

The reading contracts in the advertising discourse of health communication campaigns: an analysis of the “I know. Do you know?” campaign

Os contratos de leitura no discurso publicitário de campanhas de comunicação em saúde: uma análise da campanha “Eu sei. Você sabe?”

Ana Cláudia Costa^{1,2} , Arthur Barbalho^{1,3} , Suelayne Sousa^{1,3} , Juciano de Sousa Lacerda¹ ,
Mar Marcos Molano² , Maria Natália Ramos⁴ , Lilian Carla Muneiro¹ 

ABSTRACT

Introduction: In view of the syphilis epidemic that Brazil is experiencing and the need to strengthen the discourse on preventing this sexually transmitted infection (STI), the campaign “Eu sei, você sabe?” (I know. Do you know?) was conducted for dissemination of the pieces on social media. **Objective:** The aim of this study was to perform a qualitative descriptive analysis of the posts published on the social network Instagram of the National Campaign to Fight Syphilis 2020-21 aimed at young people. **Methods:** The analysis performed was based on the method suggested by Eliseo Véron and aimed to establish relationships between the “reading contracts” offered and the processes of focusing (strong direct relevance) and defocusing (interdiscursive relevance) acting in the messages with the results of the communication indicator “Reach/Exposure”. **Results:** The analysis was conducted from October 2020 to April 2021. In all, 31 cards were published. Among them, eight publications presented in their content a discourse directed at young people including individuals in the 20-29 age bracket. In general, the pieces provided a common proposal of visual structuring and aimed to address the deficiencies identified in previous campaigns developed and presented in the perspective of the project itself, as well as the propositions established by control agencies for dealing with syphilis in Brazil. **Conclusion:** Some hypotheses raised on the basis of the analysis were as follows. There is the possibility that the distinction between grammars of production and recognition produce negotiations or resistance to the meaning of the interpellation contained in the theme “Sífilis. Eu sei. Você sabe?” Even if the characters presented in the cards did not include some specific audiences, such as young transgenders, the language offered can generate empathy in these audiences. The production strategies of cards with a more visual aesthetic and added to a predominantly graphic distribution of important information possibly contributed to a greater reach/impact on the social network audience.

Keywords: epidemics; syphilis; evaluation studies as topic; social media.

RESUMO

Introdução: Diante da epidemia de sífilis vivida pelo Brasil e tendo em vista a necessidade de fortalecer o discurso de prevenção dessa infecção sexualmente transmissível, realizou-se a campanha “Eu sei. Você sabe?”, voltada para divulgação das peças nas redes sociais digitais. **Objetivo:** Este trabalho objetiva realizar análise qualitativa descritiva das postagens publicadas na rede social Instagram da Campanha Nacional de Combate à Sífilis 2020-21, destinadas ao público jovem. **Métodos:** A análise realizada baseia-se na metodologia sugerida por Eliseo Véron e visa estabelecer relações entre os contratos de leitura ofertados e os processos de focalização (pertinência forte direta) e desfocalização (pertinência interdiscursiva) atuantes nas mensagens com os resultados do indicador de comunicação alcance/exposição. **Resultados:** A análise adotou o recorte temporal de outubro/2020 até abril/2021. Ao todo 31 *cards* foram publicados. Entre eles, oito publicações apresentaram em seu conteúdo um discurso direcionado ao público jovem, como também personagens na faixa etária entre 20 e 29 anos. De maneira geral, as peças trazem uma proposta comum de estruturação visual e visam contemplar as deficiências identificadas em campanhas anteriores desenvolvidas e apresentadas na perspectiva do próprio projeto, bem como das proposições estabelecidas por órgãos de controle para o enfrentamento da sífilis no Brasil. **Conclusão:** Algumas hipóteses levantadas com base na análise realizada: há a possibilidade de que a distinção entre gramáticas de produção e reconhecimento produza negociações ou resistências ao sentido da interpelação contida no tema “Sífilis. Eu sei. Você sabe?”; mesmo que as *personas* apresentadas nos *cards* não englobem alguns públicos específicos, como jovens transgêneros, a linguagem ofertada pode gerar empatia nesses públicos; as estratégias de produção de *cards* com estética mais visual e somados a uma distribuição das informações importantes predominantemente gráfica possivelmente contribuíram para maior alcance/impacto no público das redes sociais.

