify e-cigarette use. Indoor use should never be permitted as it is a violation of others' space and comfort, especially if they do not use e-cigarettes, but I wanted to learn more about what people think of outdoor use on campus, specifically at Bowling Green State University. Let it be established that Bowling Green State University has a smoke free campus policy, however does not exclusively have any parameters regarding e-cigarette use on campus grounds. As a student at BGSU it is not uncommon for me to see my peers using e-cigarettes on campus. Additionally, it is less common to see or smell another student smoking a cigarette on campus. I believe this is partially due to the designated smoking areas in parts of campus parking lots, where smokers are more secluded from campus foot traffic and partially due to the integrity of our student body. In a study done by the *Journal of Community Health* in 2016 concluded that about 70% of students were either unaware of or could not correctly identify their campus's policy on the use of e-cigarettes on campus grounds. This begs me to think that something should be done to spread awareness of campus policy (if not already implemented). The *Journal of Community Health* states, "Understanding student perceptions about e-cigarette policies could help inform college administrators about strategies for successful adoption and implementation of these policies.

Even when a campus policy is in place, the presence of a policy does not ensure that it is being communicated effectively and understood and followed by students" (1). I believe that implementing some sort of policy on campus would be beneficial to the university as a whole. Not to say that e-cigarette use is a hindrance to other students, however sometimes courtesy is not considered by students using e-cigarettes on campus. I thought that since Derrick runs a shop so close to campus that he would have some sort of input on if implementing a campus policy would be beneficial to Bowling Green State University. He stated that it would be beneficial to the university, however nearly impossible to enforce due to the "under the radar" nature of e-cigarettes. Derrick continued to say that if regulation were to occur it would be between manufacturers and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). He added that recent FDA regulations are heavily in favor of big tobacco companies because of the amount of money able to be made off of smokers being addicted to cigarettes. I asked if he thinks that regulators are willing to work with e-cigarette manufacturers and shop owners in order to benefit both parties and his response was unhelpful at least for the near future.

## **Counter Argument**

Factors associated with using e-cigarettes as a method of smoking cessation vary drastically from user to user. As previously discussed, there is a wide spectrum of flavors, nicotine concentrations, and devices. Devices differ in the amount of battery life, battery power, types of atomizer attachments, and levels of expertise necessary to safely use certain devices. It is also important to consider the inherent risks associated as a factor of using e-cigarettes despite them being sold as a safer alternative to smoking. The short-term effects of smoking cessation are clearly evident, and Derrick said that after being a smoker for 13 years and only after using e-cigarettes for a few months he could tell the difference in his ability to breath, smell, and taste. Although it is safe to assume vaping is less safe than being abstinent from nicotine, due to e-

cigarettes being such new products, insufficient and inconclusive research on the health risks associated with vaping makes it hard to say what long term consequences might be.

In conclusion, the risks involved in smoking cessation through the use of e-cigarettes greatly outweigh the side effects of smoking, and after conducting my own empirical research it is safe to say that leading factors such as efficacy, behaviors, and demographic could lead to an effective way to implement a sufficient campus policy.

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