

Chapter 6

Better Safe Than Sorry: Analysis of International Media Campaigns on Cancer Prevention

Célia Belim

ISCSP, University of Lisbon, Portugal

ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on cancer prevention media campaigns, concretely on the construction of the persuasive message. Methodologically, semiotic analysis is used, exploring the verbal and visual dimension of 19 international ads linked to the five most deadly cancers, in order to understand and deconstruct the message and the communication tactics used. The results reveal the diversity of resources and tactics. In the verbal dimension, it presents the use of rhetorical tactics (e.g., statistical and factual evidence and stimulation of emotions), the popular vocabulary, cues to action/motivational content, the phatic, poetic, and appealing functions, stylistic resources, credibility of the source, evocation of good causes, originality and distinction, anecdotal approach. In the visual dimension, it observes the use of three languages' functions, isotopy, stylistic resources, personalization, symbolical approach, polychrome, diversity of phenotypes, the credibility of the source, a pedagogical component.

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INTRODUCTION

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in the globe, being responsible for an estimated 9.6 million deaths in 2018 (WHO, 2018). This statistical value means that, globally, about 1 in 6 deaths is due to cancer (WHO, 2018). There are risk factors, such as high body mass index, low fruit and vegetable intake lack of physical activity, tobacco use, and alcohol use (WHO, 2018). These five factors are the cancer deaths' leading behavioral and dietary risks, causing around one-third of mortal victims (WHO, 2018).

Persons often seek and receive cancer information from mass media (Hannon et al., 2009). Mass media can be used to motivate individual behavior change and influence policy, and it can help set the cancer prevention and control agenda (Hornik, 2002). Enough simple and straightforward cancer prevention and early detection messages are needed to ensure adequate exposure to achieve these goals (Hornik, 2002).

Generally, mass media campaigns are widely used to expose high proportions of large populations and can generate positive changes or prevent negative health-related practices across the publics (Wakefield, Loken & Hornik, 2010). The “great promise of mass media campaigns” lies in their power to disseminate well-defined behaviorally focused messages to ample audiences in a repeated, longitudinal, incidental, and cheap manner (Wakefield et al., 2010).

Media interventions can effectively promote cancer-preventing lifestyle changes and screening tests that detect cancer early (Viswanath, 2005). Empirical research shows that media campaigns have been used to promote healthy behavior related to cancer prevention, both in urban and rural settings (Campo et al., 2008; Pasick, Hiatt & Paskett, 2004; Rim et al., 2009; Young, McGloin, Zittleman, West & Westfall, 2007; Zittleman et al., 2009). Studies demonstrated that the utilization of media channels to design interventions can be an effective approach to increase healthy behaviors. For example, the media can be effective in the promotion of sun protection behaviors and in the reduction of the risk of skin cancer among outdoor workers (Borland, Hocking, Godkin, Gibbs & Hill, 1991; Mullein, Gardiner, Roseninan, Zhu & Swanson, 1996).

Public health practitioners have used campaigns as a common tool due to their wide reach (Hornik, 2002; Institute of Medicine, 2002; Randolph & Viswanath, 2004; Salmon & Atkin, 2003). As Hornik (2002) states “there

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