Palavras-chave: epidemias; sífilis; estudos de avaliação como assunto; mídias sociais.

INTRODUCTION

Considered a global public health problem, syphilis is an infection caused by the bacterium *Treponema pallidum*, which can be transmitted sexually or vertically (during pregnancy or childbirth). This sexually transmitted infection (STI) presents at different stages, and if neglected, it can have serious clinical consequences or even

lead to death⁽¹⁾. Although it is curable through a simple treatment and easily avoided with the use of a condom, the numbers of new cases persist and are worrisome⁽²⁾.

According to the World Health Organization⁽³⁾, there are about 6 million new cases each year worldwide. The Brazilian epidemiological context is no different. According to the Syphilis Epidemiological Bulletin⁽⁴⁾, through the data from the Information System for Notifiable Diseases, a total of 783,544 cases of acquired syphilis were registered in the period from 2010 to June 2020 in Brazil. In addition, in 2019, 152,915 cases of acquired syphilis and 61,127 cases of congenital syphilis (vertical transmission) were reported, and 173 deaths from

¹Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte – Natal (RN), Brazil.

²Universidad Complutense de Madrid – Madrid, Spain.

³Universidade Aberta de Portugal – Lisbon, Portugal.

⁴Université Paris-Sorbonne V – Paris, France.

syphilis in children under one year were reported in the Mortality Information System⁽⁵⁾.

To deal with this epidemic, the Brazilian Ministry of Health, in partnership with the Pan American Health Organization and the Laboratory of Technological Innovation in Health of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte, established the Applied Research Project for Guided Intelligent Integration for the Strengthening of Care Networks for the Rapid Response to Syphilis, the project “Sifilis Não” (Syphilis No). This intergovernmental project aims to: “promote actions aimed at controlling syphilis in health care networks, with the help of local supporters; obtain knowledge through operational studies; and enhance the technical capacity of local surveillance and assistance”⁽⁵⁾. Accordingly, several studies and actions have been carried out at the national and international level (via cooperation) to contribute to the fight against syphilis, which are organized into four axes: surveillance, management and governance, assistance and educommunication.

Considering the importance of information and communication on syphilis, the educommunication axis aims to “broaden the dissemination and understanding of information on syphilis prevention, diagnosis and treatment, as well as support the mobilization of local managers, health professionals and civil servants to control the harm in its territory”⁽⁶⁾. In other words, it works in the production and dissemination of informational materials, in addition to developing communicative strategies that allow the messages to have an impact on the intended audiences and in the prevention and intervention of this serious public health problem⁽⁷⁾, also keeping in mind that “communication in the health context has to be adapted to cognitive abilities, at the cultural/educational level, to the health representations and beliefs, and to the individual, emotional, social, cultural and linguistic needs of the user/patient”⁽⁸⁾. Adapted and culturally competent communication in the area of syphilis is important for information, education, prevention, knowledge, behavioral change and public awareness, with the media and digital social networks playing a key role in this area⁽⁹⁾.

With that in mind, the campaign “I know. Do you know?” was carried out to strengthen the syphilis prevention discourse through organic communication with strategies aimed at disseminating the pieces on digital social networks. Therefore, the campaign’s premise provides a discourse with a positive, wise and encouraging tone, where by promoting doubt, it supports self-care, in addition to encouraging seeking the rapid syphilis test. Thus, this work aimed to analyze in a qualitative descriptive way a set of posts made on Instagram of the project “Syphilis No”, aimed at young people, through the reading contract offered. The notion of reading contract⁽¹⁰⁾ is related to the conditions of construction of the bond that unites the media with its consumers, as in the case of how the media company manages and maintains this bond with its audience over time. This reading contract can manifest itself in the ways of stating the messages in which the enunciation of the advertisements offers a place for the enunciator and a place for the enunciatee to speak, which may or may not agree with the contract offered in the message.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the study was to carry out a descriptive qualitative analysis of posts published on Instagram of the National

Campaign to Combat Syphilis 2020-21, with the theme “I know. Do you know?” aimed at young people, for the following purposes:

- to establish relationships between the reading contracts offered and the targeting and defocusing processes acting in the messages;
- to cross the relationships established in A with the results of the reach/exposure communication indicator used in the evaluation of campaigns presented on social media to interpret the type of success achieved by each of the posts.

METHODS

This research aimed to conduct a descriptive qualitative analysis⁽¹¹⁾ of the posts from the “I know. Do you know?” campaign, developed and published for young audiences to establish relationships between the reading contracts⁽¹²⁾ offered and the processes of focusing (strong direct relevance) and defocusing (interdiscursive relevance)⁽¹⁰⁾ acting in the messages with the results of the reach/exposure communication indicator^(1,13-15) used in the evaluation of campaigns broadcast on digital social networks.

Starting from the interface on media-health studies, the decision for a descriptive qualitative approach was justified by the purpose of producing a first characterization of the object of investigation and obtaining results that would allow for the establishment of more complex hypotheses of the phenomenon⁽¹¹⁾.

Examining the reading contracts made it possible to characterize the articulation between the production and reception of messages from the discursive offer contained in the media product itself, which prescribes the position of the sender and recipient audience of the message⁽¹⁰⁾. In this study, we analyzed the discursive offers contained in a set of eight posts on Instagram from October 7, 2020 to April 16, 2021 by the “Syphilis No” project, aimed at the young target audience, in the age group of 20 to 29 years old, considered by the Epidemiological Bulletin (2020) the population most affected by syphilis, especially black and young women.

The “discursive circulation entails a certain degree of indeterminacy that constitutes it”⁽¹⁰⁾. According to this premise, the set of posts selected as the research corpus was defined on the basis of the elements that characterize the specific target, or target audience, determined by the campaign: young men and women (20-29 years). Verón⁽¹⁰⁾ calls this the process of focusing on advertising, as it is a relationship of strong direct relevance between message and audience. We decided to evaluate the success or not of the messages according to the discursive positions of the sender (campaign) and receiver (target audience) offered in the texts on the basis of the results obtained with the reach/exposure indicator.

However, as it is necessary to consider the degree of indeterminacy of each message analyzed, these results would be correlated with the possible defocusing processes, since other audiences besides the one determined by the campaign as the target audience were exposed to the messages and positioned themselves by assigning likes to posts. This strategy was necessary since the recognition grammars, that is, “the reading and interpretation schemes that each individual applied to an important proportion of the advertisements they received, had no direct relationship with their own consumption behaviors nor with those of their own relatives”⁽¹⁰⁾.

Therefore, as it is not possible to measure the number of people who had some contact with the posts and were not part of the target audience of the media action, it was methodologically important to identify and discuss relationships that could be established with such messages. This would contribute to a better dimension of what it means to think about advertising beyond the logic of the market and problematize it as a global sociocultural fact, capable of producing other effects, immediate or not, on a wider audience due to the possibility of an interdiscursive pertinence⁽¹⁰⁾. This interdiscursive pertinence is the result of defocusing, which has no value for the market, but it can be value to public health communication, which is concerned with the cultural dissemination of practices and values of caring for oneself and others.

RESULTS

The empirical corpus of this study, the “I Know. Do you know?” campaign began broadcasting in October 2020 only on the digital social networks Instagram, Facebook and Twitter on the profile @sifilisnao. As the campaign continued to air, the analysis adopted the period from October 2020 to April 2021. A total of 31 cards were published. Among them, eight publications (**Table 1**) presented in their content a discourse aimed at young audiences including persons aged between 20 and 29 years. All cards were published only on the main page of the profile @sifilisnao and addressed the topic of syphilis from different angles, dealing with symptoms, general

Table 1 – Publications aimed at the target audience young people.

CARD	Publication date	Reach	Impressions	Likes	Content axis
	Nov 13, 2020	1,091	1,295	103	Syphilis symptoms
	Nov 23, 2020	560	607	41	Syphilis treatment
	Dec 4, 2020	636	789	57	Prevention
	Dec 15, 2020	687	762	54	Prevention
	Feb 13, 2021	1,333	1,412	104	Prevention
	Mar 19, 2021	551	612	40	Rapid test
	Mar 5, 2021	608	752	58	Syphilis transmission
	Apr 6, 2021	470	481	19	Prevention

information about the problem, condom use, rapid testing, forms of transmission and prevention. Thus, we analyzed four publications from the perspective of reading contracts⁽¹⁰⁾ that could be established between the enunciator and the enunciatee.

For the purpose of analysis, the two publications that showed the greatest engagement, designated pieces 1 and 2, and the two that showed the least engagement, designated pieces 3 and 4, were selected.

Post number 1 (Figure 1) was presented in the carousel format, which includes the use of multiple images and/or videos. In total, five images were used with information about the symptoms and manifestation stages of the disease (primary, secondary and tertiary), as well as its asymptomatic characteristic, which masks its existence and allows the emergence of the vast majority of severe cases. The caption includes the warning for the use of condoms as a method of protection against syphilis and other STIs, also emphasizing the monitoring of pregnant women by health care professionals. It had a total reach of 1,090 users, with 104 likes and 1,293 impressions.

Post 2 (Figure 2) had the theme of carnival. Here, it is important to highlight an important fact: the period used to disseminate information included the validity of municipal and state decrees that determined the restrictive measures throughout the country in a period widely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. A reach of 1,328 users, 104 likes and 1,408 impressions was recorded. The piece provided information on the need for people to be more careful with regard to the prevention of syphilis, and at the same time, also of COVID-19 infection, respecting the restrictive measures of circulation imposed in states and municipalities. Also, information was provided on the use condoms in the case of sexual relations to prevent possible infections, on the basis of the prerogative that the syphilis epidemic that the country had been facing for years is not over yet.

In the specific case of pieces 3 and 4, both had a reach of less than 500 people (464 and 401, respectively). Piece 3 showed figures indicative of the infection in Brazil in 2019, when the country recorded an average of 18 cases of the disease per hour, also reinforcing the

importance of testing to prevent the spread of syphilis. Piece 4, on the other hand, outlined a content approach aimed at discussing the theme of syphilis reinfection, making a connection with the need for periodic testing with a view of prevention.



Figure 2 – Post 2: “Carnival” card.

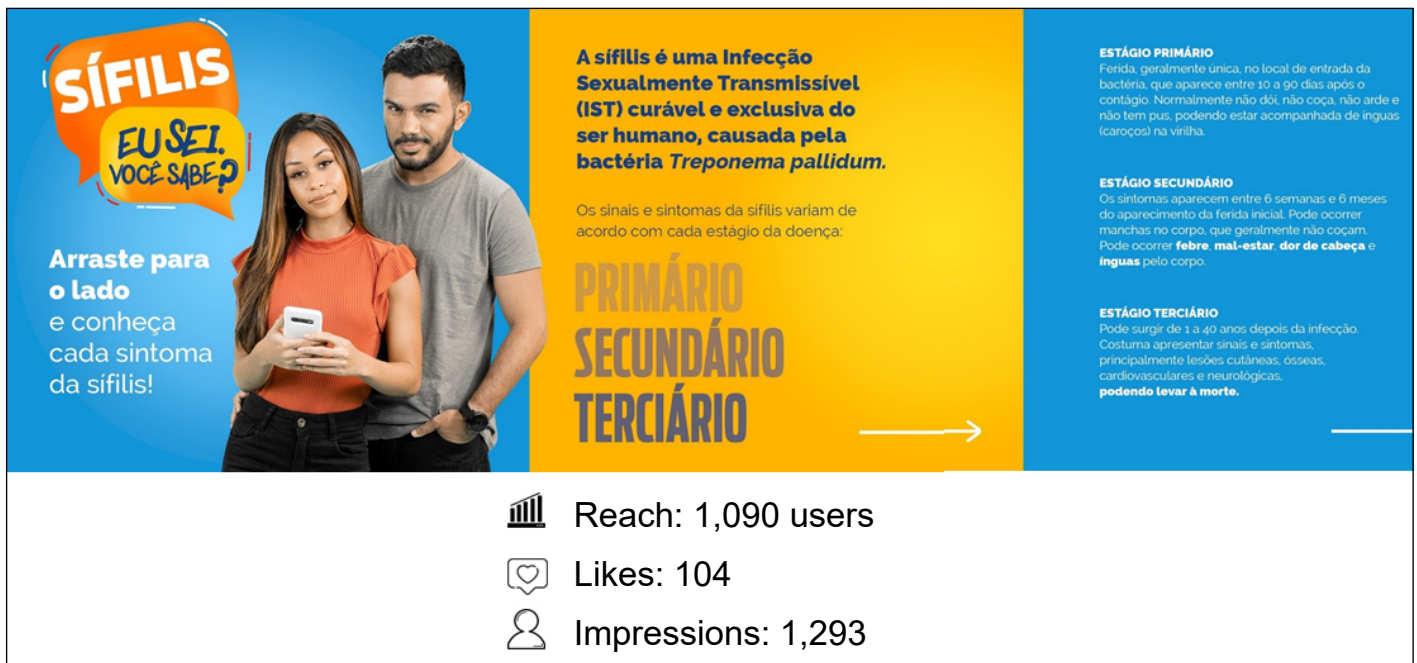


Figure 1 – Post 1: Carousel of images

Post 3 (Figure 3) adopted a more direct narrative with regard to communication with young people, alerting them to the need for prevention as a way to contain and, above all, prevent the spread of syphilis. The artwork had a green background and the campaign logo in the upper left corner, and in the upper right corner, there was the logo of the Disque Saúde service and the number 136. More centralized were the phrases “Young people, there’s a message for you! Get a rapid syphilis test regularly.” The composition was finalized with the project’s website address at the bottom, accompanied by the official logo and the signatures of the interfederal partners. The post had a reach of 550 users, 40 likes and 610 impressions.

In turn, in the case of post 4 (Figure 4), the composition of the image had a yellow background (one of the colors adopted in the visual identity proposed by the campaign). It also contained an image of a young man holding a cell phone. In the upper right corner, there was the logo of the Disque Saúde service and the number 136. In the lower part of the artwork there were the official logos of the “Syphilis No” project and the “I know. Do you know?” campaign, in addition to the phrases “Prevention should be a habit. Don’t waver with your health.” In addition to the image, the publication included the following caption: “Did you know that syphilis can be contracted again? The disease is curable but does not generate immunity. Therefore, it is possible to get infected more than once. Preventing infection and getting tested periodically are healthy and very important habits. Share this message! Information is essential for dealing with syphilis. Learn more at sifilisnao.com.br”. In this

post, user interaction resulted in a reach of 464 individuals, with 19 likes and 475 impressions.

In general, the posts provided a common proposal of visual structuring, in part pre-established by the guidelines defined in the scope of the communication plan for the development of such actions. These, in turn, aimed to address the deficiencies identified in previous campaigns developed and presented from the perspective of the project itself, as well as the propositions established by control agencies to fight syphilis in Brazil, located by means of the 2019/2017 decision by the Brazilian Federal Court of Accounts (TCU)⁽¹⁶⁾.

DISCUSSION

The main reading contract⁽¹⁰⁾ of the campaign is contained in the theme “Syphilis. I know. Do you know?”, which presents the problem of the disease followed by a statement that places the issuer in a position of knowing about the problem. And from there, they question the receiver as if to say: “And you, do you know?” The issuer offers themselves as someone who knows the disease and questions the recipient in a way that wants to be interpreted as believing that the recipient of the campaign also knows something or if they do not, the issuer is there to share that information in a dialogic manner.

The enunciation of the theme prescribes to the target audience⁽¹⁰⁾ a place of horizontality, from someone who wants to share what they know and, at the same time, is also curious to know what the other knows about syphilis. The texts are short, informative and modalized

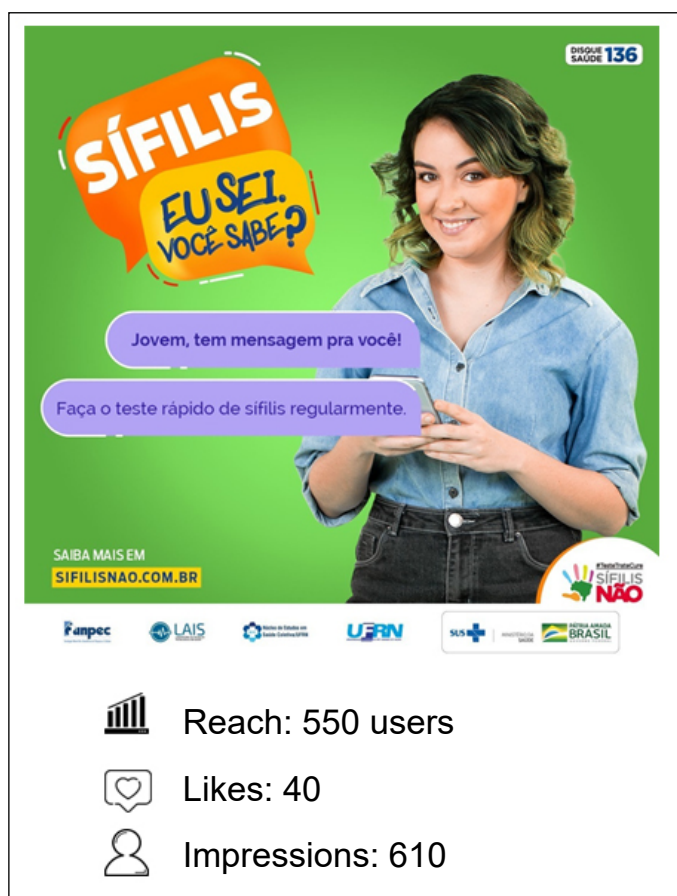


Figure 3 – Post 3: “Youth” card.



Figure 4 – Post 4: “Prevention” card.

like someone telling something to someone else, but not seeming to have an imperative tone in every sentence. At most, they try to build a sense of advice from a friend or someone with a little more experience.

In relation to the strong direct relevance, that is, to the targeting⁽¹²⁾, all seven cards analyzed indicated that they were in fact intended for the target audience characterized as young people, in the age group between 20 and 29 years old. All cards feature images of young people, with the representation of sex limited to male and female, with skin tones closer to Caucasian-white, but with indigenous and black ethnic characteristics in some characters. It would be necessary to appeal to the effects of interdiscursive pertinence, that is, to the effects of defocusing⁽¹²⁾ to infer that it would be possible for other young people, outside this characteristic, to feel questioned by the posts.

The problem that arises at the moment of discursive circulation is precisely its degree of indeterminacy⁽¹²⁾. Since there is in the grammar of message production this prescription of place/dialogue relationship between campaign and target audience, it cannot be clearly stated that this reading contract will be accepted/interpreted in the same way in the instance of reception. There would be the possibility of deviations in meaning, of bifurcations with readings with a negotiated meaning or a sense of resistance⁽¹⁷⁾, in a grammar of recognition that would interpret the statement as meaning that the issuer dominates the knowledge and the question as, for example, a challenge or attestation of ignorance. Or, as a second example, a possible resistance to this place offered by messages from young people who are not cisgender men and women.

Thus, the prescription of the reading contract contained in “I know. Do you know?” relies on the participation of the receiving subject as part of the discourse process, and it is possible to state that there would be a direct relationship between the users’ interaction with the campaign content and, at the same time, a possible lack of knowledge of the basic notions about what syphilis is and what it represents, especially with regard to prevention and symptoms.

This is shown mainly in the pieces that showed greater interest and engagement (1 and 2). It is possible to infer that, although they involve very specific themes, the pieces that offered the greatest amount of general information (profile of the disease, its symptoms, prevention methods, etc.) were those that aroused the greatest general interest by users of social media (in this case, pieces 1 and 2). In them, either by the visual composition (the carousel format with multiple information) or by an appeal to the crisis scenario (a text about carnival and prevention during a pandemic), the audience manifested greater interaction with the content, reinforcing the relationship between the issuer and receiver.

In turn, the pieces with less interaction by users on Instagram were those that offered little visual information in the card image. They showed information qualified as important, but in text form, not visual form. It is relevant information and represents the current situation of the infection in the country (with 18 cases registered per hour) or the idea of proposing to the user the adoption of continuous prevention practices, but without imagery appeal.

Strengths

It is important to highlight that the content resources used to design the campaign’s final products had a high scientific content. That is,

they were based on information that had a robust technical base, developed with the help and supervision of health professionals, who acted as consultants in the development of the advertising pieces.

Limitation

It is important to understand that, despite having a numerically good reach, the advertising campaign in question was completely organic, with the audience in question reached by the use of paid traffic tools, which, in turn, could have enabled a substantial number of people interested in this theme that is of public interest to society if we think of syphilis as the global public health problem that it is.

CONCLUSION

The results of the descriptive qualitative analysis of the use of the reading contracts resource in the advertising discourse of the campaign “I know. Do you know?” allow us to point out that in these, there is a clear relationship between the interaction data of the target audience with the content displayed in the pieces analyzed. This is also solidified thanks to the narrative resources used, which include technical data about the disease, but which, at the same time, provide a more human perspective to the final result.

The results presented here cannot be generalized because it is a descriptive qualitative analysis⁽¹¹⁾, but they can make important contributions in the application of public communication campaigns in social networks. The seven posts from the “I know. Do you know?” campaign produced and offered to young public by Instagram of the “Syphilis No” project (“Sífilis Não”; @sifilisnao) provided a reading contract⁽¹⁰⁾ that positioned the broadcaster and target audience as interlocutors in a sort of dialogue in which interpellation is constructed as a question to prompt a conversation, in a kind of factual function of language.

Having identified that there was a set of posts (1 and 2) that achieved greater reach than another group (3 and 4) in relation to the number of users, likes and impressions, we raised some hypotheses by way of conclusion.

First, there is the possibility that the distinction between grammars of production and recognition produce negotiations or resistance⁽¹⁷⁾ regarding the meaning of the question contained in the theme “Syphilis. I know. Do you know?”, taking this question as a doubt about the other’s ability to know. On the positive side, it should be noted that the language of the texts is dialogic and informative and avoids the imperative tone that is often present in public health campaigns.

Second, the focus that it establishes as having strong direct relevance⁽¹⁰⁾ in young people aged 20 to 29 years is represented in the images of the cards by persons that show, in a certain way, some of the characteristic ethnic and social profiles in Brazil, based on target audiences not included in previous health communication actions on a national scale. Thus, discursive strategies in the form of text and images on cards need to have certain possible effects on the audience from the perspective of interdiscursive pertinence⁽¹⁰⁾. Defocusing contributes to thinking that even the messages are not clearly directed to a very specific audience, such as young people who are not cisgender, and the fact that these are young people

can generate some empathy with the messages due to the language offered, which seeks to be informative and dialogic.

Third, it is possible that card production strategies with more visual aesthetics and added to a distribution of important information in a more graphic than textual form may have a greater reach and impact on social media audiences than cards in which the important information is limited to the linear text format, outside the space reserved for images on Instagram. The carousel feature also appears to have a greater audience reach than pictures posted alone.

Finally, even though it is not possible to generalize the results presented here, they allow interesting hypotheses to be drawn about the evaluation of the use of posts on digital social networks by public health communication campaigns, which can be verified in a more extensive investigation.

PARTICIPATION OF EACH AUTHOR

Ana Cláudia Costa de Araújo worked on the study conception, methodology, analysis and interpretation of data, writing the manuscript and preparation of images. Arthur Barbalho worked on the study conception, analysis and interpretation of data and writing the manuscript. Suelayne Sousa worked on the study conception, writing the manuscript and final version of the article. Juciano Lacerda worked on the construction of the problem, theory and discussion and on the final version of the article. Maria Natália Ramos, Lilian Muneiro and Mar Marcos Molano worked on the critical review of the manuscript and final version of the article.

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Each author participated actively and sufficiently in this work, and all of them gave their approval of the final version of the manuscript.

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Address for correspondence:

ANA CLÁUDIA COSTA DE ARAÚJO

Avenida dos Caiapós, 121, Torre Florença, 1507

Natal (RN), Brazil

CEP: 59067-400

E-mail: anaclaudiacostaaraujo@gmail.com

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